



# The Torch



## Project Gemini 2017 report

by Archie Roberts

**Report date: 15 June 2017**



My approach to 2017 Project Gemini was that I was just going to soak it all up and enjoy myself and the unique experience. On arrival the pilot told us that it was a beautiful day in London with the ground temperature being 9 degrees Celsius. Oh dear! I was pleasantly surprised that when we left the terminal building that it was somewhat warmer and indeed the whole week was like being at home in South Africa with temperatures ranging from 24 to 29 degrees Celsius.

We met with Colin in the receiving hall and the jokes just started flying. We had to wait for the American people, so whilst we were waiting we had a cup of Costas finest coffee. I then needed the loo and I went into the disabled toilet. I look for the flusher everywhere and eventually found a button that I pressed. What happened then was that a lady started banging on the door so I opened it and she rushed in. Apparently I had set of a panic alarm. Thankfully she did show me where the button to flush was and I was relieved.

Once the American contingent arrived we set off on the hour and a half drive to Brighton. We arrived at Port Hall, unpacked and got ready for the rest of the day. We had a wonderful lunch of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Chris then orientated me to the route to get from Port Hall to the Brighton facility on the way to supper. At the Brighton Centre pub I was introduced to War Blind UK ales and we had pizza to go with that. I think the toilets were out to get me because as you know drinking beer brings on a huge need and once again I set off the blasted panic alarm in the toilet.

On Monday we had the usual English fry up for breakfast at the Brighton Centre. All the war vets met in the lounge and we all shared who we are, where we come from, what unit we were in and how we became blind. Having got that little bit of formality out of the way we were introduced to the representatives from Revision Military who sponsored Project Gemini in 2017. This company produces protective eyewear and other items for military application. After meeting the representatives From Revision Military we were all taken on a tour of the Brighton facility. My recollections from this tour were that in the annex they have a heated pool and a wonderful gym. Apparently when people are training for events such as marathons the personal trainers at the facility assist the individuals in the preparation for the event.

There is a section where people learn daily living activities and I remember from my own rehabilitation days that OPTIMA College also had a daily living learning area. I was really intrigued to find that you can get a microwave these days that talks to you. In another area there is a crafts centre and in the crafts centre one of the people was learning leatherwork whilst others were making seagulls for the Chelsea Flower Show.

We then went to the Information Technology section where they train people on Supernova, a program called GUIDE and how to use synaptics with touch screen phones. I really don't think Supernova will work for me and quite frankly, even though I have a new touch screen phone, I will only change to using a touch screen phone full time when my current phone goes to phone heaven.

From the reception area you can go up on the lift or walk up to the first floor where the canteen and pub are situated. In addition, one can go out to the garden area from the pub and this I found to be a very peaceful place to escape to.

The second and third floors of the facility are used for those war blind persons who require a frail care facility. The fourth floor is used as a medical floor. The top floor is used for training and this is where we had lunch and I got to sit next to a real live Royal Marine who now works for Revision Military.

After lunch Colin arranged that I get a new cane from the ROVIES because my one must still be in one of the rural areas I work in. I was also taught how to set the watch that Colin gave me last year by the ROVI and for that I'm very thankful. Whilst I was getting my new cane everyone else was being briefed in the sports hall on how to play goal ball. When I arrived back Gareth gave me his knee and elbow pads as well as his goggles. The goggles ensure that nobody can see on a goal ball field. At first they taught us how to dive to prevent the ball going passed you into the net. My first attempt at stopping the ball ended up with me being told that there is a reason for wearing a box to protect my privates. I thus eagerly put my box on and tried as far as was possible to stop talking like a girl. My next attempt at stopping the ball ended up with me diving over the ball and there were sniggers all round. Nobody told me that if I wanted to I could just catch the ball without diving around like a lunatic. I was on the red team and needless to say we won but this had very little to do with me being a member of the red team.

After goal ball we walked down to the Brighton Pier to play ten pin bowling. I won't go into this too much but just to say that George's bowling background stood him in good stead whereas Colin's retort to me is instructive as to my

prowess in the sport:, “Archie when that thing comes back down to earth it will have snow on it”.

After ten pin bowling we returned to something I'm more comfortable doing, that being eating. We went to a restaurant where you first pile your plate with things like salad and the like. Then people walk around with these huge hunks of cooked dead animal, ask you what piece you want and then put your chosen piece on your plate. These guys just kept on coming and coming until we called a halt to their procession.

On Tuesday we went to a company that trains both military and commercial pilots. They teach using simulators and believe me, the experience is just like being on an aircraft. We went through various weather conditions during our time on the simulator and now I know what causes some of the sounds you hear when you are flying on an aircraft. I must mention though that Gareth crashed the helicopter simulator.

