



## D Day 75

### **75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Normandy Landings**

#### **A busy series of commemorations**

Well, we knew that this would be a busy year, but never imagined that it would be quite as busy as it has proved to be so far!

75 years on from the operation that liberated France, and ultimately Europe, from a sinister and oppressive regime, the commemorative events were very moving as always and seemed to carry more emotion than we have known in the past.

Firstly a sincere thank you to everyone for their patience and forbearance during the accreditation process. It became a convoluted and difficult process, not of our own making, but we got there in the end, with a few exceptions.

Moving around in Normandy, particularly on 6<sup>th</sup> June was a challenge with many roads barred and Arromanches being inaccessible for periods of time.

Each of the ceremonies in Normandy and the UK went very well indeed and paid a fitting tribute to those who took part in D Day and the Battle for Normandy.

All of the events were well supported and it was good to see so many veterans at each one.

A summary of the events attended by Trustees of the Spirit of Normandy Trust and Normandy Veterans follows in the ensuing pages.

### **Future Events**

#### **Cenotaph Parade Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

Veterans wishing to march as part of the Spirit of Normandy Trust contingent at the Cenotaph this year should contact Trust Secretary, Mary Stewart, as soon as possible as we need to submit names soon.

#### **An experience money can't buy, but.....**

On Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July the Spirit of Normandy Trust is hosting a fund raising formal dinner on the lower gun deck of HMS Victory in Portsmouth, by kind permission of the Second Sea Lord. We have a small number of tickets remaining for the event. The price per person is £200 and includes a drinks reception on arrival, entertainment by the Royal Marines Band and dinner in the company of a number of Normandy Veterans. There will also be the opportunity to bid at auction for more "money can't buy" experiences. Contact Trustee Mark Waring for more details by email on [mark.sont1944@outlook.com](mailto:mark.sont1944@outlook.com)

#### **Veterans Reunion**

Over the weekend of 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> September 2019 we will be holding a D Day 75 Veterans Reunion in Portsmouth with a Gala Dinner on Friday evening, a full day of events in the Historic Dockyard on Saturday and events culminating in a Remembrance Service in St Ann's Church on the Dockyard on Sunday. Full details from Mark Waring who can be contacted by the email address above.

## Early event

D Day 75 commemorations started on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May with a commemorative event at the bridges in Countess Wear, Exeter. The bridges, which closely resembled the bridges over the Caen Canal and the Orne River were used by the Ox & Bucks to practice their attacks on Pegasus and Horsa bridges in Normandy. The event, originated by Philip Mussell and managed by Exeter City Council. Attendees included the Lord Lieutenant of Devon, the Lord Mayor of Exeter, Penny Bates (daughter of Major Howard), General Sir Robert Pascoe and Lieutenant Colonel Andy Pearce Commanding Officer of 6 Rifles. A number of SONT Trustees were present and the Chairman was one of the speakers at the event.



*From Left to Right: Lt Col Pearce, Philip Mussell, Richard Palusinski, The Lord Lieutenant of Devon, The Lord Mayor of Exeter, Penny Bates, The lady Mayoress of Devon, General Pascoe*

## Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June

The Spirit of Normandy Trust, in partnership with the Mairie of Colleville Montgomery, held the annual commemorative service at the statue of Montgomery at Colleville Montgomery.

The event was very well attended with 41 veterans present and approximately 400 supporters and residents of the local community. We were delighted that our Patron, General The Lord Dannatt was able to be present this year

and read the Lesson. Also present were The Honourable Henry Montgomery (grandson of Monty), General Swift GOC 3 Div., two Senators from the French Parliament and senior officers from the French Military and Gendarmerie. The Band of the RAF Regiment provided the music, Emma Brown sang and the service was led jointly by Rev Mandy Reynolds and Fr Francois Quillet. Soldiers of 3 Div. paraded as did the officers and cadets of 2359 (Woolton) Sqn. Air Cadet Unit.



