

**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 Liverpool Town Hall  
on 19 February 2016**

Ladies and gentlemen,

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

My heartfelt thanks to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool for inviting me here to this beautiful Town Hall, and to the Clerk to the Lieutenancy of Merseyside for being with us today.

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 Parachute Regiment, the King's Regiment, the Grenadier Guards, the Royal Army Service Corps and the Royal Engineers respectively, you played an active role in liberating our country, and you do us an honour by being here today.

Many of you landed on Juno Beach, Sword Beach, Omaha Beach or in Ranville on the sixth of June nineteen-forty-four. Some of you were barely twenty years, and some were also wounded in action.

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 Liverpool, who paid an especially heavy price during the Battle of Britain. From December nineteen-forty to January nineteen-forty-two, the Blitz took the lives of more than two thousand seven hundreds innocent civilians in Liverpool, and a thousand more in the surrounding area. Such was the heavy price paid by the city of Liverpool in the fight for freedom, in its pivotal role as headquarters for the Battle of the Atlantic.

Seventy-five years on, we remember the worst night of the Blitz for Liverpool citizens, described by Churchill as “the single worst incident of the war”: the bombing of a Liverpool air-raid shelter in November nineteen-forty saw more than a hundred and sixty

killed. Nearly as many innocent civilians lost their lives in twenty-fifteen in the streets of Paris, falling 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.

As Churchill said after visiting Liverpool at the worst time of the Blitz in May nineteen-forty-one: "I see the damage done by the enemy attacks, but I also see the spirit of an unconquered people".

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!