

# Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association



## The Branch

October 2020

### The Magazine of Wiltshire Retired Firefighters

## CARE REFORMS DELAYED AGAIN!

**FAMILIES STUCK WITH  
SKY-HIGH  
BILLS**



Boris Johnson's plan to deal with the UK care system that is in crisis has yet again been delayed. This means that the families of those in care or needing care will face severe difficulties in meeting care costs.

Information dribbling out of No.10 indicates that there will be no further announcement on how the Government intends to tackle the crisis until the Autumn Budget in November or perhaps even later than that.

It was indicated earlier that the Prime Minister was working towards implementing a plan that placed a cap on care costs. It is now understood that Mr Johnson has ditched that idea and is instead warming towards a new plan based on pension systems with people getting basic care for free but having to pay for higher quality care.

Charities supporting pensioners are united in calling this further delay "gut-wrenching".

Under the existing social care system that is widely accepted as being broken, people pay the full cost of their care until their assets, including the value of their home, fall to £23,250.

The plan that Boris Johnson has now rejected would have required people to pay for their care costs up to a maximum of £40,000 after which the state would pay for any further costs.

Those on the front-line of dealing with social care issues point out that even before the pandemic the system was in urgent need of reform. This government and many of those before it have done much talking about reform but produced little to improve a broken system.



## EDITORIAL by JOHN CRAIG

# THE WRFA & COVID-19



I don't normally slip an editorial into our magazine but given the peculiar circumstances that the pandemic is imposing upon us I thought it appropriate to update you on what impact it is having upon us. My first thought is for the health and safety of all our members and your families. I sincerely hope that you have not been infected by the virus and will never be so.

It is a great frustration that face-to-face meetings and social gatherings are so restricted and our social life in the form of lunches, dinners and outings has come to a halt for the foreseeable future. Even the AGM planned for June was affected and the Executive Committee has agreed to suspend standing orders that require an annual AGM that will allow us to hold a "double-header" AGM in June 2021 to cover two years. Hopefully, by then meetings of that sort will be allowed and if they are not we shall have to perhaps investigate holding an AGM in another format.

The Executive Committee from day one of the lockdown and ever since has been concerned about our members that live alone and/or are dealing with health problems other than the virus. We put together a plan to keep in touch by telephone with as many of our members in such situations as possible and monitor their needs. Even if personal visits could not be carried out there are things that the WRFA can do through our contacts to assist in overcoming problems. In any case, a chat on the telephone is some help towards coping with loneliness. These phone calls have proved of value and I know have been very much appreciated by many of our members. They have initiated help being given for members in the form of, shopping, medication collection, books (both audio and paper) being provided as well as the occasional DVD.

The main theme that our Executive Committee members wish me to convey in this article is that they really do care and from my privileged position I have seen the way that EC members are 'going the extra mile' to put themselves at the service of others in the finest tradition of the service and our association.

This edition of THE BRANCH is the first to be published for several months. We have kept the website running at full chat so important and urgent news is always available on [www.wrfa.org.uk](http://www.wrfa.org.uk). Because I didn't wish during the current difficulties to add to the workload of the Service HQ staff in copying the hard copies of the magazine I have not recently produced THE BRANCH. We are now back in business!

As to the immediate future, I wish to add to the guidance of health experts who are urging all of us to ensure we get our **flu jab**, and observe the rules and regulations intended to impede the spread of Covid-19 . **Wash/sanitise hands often, observe 2m social distancing, where appropriate wear face mask.**



Photo by Shutterstock

## PEOPLE & PLACES

### PERSONS REPORTED!

## PETE WIXEY TO THE RESCUE!

### WRFA Member saves life from fire

From his home in Latton, near Cricklade, on 4th August, Pete Wixey spotted smoke issuing from a mobile home nearby. Initially, the fumes were mistaken for steam but on closer examination, Pete realised that it was acrid smoke pouring from the caravan. His immediate concern was for the safety of the man that he knew lived inside. While a 999 call was being made Pete shouted from outside in the hope of getting a response but there was none. Decision time had arrived! To enter or not to enter, that

was the question?