*Band of the RAF Regiment plays at Colleville Montgomery*

The Mayor of Colleville Montgomery spoke at the Service, welcoming veterans and their supporters. The Honourable Henry Montgomery also spoke at the Service, recalling moments with his grandfather. The music provided by the Band of the RAF Regiment throughout the Service, including before and after the ceremony, was exceptional. A lone piper from 3 Div. played a lament during the Act of Remembrance. Two verses of the Exhortation was read by Cadet Thorogood and Veteran Allan Gullis Leg d'Hon and the Kohima Epitaph was read by Veteran Len Hobbs Leg d'Hon. The parade of Standards was led by the original Beachmaster's White Ensign used on Sword Beach on D Day by Lt Commander Teddy Gueritz (Loaned by kind permission of Trevor Beattie) and carried by WO1 Baz Firth MBE. A number of Standards were paraded including veterans' Standards, 3 Div. Colours, Air Training Corps and French Colours.

As in past years the service concluded with a march to the Sea Front, followed by a Vin d'Honneur and a lunch for the veterans and their families hosted by the Community of Colleville Montgomery. At the Vin d'Honneur all of the veterans present received a commemorative badge issued by the Comité du Débarquement.



*Service at Colleville Montgomery*

## **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June**

The main Royal British Legion commemorative events in Normandy were held in the Cathedral and Military Cemetery at Bayeux. Both Services were well attended.

The day started with a 10.00 a.m. Service in Notre Dame Cathedral in Bayeux. The Service was opened by a poem written by Cyril Crain, a Canadian veteran of D Day and read by Veteran Ken Hay JP MBE Leg d'Hon. The Kohima Epitaph was read by Veteran Len Hobbs Leg d'Hon.

Following the Cathedral Service, veterans, families and carers paraded from the Cathedral to the CWGC British Military Cemetery where they gathered for a commemorative service at midday.



The Cemetery was packed with veterans, families and supporters for a poignant and very moving ceremony. This year the service started with a personal reflection by Veteran Frank Baugh Leg d'Hon of his experiences bringing troops in by landing craft in the first wave on D Day. Frank gave a vivid and very emotive account of his experiences.



*Veteran Frank Baugh at Bayeux Cemetery*

A reading written by Robert Nawarski, a Polish Fighter Pilot providing air cover on D Day was read by Richard Palusinski, Chairman of the Spirit of Normandy Trust.



The Bible Reading was given by the Rt Hon. Theresa May, Prime Minister. The Exhortation was read by Veteran Ray Lord Leg d'Hon and the Kohima Epitaph was read by Veteran Alan Harris Leg d'Hon.

The Service at the Cemetery was attended by HRH The Prince of Wales, accompanied by the Duchess of Cornwall, both of whom circulated

amongst veterans and their families afterwards.

The Royal British Legion provided a light lunch for veterans and carers after the Service in a marquee in the field alongside the Cemetery.



*Veterans Frank Baugh, Ray Lord and Alan Harris*



*Scene at Bayeux Cemetery*

## **A New Dawn..**

Early on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> June something was seen on the coast of Normandy for the first time. Rather than an armada of ships bringing troops to these historic shores, it was the inauguration of the British Normandy Memorial on the headland at Ver sur Mer, at the site where the only VC of D Day was awarded for the actions of Company Sergeant Major Stan Hollis and overlooking Gold Beach. The focal point of the inauguration was the evocative statue of three British soldiers, which has been sculpted by David Williams-Ellis. Normandy veterans, Trustees of the Normandy

Memorial Trust and invited guests were present to hear the Rt Hon Theresa May, British Prime Minister, describe those who served in 1944 as belonging to a very special generation. M Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France, paid tribute to the young men who had landed on the beaches of Normandy at dawn under German fire.



*Statue of three soldiers sculpted by David Williams-Ellis*

The siting of this statue and the inauguration ceremony mark the first stage of the building of this important memorial, which will bear the names of the 22,442 under British Command who gave their lives on D Day and during the ensuing battles in Normandy which paved the way for the liberation of France and Europe.

The site itself, open for a few days following the inauguration, is now closed as the construction phase gets underway to build the full memorial. The construction of the memorial is expected to take about a year. More information about the British Normandy Memorial can be found on their website [www.normandymemorialtrust.org](http://www.normandymemorialtrust.org)

## **As the day closed**

Later that day those veterans who managed to get in to Arromanches gathered there for a parade and Service, which was held on the sea front by the D Day Museum. General The Lord Dannatt took the salute at the Parade.

Rev Mandy Reynolds led the Service and the Mayor, M Patrick Jardin, spoke warmly of the bravery and fortitude of the young men who landed on the beaches of France so many years ago.

