

Speech: PM Statement – Inauguration of the British Normandy Memorial: 6 June 2019

Thank you President Macron for your support to ensure a lasting monument to the service and sacrifice of those who fought in the Battle of Normandy – something which means so much to our veteran community and to the whole of the British nation.

It is incredibly moving to be here today, looking out across beaches where one of the greatest battles for freedom this world has ever known took place – and it is truly humbling to do so with the men who were there that day.

It is an honour for all of us to share this moment with you.

Standing here, as the waves wash quietly onto the shore, it's almost impossible to grasp the raw courage that it must have taken that day to leap out from landing craft and into the surf – despite the fury of battle.

No one could be certain what the 6th June would bring. No one would know how this – the most ambitious – amphibious and airborne assault in all of human history, would turn out.

And, as the sun rose that morning, not one of the troops on the landing craft approaching these shores, not one of the pilots in the skies above, not one of the sailors at sea – knew whether they would still be alive when it set once again.

If one day can be said to have determined the fate of generations to come – in France, in Britain, in Europe and the world – that day was the 6th June 1944.

More than 156,000 men landed on D-Day – of which 83,000 were from Britain and the Commonwealth.

Over a quarter million more supported operations from air and sea – while the French Resistance carried out extraordinary acts of bravery behind enemy lines. Many were terribly wounded.

And many more made the ultimate sacrifice that day and in the fierce fighting that followed, as together our allied nations sought to release Europe from the grip of fascism.

Men like Lieutenant Den Brotheridge of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. 28 years old. Husband. Father-to-be. Thought to be the first Allied soldier to be killed in action after leading the charge over Pegasus Bridge.

Marine Commando Robert Casson of 46 Royal Marine Commando, who was killed on

the approach to Juno Beach, three weeks before his brother Private Joseph Casson was also killed in Normandy.

And twins Robert and Charles Guy, 21, who both served in the RAF and were shot down and buried separately. Their names will now be reunited here.

These young men belonged to a very special generation, the greatest generation. A generation whose unconquerable spirit shaped the post war world. They didn't boast. They didn't fuss. They served. And they laid down their lives so that we might have a better life and build a better world.

The memorial that will be built here will remind us of this. Of the service and sacrifice of those who fell under British Command in Normandy, of the price paid by French civilians – and of our duty, and our responsibility, to now carry the torch for freedom, for peace and for democracy.

I want to thank all those involved in this memorial. George Batts and the veterans who have campaigned so hard to make it happen. The people of Ver-sur-Mer, and Phillipe Onillon the town's mayor.

Here in Normandy, the names of those British men and women who gave their lives in defence of freedom, will forever sit opposite their homeland across the Channel.

Here, in Normandy we will always remember their courage, their commitment, their conviction.

And to our veterans, here in Normandy, I want to say the only words we can: thank you.