Opening the caravan door revealed heavy smoke conditions. Bedding was alight. Pete took the brave decision to enter for a search. Drawing on all his experience and skill as a former retained leading fireman at Cricklade, Pete went into the caravan and soon found the resident unconscious. Aided by another neighbour, Pete got the casualty out to fresh air and safety. In carrying out the rescue Pete sustained burns to his feet.

The emergency services then arrived in force, four pumps and a water carrier, plus an ambulance and police.

The casualty was taken to hospital suffering from smoke inhalation and burns. He is recovering thanks in no small part to Pete's actions.



**PETE WIXEY**  
Photo copyright JOHN CRAIG

Pete's "good neighbour" behaviour and unselfish actions come after years of serious health problems starting with a hip replacement operation that went badly wrong and for quite a time he was confined to a wheelchair. He then suffered the terrible blow of his wife dying suddenly. To further add to his troubles in 2017 he was assaulted when out walking his dog near his home and left with injuries that took a long time from which to recover and involved him in all the stress of a court case that failed to result in his assailant being found guilty. He did, however, receive modest cash compensation.

Pete is an inspiration by the way that he copes with the many setbacks that have come his way through no fault of his own.

Pete, on behalf of all members of this Association, warmest congratulations on the fire rescue. We sincerely hope that all the bad luck that has come your way in not repeated and the time ahead is happy and healthy.

**Well done!**



# HEALTH MATTERS

Folks we know dealing with health  
issues



## HAROLD PORTER

Harold has been diagnosed as having bowel cancer. Tests have shown that the tumour has not spread and the hope is that surgery will get rid of it. The operation was to have taken place on 28th August but at the last minute a problem with Harold's blood was discovered that needed attention before the operation could take place. This has imposed about a three week delay. Harold is 95 and we are all wishing him victory over 'The Big C'.

## SALLY JAYCOCK

Sally was recently admitted to Southampton Hospital with a bleed on the brain. Fortunately, she has made a very good recovery. Her condition is very rare and the recurrence of it is unlikely which is extremely good news. Sally, you gave us all a bad fright, especially, Paul, so please keep on getting better. All our very best wishes are with you.



## CHRIS WANNELL

While staying with friends in Hampshire during August, Chris was taken ill and rushed into Southampton Hospital. He was diagnosed as having a urethral tract infection and discharged home after a few days of hospital treatment. He has to continue the treatment while at home. The attention he has received from medics has uncovered a heart murmur and he is now having tests to learn more about that. These tests include an ultrasound and a CT scan. We wish you well and a rapid and full recovery, Chris.







## URGENT!

Our charity needs our help. Fundraising has been interrupted by Coronavirus. There is an urgent need for us to do more to fundraise and donate.

**STILL AT YOUR SERVICE :** After the lockdown our Charity has resumed therapy services. These are being delivered in a different way but still with the professionalism for which the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY is widely known. These services cover physical and mental health matters, welfare and wellbeing, and help with a wide range of issues that can impact on the lives of retired people.

### ITS EASY TO GET HELP

To access the services of the Charity just pick up a phone and dial  
**0800 389 8820**



### HOW YOU CAN GIVE HELP

Become a **REGULAR GIVER**. To sign up for the system of making a routine monthly donation call **01256 366566**.

If you are already a regular giver, please consider increasing your donations.

**Sign-up to the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY LOTTERY**

To join log onto the Fire Fighters Charity website

[firefighterscharity.org.uk/lottery](https://firefighterscharity.org.uk/lottery)

Prize draws monthly. Top prize £25,000



**Use the Wannell Christmas Card**

**Why not buy the Christmas Cards**  
**Every penny of the profit from which will**  
**go to**  
**THE FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY**  
**See next page for details**

# **NEW CHRISTMAS CARD** **ON SALE NOW!**

**Card back**



**Card front**



Being conscious of the need for us all to do everything we can to support the **FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY** the Chairman of the WRFA, **CHRIS WANNELL**, has put his creative qualities into top gear and produced a brand new Christmas card that is sure to have a wide appeal within the fire service world and beyond. The project has been approved by the Fire Fighters Charity who will benefit from all the profits raised by the sale of the cards. Chris managed to find a sponsor to cover the cost of producing the card and so the profit margin will be high. The card front uses a photograph of the wartime turntable ladder owned by Chris on one of its annual fundraising outings with Santa Claus perched on the head of the housed ladder. The photograph was taken by Danielle Owen who has approved of its use. The cards are of **high quality** and are supplied with envelopes. The cost for a pack of 10 with envelopes is only **£5.00**. Don't delay, order your cards **now**.