Meanwhile, back in the UK a commemorative ceremony was held at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas. In recognition of the special anniversary the ceremony was very well attended ceremony and was honoured by the presence of HRH The Duke of Cambridge. Flaminia Martin, granddaughter of the founder of the Spirit of Normandy Trust read a poem and laid a wreath. The Service, which had been organised in previous years by Peter Lloyd was jointly organized this year by him and the Royal British Legion.

### **And since then.....**

Trustees attended a commemorative dinner at the very impressive venue of the Cutlers' Hall, Sheffield on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June at the kind invitation of Graham Askham and the Sheffield Normandy Veterans. The following day they attended a commemorative Drumhead Service in the Norfolk Heritage Park. Ian Stewart, Vice Chairman of the Spirit of Normandy Trust laid a wreath on behalf of Canada at the ceremony.



*Wreath laying at Norfolk Heritage Park, Sheffield*

Richard Palusinski, Chairman of SONT, attended an event in Stockport to launch the Stockport Normandy Veterans Legacy, a schools based project encouraging local schools to engage with surviving veterans and learn of different elements of war experiences, both military and civilian. The event, held in the Ballroom of Stockport Town Hall was very well attended, with many schools exhibiting the work they had undertaken. The children had learned a great deal and were enthusiastic about the projects that they had undertaken. One school group, dressed as evacuees sang wartime songs.



*The Chairman participated in the presentation of certificates at the Stockport Normandy Veterans Legacy Event*

On Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> June, the Chairman and Trustee WO Baz Firth MBE went to Westbourne Post Office to receive a cheque for £1,700.00 arising from their magnificent fund raising efforts on behalf of the Trust. Jean Simms, Branch Manager, along with her staff at the Post Office, decorated the public area, held a cake sale and undertook a range of activities, based around the people and events of D Day.



*The Chairman receives a cheque from the Branch Manager*

### **Sponsorship**

Sponsorship and fund raising are vital for the Spirit of Normandy Trust, enabling us to continue our work and to ensure that Normandy Veterans do not have to pay anything towards the events that we set up, or for their pilgrimage visits to Normandy. We have been very fortunate this year with the number of major organisations with whom we have had the privilege to work and who

have supported our aims through their generosity.



Earlier in the year we worked with Royal Mail, bringing a group of veterans together to review the revised designs for the special issue of stamps to commemorate D Day 75. Veterans Mervyn Kersh Leg d'Hon, Len Hobbs Leg d'Hon, Fred Lee Leg d'Hon and Ken Hay MBE JP Leg d'Hon formed the adjudicating group and are pictured below with members of the Royal Mail team and Trustees of SONT. The stamps were released in early June and each of the veterans have received a First Day Cover as a thank you from Royal Mail. The Trust has also received a donation from the Post Office of £1,000.00 towards the prize fund for the Young Historians Competition.



Since the beginning of the year we have also been working with the Isle of Man Post Office in support of their issue of special stamps and coins to commemorate D Day 75. In recognition of the support and advice provided by the Trust, the Isle of Man Post Office have already donated £700.00 to the Trust towards the support of veterans and the Young Historians Competition.



Kia cars provided very practical support to the Trust by loaning six vehicles to us to enable veterans to travel to Normandy in comfort for the D Day 75 Commemorations. They provided a range of vehicles including the Sorento, Sportage and Optima Wagon. Each vehicle was liveried with a D Day 75 Return to Normandy Logo and the Kia emblem. It really made the veterans' trip enjoyable and very comfortable and was very much appreciated. The loan also meant that the Trust did not have to hire vehicles to take the veterans to Normandy, saving us a considerable amount of money.



As we look forward and prepare for the Normandy Veterans Reunion weekend from Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September to Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September we have been very fortunate to receive grant support towards the weekend from the Veterans Foundation. A grant of £7,120 has been made towards the costs of food and refreshments for veterans, carers and their immediate family members, providing a secure respite area for veterans to relax in, support for arena/stage display costs and towards the Service of Remembrance on the Sunday. We are grateful for this generous support and for the encouragement that it gives to the Trustees as we plan for the weekend.



We wish to thank ALL of our supporters and sponsors who contribute in small and large ways to enable us to continue working for the benefit of the veterans and the memory of Normandy.