Blind Veterans UK and Specsavers host Dinner in the Dark to highlight living with sight loss

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Supporters of the military charity Blind Veterans UK gathered at the Cavalry and Guards Club last night (10/03) to try a unique experience in the charity's first Dinner in the Dark.

The dinner, sponsored by Specsavers, allowed guests to experience living with sight loss for a brief window and the difficulties faced by blind and vision-impaired veterans every day.

The room was also treated to performances by Welsh soprano Gwawr Edwards and vocal group Blake on a night that raised more than £32,000 for the military charity.

Simon Brown, a blind veteran supported by the charity, spoke about his journey from losing his sight whilst serving in Iraq in 2006 and the support that Blind Veterans UK has given him ever since.

Simon, 37 and from Morley in West Yorkshire, was a Corporal in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in Iraq when he sustained facial injuries during a rescue mission in Basra.

On the day of his injury, Simon had successfully rescued six of his colleagues whose vehicle had broken down. As he was withdrawing from the area, he was hit by sniper fire. A bullet entered his left cheek and exited through his right, shattering both cheekbones, destroying his left eye and severely damaging his right leaving him with only 20 percent vision in one eye.

With the support of Blind Veterans UK Simon has been able to regain his independence and self-confidence, and now, almost 10 years after his injury, he works for the charity as a Communications and Engagement Officer, responsible for recruiting more blind veterans.

Simon said: “The Dinner in the Dark was a great opportunity for people to experience living with sight loss. It made me very thankful for the little vision I have in one eye and I know that all the others on my table found it enlightening!

“I'm so grateful for the support that Blind Veterans UK has given me since I lost my sight and that's what I wanted to get across to everyone there at the dinner. I know that I will have always recovered but going from being in a coma to back in full time employment in five years would never have been possible without Blind Veterans UK.”

The dinner was made possible through the generous support of Blind Veterans UK's corporate partner Specsavers. The opticians has supported Blind Veterans UK for many years and Dame Mary Perkins, the founder of Specsavers, also attended the Dinner in the Dark.

Dame Mary said: “Specsavers is hugely proud to support such a brilliant charity in Blind Veterans UK.

“The Dinner in the Dark was a really innovative way for all of us to experience the challenges that blind veterans face every day and helped to get across the life-changing work that the charity provides.”

Supporters of the charity that experienced dining in the dark included Falklands Veteran Simon Weston CBE and impressionist Jon Culshaw.

Simon Weston said: “It was an honour to hear about the brilliant work of Blind Veterans UK and all the support and training they provide for veterans who have lost their sight.

“As a veteran, I know that Blind Veterans UK will be there for me if I ever lose my sight.”

Blind Veterans UK was founded in 1915 and the charity's initial purpose was to help and support soldiers blinded in World War I. But the organisation has gone on to support more than 35,000 blind veterans and their families, spanning World War II to recent conflicts including Iraq and Afghanistan.

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For more than a century, the charity has been providing vital free training, rehabilitation, equipment and emotional support to blind and vision-impaired veterans no matter when they served or how they lost their sight.

ENDS

Simon Brown, Simon Weston and Jon Culshaw are available for interview.

Higher resolution images are available on request. Photo Credit – Blind Veterans UK.

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Notes to Editors

Blind Veterans UK

Blind Veterans UK (formerly St Dunstan's) is a national charity that believes that no-one who has served our country should have to battle blindness alone. Founded in 1915, the charity provides blind and vision impaired ex-Service men and women with lifelong support including welfare support, rehabilitation, training, residential and respite care.

Find out more at: blindveterans.org.uk, follow us on Facebook at: facebook.com/blindveteransuk and on Twitter at: twitter.com/blindveterans.

Specsavers

Specsavers is a partnership of almost 2,000 locally-run businesses throughout the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Australia and New Zealand, all committed to delivering high quality, affordable optical and hearing care in the communities they serve. Each store is part-owned and managed by its own joint venture partners who are supported by key specialists in support offices that provide a range of services including marketing, accounting, recruitment, IT and wholesaling, among others. More than 28 million customers used Specsavers in 2015 and the partnership had a turnover of more than £2 billion. More than one in three people who wear glasses in the UK buy them from Specsavers. Of its 17.3m customers in the UK, 60% are from the NHS and the company is the largest provider of free NHS digital hearing aids.

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