## **To Order**

Send your order with cheque made  
out to  
C. Wannell  
at  
53, Nore Marsh Road,  
Royal Wootton Bassett  
SN4 8BH



# THE FIRE & EXPLOSIONS AT IPSWICH DOCKS

## OCTOBER 14th 1982 11.00am

An incident that could have turned into a disaster like Beirut  
By John Craig

*“You see those fumes coming out of that warehouse, they are nitrous fumes and anyone who has inhaled them is likely to die in about ten to twelve hours”.*



Photo by Archant Photo Sales

I had just arrived at a “make pumps ten” job at Toller Road, Ipswich Docks and was about to take over command from Divisional Officer John Cole. As I got out of my car and started to dress in fire kit my eyes were absorbing the amazing sight of massive clouds of orange/brown smoke pouring from the warehouse involved and drifting over a housing estate, a school, and old folks home.

The chilling words of warning about the toxicity of the fumes I turned to find were spoken by a man in a white smock and industrial helmet who introduced himself as the Works Chemist from a nearby fertiliser factory. He explained that his company had **3,000 tons** of **ammonium nitrate** plus some other nitrates in the burning warehouse and judging by the fumes it was certain that the nitrates were heavily involved. (the Beirut Docks job involved 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate). I was the newly appointed Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Suffolk Fire Service and this was my first working fire in that rank requiring me to take charge. At the back of my mind was a memory that under certain conditions ammonium nitrate will go “bang” and the destruction of much of Texas City in 1947 when a ship carrying ammonium nitrate blew up was but one of the many examples of how dangerous this chemical is. My immediate worry was those orange fumes and I was so pleased to see the local police superintendent approach to ask what I needed. I didn’t hesitate but pointed to the down wind area of the fire and said **“Look, Tony, you have to evacuate everyone downwind of that lot.”** Acknowledging this very challenging request with nothing more than an “OK”, he turned and set in motion a very efficiently executed emergency evacuation of about 1,000 people and their pets.

Talking to the chemist and to Tony took only about a minute and then it was time to consider whether John Cole’s assistance message was going to be enough. The transit warehouse involved was in fact a range of buildings mostly single storey but with two storey and an eight storey sections. John Cole had his crews making determined efforts to cut through the corrugated steel sheeting walls to get jets onto the seat of the fire and it was obvious that massive amounts of breathing apparatus was going to be needed plus chemical protection suits for some of the guys.

My train of thought was that we needed to saturate the nitrates with as much water as possible as quickly as possible to suppress those toxic fumes and reduce the risk of explosion. So, I opted for a make up never before seen in peacetime Suffolk. I sent....  
**“Make pumps 20, turntable ladders 2.”**

**“An unprecedented  
peacetime Suffolk  
assistance  
Message”**

I added to my assistance message a request that the Brigade's pair of Jetmaster foam monitors be sent on urgently. These were capable of delivering large quantities of foam but I had in mind that they would be handy to project copious quantities of water. Being so close to Ipswich Docks we had no water supply problems and my simplistic approach to this job was **to pump as much of that water onto the nitrates as possible and as quickly as possible,**

### WORKING UNDER HOME OFFICE SCRUTINY



Howard Porter  
OBE, QFSM, FIFireE

Soon after my assistance message had been sent I was relieved of command of the fire when **CFO Terry Miles** arrived. Terry was accompanied by **Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services Howard (aka Harold) Porter OBE, QFSM FIFireE**. Mr Porter was in the middle of carrying out the annual inspection of Suffolk Fire Service and the fact that he was present to witness first hand how the Brigade dealt with a potentially disastrous fire was a golden opportunity for him to assess us. For our part, Terry Miles and I knew very well that we were under scrutiny from a very experienced fire officer who would have the knowledge to make a detailed and accurate assessment of the way the fire was handled. Unlike today's Home Office Inspectors who have never even been to a chimney fire we knew that HMIFS Porter knew the job of fire & rescue from the grass roots upwards.

