

**Cérémonie de réception dans la Légion d'honneur de
18 vétérans britanniques**

Résidence de France, 16 février 2016

Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel honoured to welcome you today to the French Residence to pay homage to these eighteen men who contributed through their action, their bravery and their commitment to the liberation of France during the Second World War.

This ceremony provides an opportunity to commemorate the unspeakable suffering endured by the British people during the War, and to salute the bravery they displayed in holding out alone against the enemy.

Britain faced the Blitz – the Nazis' appalling attempt to break the spirit of its civilians – and yet, despite the bombings, London remained a haven for those French people who rejected the Occupation. As headquarters of the Free French Forces, who responded to General de Gaulle's Appeal of the eighteenth of June

nineteen-forty, London bore the flame of hope and freedom thanks to the defiance of the British people.

This shared history written by the French and the British, hand in hand, had begun during the Great War, when Britain sent thousands of young soldiers to our land. It is a history we commemorate this year, during the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, and it is a history we shall not forget, as we owe so much to those who fought for independence and freedom.

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. It is my solemn duty to echo that gratitude on the behalf of the French people.

To mark the seventieth anniversary of D-Day, the French President decided to award the *Légion d'honneur* to all those 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 Navy and the British Army, you played an active role in liberating our country, and you do us an honour by being here today.

Honour, indeed, is the word that springs to mind when I read your stories – stories born of so much courage – and when I learn about all your French and British companions who met their fate on French soil, all your comrades-in-arms you so loyally remember. We shall never forget the courage of those who fought for France's liberation over 70 years ago. To them, France owes its freedom. Over them, “death shall have no dominion”.

Many of you, sometimes barely twenty years old, landed on Gold Beach, Sword Beach, Juno Beach or Omaha Beach, and continued to Pouligny, to Caen, to Belgium and Holland, where

you risked your lives to build a better and brighter world, to ensure peace and freedom throughout Europe.

Gentlemen, you are living witnesses to a history you wrote on our soil, a history which shaped your identity, our identity and those of Britain and France.

This ceremony is not only the expression of our gratitude to men who were ready to give their lives to liberate us. It is also a message to each of us today in Europe: that we shall not forget, that we shall never forget those who fought for us against terror and division.

Long live Britain!

Long live France!

Long live Franco-British friendship!