On Wednesday we all got up early to go to the American Ambassador's residence in London. The reason for the visit was to hand over a plaque commemorating the centenary of America's entrance into the First World War. With the posh duties complete for the day we traveled to the Victory Services Club for a seminar. The speakers were as follows:

- Surgeon General of the British Defense Medical Services Vice Admiral Alasdair Walker,
- Dr. Renata Gomes, Head of Research and Innovation at Blind Veterans UK,
- Major (Ret. U.S. Army) Dr. Thomas Zampieri Ph.D., Blinded Veterans Association,
- Major General (Ret. Army Air Corps) Nick Caplin CB, Chief Executive, Blind Veterans UK,
- Dr. Heidi Baseler Ph.D., Principal Investigator and Lecturer in Imaging Sciences, Centre for Neuroscience, The University of York,
- Colonel (Ret. U.S. Air Force) Dr. Glenn Cockerham M.D., Chief of Department Veterans Affairs Ophthalmology Services,

- Lt. Colonel (Ret. U.S. Army) Dr. Kimberly Cockerham M.D. FACS., Adjunct Associate Clinical Professor, Stanford University Department of Ophthalmology Oculofacial Plastics, Orbit and Neuro-Ophthalmology, and
- Colonel (Ret. MC US Army) Dr. Robert A. Mazzoli M.D. FACS., Director of Education.

Topics covered included Research into macular degeneration, experimental Dohikkies, traumatic brain injury and the challenges around policy and monitoring and evaluation. After the seminar there was a reception and photos with a model called Caprice and subsequently we once again were treated to an amazing dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

On Thursday we slept in but then traveled to visit a brewery. We were taken on a tour of the brewery and the owner explained how unpasteurised beer is made. After this we were given a taste of the beers produced at this brewery and suffice to say Castle lager in terms of my taste buds beats these beers hands down.

In the evening we were taken to the dog races in Brighton. Our table all won something however gambling on dogs was to me not the most intelligent way to spend ones money. Quite frankly it's a mug's game.

On Friday we traveled to a place to play bubble football, throw axes and ride in Go-carts. The bubbles were great fun and we ended up not playing football but just bashing into each other. I decided that just diving and rolling around was better fun than being bashed around by Russell who is six foot seven and built like a barn door. Gareth probably doesn't know this but the guys really appreciated the fact that even though he was the Saint Dunstan's CEO, he got down and dirty with the rest of us. To my astonishment I realised during this event that I am actually claustrophobic and hate things put over my head. We then moved onto axe throwing and it took me fifteen goes to actually hit the target. I think I'll keep my day job.

After the axe throwing we had pizza for lunch and subsequently were shown a video of the safety issues to comply with when driving the Go-carts. We then suited up for the drive and once again I found that I really felt sick putting on the helmet. George on the other hand had a whale of a time and Charlie told



me that when he had finished his turn he had a grin as big as Texas on his face.

In the evening we had a barbecue followed by the presentation of coins and plaques. Each of us war blinded veterans were given honorary War Blind UK certificates.

On Saturday we traveled to a pub near Devils Dyke and had lunch. After this I went to the Brighton Pier and bought loads of Brighton rock for the family. In the evening everyone was very subdued and the guys were saying that they were all thinking of going back home and taking up the drudgery of life again and that is why they were subdued.

On Sunday we just waited around until after lunch when we left for the airport. At the airport George, Gareth and I spent some pounds on presents for our loved ones. All three of us then climbed on a golf cart and went to board the plane.

# Google Glass will guide a blind man through the Boston Marathon

by: Stephanie Coueignoux



**BOSTON** - It may not sound like much, but together a pair of Google glasses and a cell phone could change the lives of anyone who is blind or visually impaired.

One local runner, who is legally blind, will be testing out the cutting edge technology during the Boston Marathon.

Erich Manser and his running partner, Dave, look like any other pair training for the Boston Marathon. But if you listen closely, you can hear the voice of a third person who is also part of their runs.

That voice belongs to a woman from California, who Erich has never met. But they share an incredible connection: she's acting as his eyes.

It's all part of cutting edge technology from the company [AIRA](#), along with AT&T.

They bill themselves as a visual interpreter of the blind. It's a pairing of the Google Glass and mounted camera on the frame.

Because the camera is connected to an app on Manser's phone, he can connect to someone anywhere in the United States who sees everything from his point of view.

"If I'm at a grocery store, I can trigger this app on my phone and it puts me in touch with a remote agent who can tell me, 'here's your layout,'" said Manser.

He's one of two people in Massachusetts testing out this technology and on Monday, he's taking it to the extreme.

Manser says his visual assistant for that day is equally as excited -- even though she'll be experiencing the race from California.

Just in case the wireless signal cuts out -- which it has in the past -- Dave will also be there running the marathon with him.

For the full interview click on the following link, [Erich Manser interview](#).

Source: [Boston 25 News](#)

# The Power of the Mind



by George De Nobrega

I recently participated in a skype chess tournament and one of my opponents was a player from Argentina Jose Maria Saponara, one of the blind players of the tournament who amazed me of his mental skill ability to play the game without a chessboard. On a specific date and time Seated comfortably in my own room I connected to skype and was surprised to have found Jose seated in a bus on his cell phone. He told me that he was on his way back to his home town of Capilla Del Monte after visiting the city of Cordoba, a distance of approximately 100Km. He told me that he didn't have his chess set with him and would be playing out of his head. One could say that I had a psychological advantage over him as I had the chessboard and pieces in front of me.