### EXPLOSIONS!

Terry quickly set up an incident command and designated a senior officer to manage each of all four sides of the fireground. I was sent to cover the side of the fireground that included some of the single story warehouse and the eight storey tower. We were successful in keeping the fire out of the tower. Because the exterior walls of the building were constructed from corrugated iron sheets without windows or doors, getting our jets onto the main seat of fire was proving difficult and attempts to gain access were being made by BA teams cutting through the corrugated iron panels.

Then, we had a stroke of good luck. **A series of explosions took place.** These were violent enough to blow a hole in the exterior wall of the warehouse about 4 meter square. They did even greater damage to the roof. Debris from the explosions was projected into neighbouring premises. So, how was this "good luck"? In fact, the blast damage opened up the building ventilating it nicely and giving us valuable additional points of access for fire fighting and we took great advantage of this. The Jetmaster monitors were got to work deluging the huge stocks of ammonium nitrate and the turntable ladder monitor did useful work through the hole in the roof. I lost count of the number of large diameter hand-held jets that were used in addition to the monitors.



### EVACUATION!

**About 1,000 people in properties affected by the toxic fumes were evacuated by the Police to Ipswich Civic College that served as an emergency rest centre for the evacuees and their pets. A police officer can be seen in this picture getting busy in evacuating nearby residents.**

Photo by Archant Photo sales



## THE DUTY OF CARE

I continue to be intrigued by thoughts of how a 21st century CFO would react after, or even before, those explosions, each about the ferocity of a mortar bomb, took place.

First thought in the immediate aftermath of the explosions was for the safety and wellbeing of our men. Had any of them been killed or injured? A rapid check on fireground radio brought Terry the welcome news that no injuries of any kind had been sustained although I suppose that any of them suffering from constipation had received an instant remedy!

I half anticipated that Terry might order the use of Acme Thunderer whistles and pull everyone off aggressive fire fighting. In modern parlance this would have been called “*going defensive*”. Terry took the decision to “carry on and keep calm” which history has shown to be one of the many very good decisions that he took at a fire that could so easily have turned into another Texas City or Beirut disaster.

Aside from the risk of explosion(s) we still had to worry about those evil orange fumes. The warning issued by the works chemist was ringing in our ears. Death would come to anyone who had inhaled nitrous fumes, not immediately, but after several hours. Pulmonary oedema was the medical term. The lungs filled up with fluid and you drown from the inside.



Crews showed great courage and determination in getting water right into the heart of the fire early. To do this, some of the corrugated iron sheeting forming the walls had to be cut away using compressed air chisels.

Photos by  
Archant Photo sales



Had we have “gone defensive” and pulled everyone back to a place of safety, how large would the evacuation zone have had to be? Taking into account the damage caused by less ammonium nitrate exploding at Texas City than we had at Toller Road, it could be argued that the evacuation zone would have had to be at least half a mile around Toller Road. The alternative was to adopt a policy of “attack being the best form of defence” and that was the decision made by Terry Miles and I was in complete agreement. Our best chance of avoiding a disastrous explosion was to stop the ammonium nitrate oxidising and to do that we had to press ahead with getting as much of Ipswich Dock dumped onto it as possible. Saturate to survive was the name of our game!

The possible toxic effects of the fumes was a matter that had to be addressed without delay. Extensive use of breathing apparatus, even for our crews working outside the building, was continued for several hours. Even so it was felt that we needed medical advice and support on site. Terry asked for Dr Gordon Kember, the Brigade Medical Examiner to attend and he did so with alacrity. Dr Kember was a GP in Ipswich and he joined the NHS after service as a medic in the Royal Army Medical Corps. The problem we faced was quickly understood by Dr Kember. We needed to check on the health of the 100+ firefighters at the incident while the fire was still in progress. To send people to hospital for these checks was not going to work. All we would do is overwhelm the A & E Department and lose fire fighting capability. This led to another brilliant decision that was Dr Kember’s solution.

## DOCTOR KEMBER'S CUNNING PLAN

There was no doubt that medical checks on firefighters were essential given the risk posed by nitrous fumes. The most practical and efficient way to achieve this was to set up a temporary clinic on the fireground. Dr Kember requested six ambulances and five GPs to attend the incident and in a remarkably short time the ambulances were in use as examination rooms and one crew at a time the firefighters were taken into the ambulances to be examined by the doctors. It was understood that anyone showing early signs of having been poisoned by the nitrous fumes would be transported as an emergency to Ipswich Hospital. Fortunately, this was not necessary. Records were kept of these examinations and filed at Brigade HQ in case any after effects were suffered by any Suffolk Fire Service members or any of the supporting crews who had been involved from Essex Fire Service. The "Kember Plan" was a complete success. It worked extremely well and all those engaged in firefighting felt that their medical needs were being efficiently handled.

