



A happy chain of events

'I WRITE to thank you for the wonderful day I had this week fly fishing. I had never fished before and it was an education for me which I thoroughly enjoyed. The fly fishing itself was a more than pleasurable experience, but the food and hospitality you brought to the river bank reminded me of the better times I have had in the army. Please also pass on my thanks to your daughter Rowena for her hard work and for the generous quantity of delicious Bakewell tarts. Once again, please accept my huge thanks for a day that reminded me of the better things in life and took me away from my problems.'

This is an extract from a charming and moving letter of thanks I received after providing a picnic for a couple of veterans who were receiving treatment for PTSD at the Recovery Centre (H4H) at Tedworth House. I would like to share with you the background to this happy day on the River Nadder.

Last summer I was invited to attend the unveiling at Highworth near Swindon of a memorial to Rex Warneford VC*, the first man to destroy a Zeppelin; an amazing feat of aviation, as Rex, with no crew, had to get above the Zeppelin and drop a bomb from his biplane on to the target below. Sadly, this brave young man was killed some weeks later, but his courage and flying skills have been an inspiration to generations of young people from his home town ever since.

At the ceremony I met and spoke to many local residents, one of whom contacted me a few weeks later and offered to give a talk at any fundraising event which I might be planning. I had already had a busy schedule organised for the months ahead, but decided to accept this generous offer. The main focus of my year was young people, helping and encouraging them to achieve their potential, but as my husband had been in the army and I had followed the drum for many years, it seemed appropriate to seize this opportunity to do something for injured soldiers.



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We invited 90 people for a tour of the amazing facilities at Tedworth House. This was followed by supper and a very interesting and amusing talk entitled the 'Life and Times of Rudolph Hess'. We had two good raffle prizes, so there was a small element of fundraising involved for the Recovery Centre. One of these prizes was day's fishing for two rods on the River Nadder. The recipient generously donated the prize back to H4H so that a couple of veterans could benefit from a day on this lovely stretch of water.

This took a little time to set up, so my shrieval year had ended before we gathered on the river bank last June. The two veterans were accompanied by two

ex-servicemen who work at Tedworth House, both of whom are fishermen and provided rods and fishing flies as well as expert instruction.

The weather was kind, not too bright nor too windy. The water was perfect, clear and limpid, and there were fish to be caught. It was a perfect English summer day which we all enjoyed in equal measure. The peace of the river has a magic of its own and we all fell under its spell that day. I think Rex Warneford VC would have thoroughly approved – this was, after all, the England he had been fighting for.

♦♦ Sarah Gooch
High Sheriff of Wiltshire 2015-16

*Flight-Sub-Lieutenant Reginald Warneford, RNAS (1891-1915), whose VC is displayed at the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovil, Somerset. Ed.