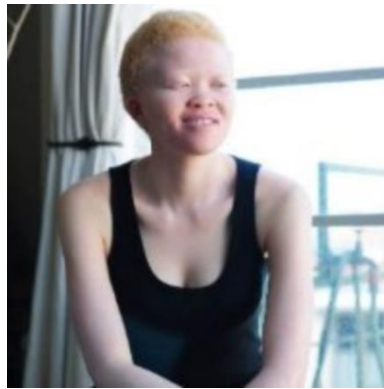
Amongst the noisy children and Spanish music in the back ground and with Jose seated in a reserved seat for disabled alongside the bus driver, Jose playing white made his first move. The game was played over forty-two move lasting two hours and 18 minutes, not once did he ask me for the board position. After consulting the bus driver, a number of times for his bus stop, on move number sixteen it was time for my opponent to climb off the bus. He unfolded his long white cane and made his way home walking which was approximately three kilometres away. As he walked breathing heavily I could now and again clearly hear him tapping his cane through the roads of Capilladelmonte. As this was all going on with the occasional sound of cars hooting and with pedestrians wanting to assist he in which he turned down, Jose continued to make his moves. On move twenty-nine I made a mistake of an illegal move and he was quick to notify me of it. On move thirty-five his



cell phone battery went flat. The game was adjourned for twenty minutes. Arriving home the game was completed through his computer ending in a draw.

What amazed me the most was how he was able to play the game out of his head and still be able to concentrate on his walking through the traffic. His four-year experience of playing mental chess as he put it has helped him.

## IAN FRASER: OUR STUDENTS 2017



**Sethu** is studying a BA Chemistry and Oceanography, at UCT is a passionate about science.

Along with her interests in Science, she spends her time promoting disability advocacy. At the age of 23, she currently runs a NPO and is a radio presenter. She loves poetry and values sincerity and kindness.

She overcame her challenge of navigating campus by speaking with lecturers and liaising with the disability unit.

One of her goals is to make science more accessible to as many people as possible and prove that women can dominate this field.



At the age of 35, **Rendani** is studying toward an Honours Degree in African Studies at the University of Venda and he is 35 years old.

He is very eager to make a success of himself in order to provide for his family. His dream is to contribute to a solution for socio-economic challenges faces Africa.

Rendani speaks highly of the disability department at the university. The department not only assists him, but also encourages him to reach beyond borders and push past the perceived limitations society places on disabled people.

He believes that the challenges he faces, drives him to work extremely hard and keep a positive mind set.



**Michelle**, 31, continues with her Masters in Music Education at Stellenbosch University. Since a very young age, she knew that her passion was music. When not playing or studying music, her time is spent in the company of literature.

She is currently conducting a study aimed at investigating the coping experiences of visually impaired musicians within the SA tertiary system.

In her spare time she plays goal ball for the University of Stellenbosch and will be taking up tandem cycling in 2018.

She counts herself as extremely fortunate to be living in an academically supportive environment.

Her personal motto for growth as university student is a Chinese Proverb: “With time and patience, the mulberry leaf becomes satin.”



**Rebecca** is 34 years of age and is studying toward a Post Grad Diploma in Monitoring and Evaluation Management. She also works as a community development practitioner and sets high standards and achievable goals for herself.

Her aim is to help with the promotion of services supplied by Social Development to community members, and in so doing assist in the improvement of these services.

Rebecca finds the work place very challenging as the employers are sometimes unable to make provisions for the visually impaired. Through her exposure to these environments she hopes to help employers better understand the challenges as well as provide solutions for the difficulties visually impaired employees face in the work place.

She feels that exploring through studying is a good way to gain knowledge and would also like to become an academic doctor one day.

# Ian Fraser Graduates 2016/2017



Congratulations to Jo- Lize Bronkhorst on obtaining her diploma in Reflexology at The International Academy of Reflexology and Meridian Therapy in Sandton.



Congratulation to Micheal Balopedi for obtaining his Honours in Communications Science at the University of Free State.

# Announcements:

## Sue Sadler



It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to Mrs Sue Sadler who passed away in July. We express our deepest condolences and support to her family during their time of bereavement.

## Nora Neal



It is with heavy hearts that we also say goodbye to Mrs Nora Neal who passed away at the beginning of August. We wish the family the strength to pull through.

# Saint Dunstan's new website

It is with great excitement that we announce the launch of our new website. Please visit by clicking this following link, [www.stdunstans.org.za](http://www.stdunstans.org.za)

## Boni and Mani Ruiendo



We wish Boni and Mani Ruiendo the best while studying at Kimberley Boys' High School.

## Just For Fun

For fun riddles and quizzes, click [HERE](#)



# Birthday Wishes



Congratulations to **Audrey Botha** who turned 80 years old in August.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **The Long Cane and Guide Dog Rally**

28<sup>th</sup> October 2017 - the Urban Park Green Point

### **The National Reunion**

7<sup>th</sup> September – 10<sup>th</sup> September 2017 - Pumula Beach Hotel

### **The Annual General Meeting**

15<sup>th</sup> September 2017 - Kelvin Grove Newlands

Click [HERE](#) to view the full calendar of events.