## "FROM THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, STOP FOR...."

The first pump from nearby Princes Street Fire Station arrived at Toller Road at 11.08am. The stop message was sent by CFO Miles at 4.46pm. It had taken almost six hours to control the fire.

I began my own personal assessment of what we had achieved. The area of fire spread beyond the large single storey part of the warehouse was very small although the damage to the single storey section from fire and explosion was severe.

The explosions were found to have been caused by 36 tons of **potassium nitrate** detonating after mixing with 190 tons of barbeque charcoal.

The amount of **ammonium nitrate** in the warehouse was **3,600 tons** and there were additional stocks of ammonium nitrate in the vicinity bringing the total to over 10,000 tons. The recent disaster at Beirut Docks involved only 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate.

The **probable cause** of the fire was heat or sparks from welding work being done on metal window frames. It is interesting to note that the fire in Beirut is reported to have started in exactly the same way.



Close to the windows being welded at Toller Road were stored 6 tons of wickerware furniture wrapped in waxed paper. The welding work is believed to have set fire to the wickerware and the fire quickly spread to the charcoal and then to the nitrates which began to oxidise.

The way that the warehouse staff had allowed the storage to be arranged you would almost have thought they were intending that there should be a severe fire starting in the wickerware, then spreading to charcoal that was well placed to roast the nitrates. The wickerware proved to be ideal kindling for the charcoal. If you wanted to 'roast' nitrates what better fuel to use for this than barbeque charcoal?

## HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORS

HM Factory Inspectorate (HMFI) was quick off the mark sending inspectors to the scene to arrive while fire fighting was still in progress. At a later date the HMFI got assistance from Her Majesty's Inspector of Explosives. HMIFS Porter was also consulted. Between them, these inspectors produced a very comprehensive report that was published ISBN -0-11-883785-0. It came as no surprise that the warehouse owners were prosecuted by the HSE. On 5th August 1983 they were brought before Ipswich Magistrates Court and fined £2,200 for three offences under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974. I thought they got off quite lightly! (continued on page 11).

## IT COULD HAVE BEEN MUCH WORSE

Fires and serious explosions involving bulk storage of ammonium nitrate are not all that rare. The latest example of these is, of course, the dreadful disaster at Beirut Docks. During the last century there were 35 major explosions attributed to ammoniums nitrate and most caused multiple fatal casualties and massive blast and fire damage.

The report produced by the HMFI has a chapter headed “*Potential*” that gives a list of all the exposure risks fairly close to the Ipswich fire. The non-industrial risks additional to private housing included two care home, several shops, and a primary school. The industrial risks adjacent to the building on fire included more transit warehouses, two oil tank farms at which three oil tanker ships were discharging low-flash products throughout the time of the fire. It is therefore a reasonable assumption that if the ammonium nitrate had detonated the death toll and damage caused would certainly have been comparable with the Beirut disaster. Those of us fighting the fire would have been wiped out and the massive fire service attendance then called to replace us would have had their work cut out dealing with some very complex fire and rescue issues.

A brief examination of the most notable of the 35 major incidents in the last century produces some interesting comparisons.

DATE	COUNTRY	FATALITIES	AMOUNT OF AM (tons)
1916	England	115	700
1921	Germany	561	?
1942	Belgium	189	150
1947	USA	581	2,100
<b>1982</b>	<b>Ipswich, England</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,600</b>
2015	China	173	?
2020	Beirut, Lebanon	178	2,750



**BEIRUT DOCKS  
2020**

Aerial shot of the moment  
the explosion of 2,750 tons  
of ammonium nitrate took  
place

Photo by SHUTTERSTOCK repro-  
duced under licence

For an independent expert opinion as to what prevented the Toller Road, Ipswich fire turning into a disaster, here is one of the final paragraphs lifted with permission from the afore mentioned report by **Her Majesty’s Inspector of Factories** :

