

# JOINING FORCES

## THE JOINING FORCES CAMPAIGN

Matthew Weston, is one of the most severely injured soldiers to have survived the war in Afghanistan. Aged just twenty, he lost both legs, an arm and suffered a host of internal injuries while clearing a road of improvised explosive devices. Matthew, having refused to live on benefits, made a slow, painful recovery from his injuries and has gone on to become a dedicated charity supporter, campaigner and spokesman for other veterans and also enjoys a successful career in finance.

The script for *Thin, Brittle, Mile* was written with Matthew's help and input and tells, not only a fictionalized version of his story, but of all soldiers who have returned from war.

“There is no such thing as an uninjured soldier.”

With many of our former servicemen and women suffering PTSD the story is an amalgam of the journeys of countless soldiers, facing their greatest battles on their return home.



**MY BROTHER SAID  
'WHY CAN'T YOU JUST  
BE NORMAL?' AND MY  
HEART SAID 'DON'T  
ANSWER HIM. NO  
ONE WANTS TO HEAR  
ABOUT A SOLDIER  
WITH GRIEF INSIDE HIS  
BONES.' BUT MY BONES  
SAID 'SOLDIER ON!'**

LUKE DEARLOVE,  
THIN, BRITTLE, MILE



## FILMMAKERS AND SOLDIERS: A SURPRISINGLY PERFECT UNION

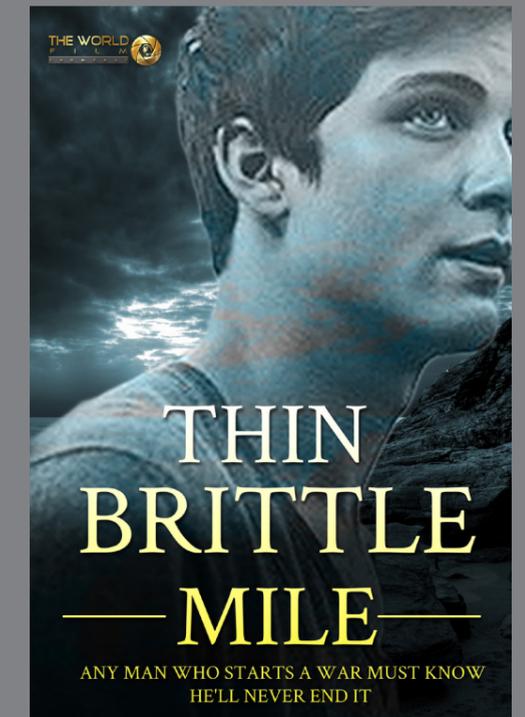
Up to 20,000 people leave the military each year. The recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan has meant many young men and women who loved their lives in the forces have had no choice but to retire early because of physical and emotional ill health and injury.

Very much inspired by Barclays highly successful AFTER programme which has helped 4,000 service leavers and veterans transition into civilian life and find new career paths and life experiences, the Joining Forces Campaign aims to match former servicemen with filmmakers for the mutual benefit of both sides.

Matt joined us on our recent film *The Spoiler* and once again felt the spirit of brotherhood and teammanship and the sense of solidarity and belonging that is prevalent while in serving in the forces.

***Love of Words, Drowning Room Only and Thin Brittle Mile are the flagship films, being made, in part, to help spearhead the Joining Forces campaign.***

Filmmakers are often guilty of slipping into divides, egos surface and opinions can, at times, be voiced in regards to the needs of the individual rather than the team and the objective at hand. There are a myriad of lessons we as filmmakers can learn from a group of people for whom no problem is insurmountable, who do not hide behind excuses and for whom giving up is never an option.





## MATTHEW WESTON

EXCERPT FROM SAPPER  
MATTHEW WESTON'S SPEECH AT  
THE STYLE FOR SOLDIERS ETON  
COLLEGE MUSIC RECITAL AT THE  
RITZ

"My name is Matt Weston. I was previously a Royal Engineer Bomb Disposal and High Risk Searcher. Put very basically my job was to find IEDs (improvised explosive devices). I was injured in 2009 while clearing a very horrible road in Afghanistan.

An explosion took both my legs and my right hand. I was lucky shrapnel had hit my upper left arm which almost resulted in losing that arm as well, it also generously gave me severe internal injuries. I had a third of my intestines and my spleen removed, a perforated stomach, my bladder pretty

much popped and a lacerated liver. My left thumb had to be reattached, both ear drums had popped. I also had small bits of grit and sand imbedded in my eyeballs and a fractured cheek and eye socket. The impact of the explosion also made my rifle fire, putting a bullet through the top of my right leg and my friend Jay was nice enough to use his chest to stop that bullet, but he was completely fine.

I have been regularly asked if I regret joining the military, but even when I'm going through a bad patch and I think about it I really don't. Even when laying on the ground crippled and dying and my friend rushing to save my life, I had no regrets. Some people say their life flashes before their eyes but with me I wasn't thinking about what I had done or what I would do differently, I was thinking about what I would miss out on.



Recovery was a difficult adjustment not so much physically but mentally. A soldier's mentality is a unique thing. We think of everything very differently from most other people. I clearly remember in late May 2009 north of FOB Delhi an Infantry Captain had got shot through the top of both of his legs. Apart from checking the fifth limb was still intact he never once complained about the injuries he had or thought about any potential impact in his life. Instead he was worried about his men still fighting and who would command them when he was back in the UK. Our ability to carry on with life is one of our defining characteristics but unfortunately the cracks had started to show in me mentality. I had started to lose the ability to carry on in a military manner and at Headley Court Military Rehabilitation Hospital I distanced myself as I could no more just shrug it off. I saw so many people in similar situations able to carry on as if nothing had happened.

The stresses of injury and Headley Court had taken its toll. I was desperately trying to hold on to certain parts of my personality but the constant operations, at least 44 I believe but no more than 46 as I have actually lost count now, and the void in my life which my job used to fill, were putting pressure on me to hold it together. But it proved too much and the cracks that had formed over months just gave way and broke completely. I was put on strong anti-

depressants and received treatment from a psychiatrist for many months. My sleep was awful sometimes, I wouldn't sleep for days on end, wouldn't eat and barely moved or said anything. It seemed that there wasn't any hope in sight and that's when I contemplated ending it all."

Matt refused to allow the catastrophic injuries and psychological blow he was dealt to defeat him for long. Refusing to live on benefits he has transitioned into a successful career in Finance with the aid of Barclays AFTER programme and is also a committed charity campaigner, business entrepreneur and spokesman for other injured veterans. Matt's appreciation for people such as Emma Willis who runs the 'Style for Soldiers' charity and Barclays and the work of the AFTER Programme is what has led us, in part, to start the Joining Forces campaign. Not only to offer former servicemen and women creative outlets, possible alternate career paths and new life experiences, but to inspire us, as filmmakers, often feeling apathetic and despondent about what we're up against. And to remind us there is no obstacle so great, no problem so challenging, that it cannot be tackled and overcome if the tenacity, determination and self-belief is within us to do so.

