

**Speech by HE Sylvie Bermann,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom,
at the ceremony to award the insignia of the *Légion d'Honneur*
to 11 British veterans of the Normandy Landings
at the National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff,
on 28 January 2015**

Minister,

Lord-Lieutenant,

Lord Mayor,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honoured to be in Cardiff today to present eleven Welsh veterans with the insignia of *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*.

My heartfelt thanks to the Deputy Presiding Officer for inviting me here to the National Assembly for Wales, to this beautiful Pierhead Building, and the Secretary of State for Wales, the Lord Lieutenant and the Lord Mayor for being with us today.

I would also like to convey the French people's deepest gratitude for all the expressions of solidarity and support shown by the Welsh people following the horrific attacks in Paris.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the sixth of June twenty-fourteen, on the beach at Ouistreham, in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen, French President François Hollande sent a strong message of gratitude to British and other Allied soldiers.

To mark the seventieth anniversary of D-Day, the French President decided to award the *Légion d'honneur* to all the British veterans who took part in the Liberation of France during the Second World War.

The *Légion d'honneur*, created by Napoleon in eighteen-ô-two, is France's highest distinction and honours exceptional acts of bravery and devotion by all those who have served France, whether they be French by blood or "by spilled blood".

Gentlemen,

Through the insignia of *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, France wants to thank you for your absolute commitment to freedom.

By taking part in the Normandy Landings in June nineteen-forty-four, in the Royal Air Force, the Royal Artillery, the Royal Marines, the Parachute Regiment, the Tank Crew, the South Wales Borderers Army Regiment and the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve respectively, you played an active role in liberating our country, and you do us an honour by being here today.

Many of you, sometimes barely twenty years old, landed on Gold Beach, Sword Beach or in Ranville. As proof of your great sacrifice, some of you were critically wounded; one of you was taken prisoner of war.

We owe our freedom and our security to your dedication, because you were ready to risk your lives to ensure a better and brighter world.

Honour is the word that springs to mind when I read your stories – stories born of so much courage – and when I read about all your French and British companions who met their fate on French soil, all your comrades-in-arms you so loyally remember. Over them, "death shall have no dominion".

This ceremony doesn't just pay tribute to men who were ready to give their lives to liberate us. It sends a message to every British person that we shall not forget.

To salute the bravery displayed by the British during the Landings is also to pay tribute to Britain's strength in holding out alone against the enemy.

I would also like to pay special tribute to the defiance shown in World War Two by the people of Wales, who paid an especially heavy price during the Battle of Britain. From July nineteen-forty to March nineteen-forty-four, the Blitz took the lives of more than three hundred and fifty innocent civilians in the Cardiff district, and nearly a thousand across Wales.

Seventy-five years on, we remember the worse night of the Blitz for Cardiff citizens: the bombing raid of the night of the second of January nineteen-forty-one saw more than a hundred and fifty killed. Nearly as many innocent civilians lost their lives in the year twenty-fifteen in the streets of Paris: they fell victim to the same brutal and indiscriminate violence.

You, too, faced a systematic attempt to spread violence and target innocent civilians in your country. By your bravery and dedication you ensured a bright and secure future for the peoples of Europe. Your actions sealed our two nations' destinies, restoring our hope and our freedom.

In World War Two, as in the past few months, the struggle against terror has been, and will remain, a central plank of cooperation between France and Britain. The people of France are immensely grateful for the tireless commitment of their long-standing ally.

This is why we shall always keep the heroes of June nineteen-forty-four fresh in our memories.

May your commitment continue to inspire us all, in our hearts and in our actions.

Long live Britain!

Long live France!

Long live Franco-British friendship!