*“ The fact that the explosions were of a relatively low order should not be taken to indicate that they would always be so in such situations. There existed a serious risk of larger explosions occurring. That these did not do so was probably due to the prompt and efficient action of the fire brigade.”*



## OBITUARIES



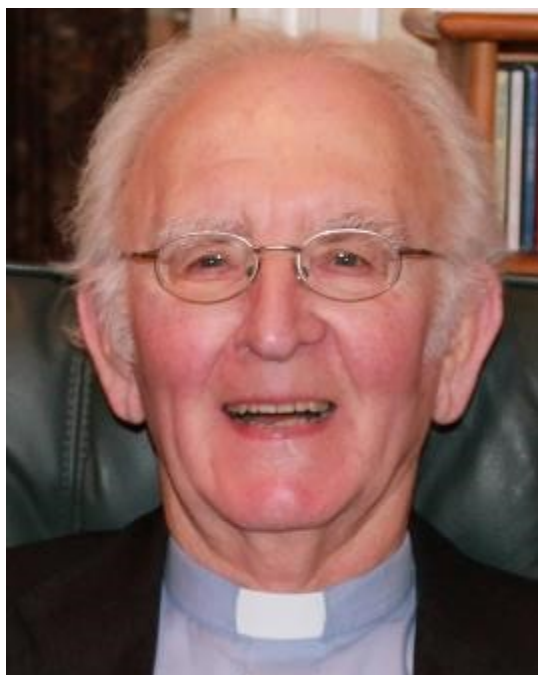
### PEGGY CATHERINE THORPE

8.9.20 to 3.8.20

With great sadness the passing of Peggy Thorpe on 3rd August, 2020 took place within days of what would have been her 100th birthday. Peggy was one of our oldest members and was the widow of Peter Thorpe who for many years was Secretary/Treasurer of the WRFA after a distinguished career in Wiltshire Fire Brigade.

Peggy died peacefully with her daughter, Janet, by her side in a care home at Derry Hill. Because of restrictions imposed by the pandemic only the very close family attended the funeral service at Semington Crematorium. Peggy's ashes were buried with those of Peter in the Urchfont Church churchyard. John & Margaret Craig represented the WRFA at this service.

We shall miss Peggy. May she rest in peace.



The cortege approaches the crematorium at Semington to the skirl of the pipes. The veteran turntable ladder carries the coffin with a four man guard of honour comprised of volunteers from Dorset & Wiltshire FRS. Both photos by JOHN CRAIG

### REVEREND CHARLES SUTHERLAND BA (Hons), MTh

Former Chaplain to Wiltshire Fire Brigade, Rev. Charles Sutherland has passed away aged 89. He is survived by his widow, Christine, who has joined the WRFA.

Affectionately known throughout his 8 years as chaplain to the Brigade as "*Charlie the Chaplain*" he took his service to Brigade members and their families very seriously to the point of insisting on being allowed to attend operational incidents of note. Charlie also became closely involved in '*Operation Romaid*' the Wiltshire Fire Brigade outreach to the Romanian Fire Service. Always proud of being a Scot, he was piped into the crematorium by a piper. He was afforded fire service honours as the cortege passed Devizes Fire Station. The coffin was carried on the 1943 turntable ladder owned by Chris Wannell. Rest in eternal, peace, Charlie.





## **FIRE SAFETY BILL**

### **A COMPLEX AND SIGNIFICANT PIECE OF LEGISLATION**

The fire & rescue service and the building industry are trying to make sense of the draft of the Fire Safety Bill that the Government produced just before Parliament went into summer recess.

Most organisations involved, having taken a first look at the draft, are prepared to recognise that it could be a step in the right direction but all have concerns.

The **National Fire Chiefs Council** lead on fire safety, Nick Coombe, has published his view that there are areas of the Bill that need strengthening. *“The public has a right to feel safe in their own homes and this can only be achieved through changes in legislation and regulation.”*

Nick Wrack, General Secretary of the **Fire Brigades Union**, is in broad support of the Bill but believes that a more joined-up approach to fire safety is required. One aspect of this joining-up is that the Fire Safety Bill needs to connect with the Building Safety Bill. His further concerns are that changes brought in by the new legislation will need to be properly funded and publicly provided to finally ensure residents and firefighters are safe.

