

Dear Captain John Andrew HILTON

Dear Staff Sergeant Alexander McKenzie REITH

And your families and friends,

Officers, Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to you all, for this very special ceremony.

Last year, on June the 6<sup>th</sup>, hundreds of veterans of World War II gathered to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. The international ceremony took place on the beach of Ouistreham, in the presence of her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II, as well as Heads of state from 17 countries.

During this ceremony, President François Hollande announced the awarding of the Legion d'Honneur (France's highest distinction) to Normandy veterans. And that is the reason why we are gathered here tonight.

But allow me, first of all, to say a **few words about D-Day**.

On 6 June 1944, the D-Day, around 175 000 troops belonging to the allied forces crossed the English Channel and landed on the coast of northern France in Normandy. "Operation Neptune" involved more than 5,000 ships, crewed by 195,700 personnel from the Allied navies and merchant navies, as well as bombers and airborne infantry.

These landings were the first stage of Operation Overlord, the invasion by the allied forces of Nazi-occupied Europe, in order to defeat Nazi Germany and bring World War II to an end.

4400 Allied troops died on the first day, “the Longest Day”. Omaha beach alone cost the Americans more than 2000 casualty.

As many as 9000 Germans are also estimated to have lost their lives on that day.

This D-Day on Normandy beaches became one of World War II key turning points. It remains the largest amphibious operation in history. The five Allied landing beaches are still well known by their code names: Utah, Omaha, Juno, Gold and Sword.

And further inland, the taking of Pegasus Bridge near the city of Caen by British paratroopers and glider-borne troops was a major victory for the Allies in the early stages of D-Day.

Coming back to the commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day last year , French President François Hollande sent a strong message of gratitude to Allied soldiers, and in particular to the British.

Today, it’s a great honour for me to echo that message.

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 a big “thank you” to men who were ready to give their lives to liberate us. It is also a message we, the French people, send to every citizen of the United Kingdom, that we shall never forget.

**Captain in the Royal Engineers John Andrew HILTON,**

You crossed the English Channel on a Landing Craft Tank and landed in Normandy on 8 June 1944.

Allow me to quote you : “I saw very little of the beaches as we ran in but I do remember some shell fire on the beaches coming from the Deauville area” unquote.

Seriously injured by an anti-personnel bomb dropped from a German Aircraft, you were evacuated back to England. After recovering, you rejoined your unit in Caen.

I quote you again : “It was nice to be “At Home” and to be able to take part in clearing the Channel ports of Dieppe, Boulogne and Calais” unquote.

On cessation of hostilities, you worked on securing bridges in Germany and then came demobilization.

**Staff Sergeant Alexander, McKenzie REITH,**

You joined the army at the age of seventeen and became Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

But your ambition was to fly, and you applied to become a glider pilot and joined one of the many Elementary Flying School operated by the Royal Air Force.

On D-Day, you were the pilot of one of the 500 gliders which took off from various airfields.

May I quote you : “A multitude of ships, boats and sea craft of every description, assault boats, landing craft all heading for the same objective, the air around us swirling with the sheer number and variety of aircraft in flight”.

You landed your glider safely close to Pegasus Bridge and helped the troopers to gather all their equipment together.

At the end of the war, came the time of demobilization in April 1946.

And I have been told that last year, wearing your glider pilot badge and maroon beret, you took part in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day , and were presented to Prince Charles.

Today it is my honor to be presenting

Captain John Andrew HILTON

and Staff Sergeant Alexander McKenzie REITH

with the Legion d'Honneur and I do so with a great deal of respect and gratitude.

**Captain John Andrew HILTON, in the name of the President of the French Republic, I bestow on you the medal of Knight of the Legion of Honor.**

**Staff Sergeant Alexander McKenzie REITH , in the name of the President of the French Republic, I bestow on you the medal of Knight of the Legion of Honor.**