Speaking for the **Association of British Insurers**, Sarah Brodie makes the point that considerations around the fire risk and use of construction materials should not be driven by a specific



trigger height of the building but the risk and vulnerability of those occupying and using it. Sarah also called for the legislation to extend the use of sprinkler protection to newly built warehouses, care homes and schools. Sarah went further by stating that insurers are calling for a publicly accessible database of building materials being used to show that they are safe. This database should carry the details of rigorous testing of the materials to show that they have the necessary resilience and durability.

The views of the **National Housing Federation** are being made known by Victoria Moffett, their Head of Building and Fire Safety Programme. One of the weaknesses in the draft bill highlighted by Victoria is the lack of any section giving the power in law for landlords to enter to inspect their own premises. Very often tenants forbid the landlord to enter a rented property and this makes it impossible for the landlord to pick up on any fire safety needs.

## **GOVERNMENT DELAY IN DEALING WITH HIGH RISE CLADDING**

There is increasing criticism of the Government for not moving swiftly enough to ensure that the dangerous combustible cladding of the type fitted to Grenfell Tower is stripped from over 286 buildings in London. Andrew Dismore (Labour) AM, the London Assembly spokesperson on fire and resilience, has managed to obtain from the Mayor figures showing the pressure that this is applying to the London Fire Brigade. Over 4,000 hours per month are being spent by LFB crews carrying out regular inspections of buildings where the “stay put” policy has had to be suspended. Three years ago, the Government pledged in the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell disaster to ensure that the lethal Aluminium Composite Material panels would be removed from all affected buildings by June 2020. It seems that in making that promise the Government had no idea of the number of the buildings at risk.

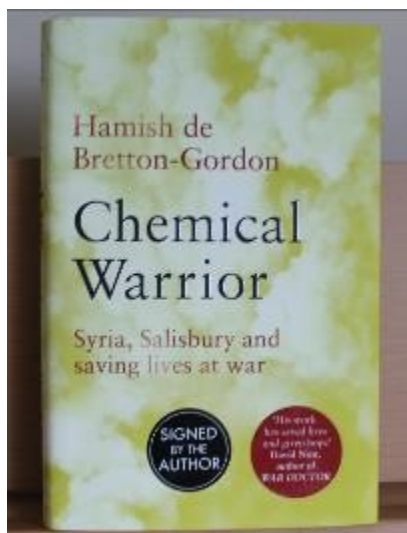


# Book Shelf Book Shelf



## **CHEMICAL WARRIOR**

**Author HAMISH de BRETTON GORDON OBE**



This very recently published book is written by a Wiltshire based author who has built a reputation for being one of the world's leading authorities on chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. I found it a fascinating read but I confess that it left me in fear of what the future holds. Hamish more than hints that the Novichok attack in Salisbury is but a foretaste of what could be to come.

If this country is subject to another attack from weapons such as nerve gas the expertise that Hamish has will be of vital importance.

In this autobiography Hamish gives us details of his early life, meeting and wooing his wife, Julia, and then his 23 year career in the Army. Hamish always had ambitions to fight in tanks and he was delighted to be commissioned into the Royal Tank Regiment. He saw action in Iraq and had an experience during a Scud missile attack that left a lasting impression on him. As the missiles landed it was feared that they carried the deadly sarin nerve gas but when Hamish pulled on his gas mask it malfunctioned leaving him with the choice of ripping off the mask and risking being poisoned or trying to survive on the very limited amount of air in the face piece until the all clear was given. I will leave you to read what choice he made.

He progressed to Lieutenant Colonel rank and was hoping to be given command of one of the tank regiments. This didn't happen and he was given command of the UK's Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Regiment instead. This challenged him to become really knowledgeable about these aspects of warfare and he soon realised that the concept of fighting wars with tanks was rapidly becoming out of date.

The book becomes really fascinating (and frightening) in the latter chapters when Hamish tells of him leaving the Army to set up a private company called SecureBio based in rented offices at Porton Down. He and his family live on the outskirts of Salisbury. His skills and knowledge have been regularly employed to give advice and instruction to those medical staff and relief workers in Syria who have been the victims of repeated chemical attacks that President Assad and President Putin deny have taken place. I heartily recommend this book. ISBN 978-1-4722-7454-0

**John Craig**