

PM'S TRIBUTE TO WWII HEROES AS HE VOWS TO FUND VE DAY CELEBRATIONS

'Veterans' bravery, loyalty to their friends and duty to country represents the very best of us'

FROM PAGE ONE

a special fund ran dry. There had been fears that some would not be able to attend commemorations, which are taking place in the UK and abroad, due to prohibitive costs.

But Sir Keir's personal promise, in recognition of the importance of our crusade Respect Our War Heroes, means those left of the greatest generation have the chance to make what may be one final salute 80 years after the end of the conflict in Europe.

In a personal message of gratitude sent via the Express, the Prime Minister said: "Over the years I have been privileged to meet veterans from the Second World War. Their bravery, loyalty to their friends and duty to their country represents the very best of us."

"I look forward to meeting as many veterans as possible at this year's commemorations. This country is so proud of the generation who fought in the Second World War for



80 trips... Geoff Roberts in Arnhem last year

our freedoms and the British troops who have followed in their steps since to defend these hard-fought values and keep us safe.

"I know that on the 80th anniversary of VE Day the British public will be there to remember their sacrifice and thank them for their service once more."

A previous scheme of financial assistance was set up using cash from fines paid by banks after the Libor interest rate scandal.

The D-Day Revisited charity ran a system on behalf of the Treasury which helped veterans with costs so they could attend events in France, Italy and the Netherlands

Successful bids, usually for a veteran plus a relative or carer, received £1,000 each - but the scheme ended in 2017. The Ministry of Defence worked with the Royal British Legion and other charities so survivors were able to visit Normandy for the 80th anniversary of D-Day last year. Last night the

Charles to lead events marking 80th anniversary

KING Charles will lead Britain in a four-day festival of celebration and commemoration to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe.

The nationwide jamboree will see the Cenotaph in central London draped in Union Flags, a service of remembrance, military parade, concert and flypast.

Victory in Europe or VE Day on May 8 marks the Allied victory against the Nazis. In 1945 millions

of war-weary families greeted the news of peace after six long years with impromptu street parties and spontaneous celebrations.

Events kicks off on Bank Holiday Monday, May 5, with the Cenotaph, the nation's focal point of remembrance, dressed in Union Flags.

A military procession from Whitehall to Buckingham Palace will honour and remember those who perished, followed by a

flypast of current and historic military aircraft including the famous Red Arrows.

The commemoration then moves to party on HMS Belfast, which fired some of the opening shots on D-Day in 1944 and protected Arctic convoys.

And street parties, barbecues and get-togethers will be held by communities across the country, echoing the celebrations 80 years ago. On May 6 the 2014

installation of ceramic poppies will return to the Tower of London.

Nearly 30,000 poppies from the original 2014 display to commemorate the centenary of the First World War will be shown within the walls of the citadel.

It will resemble a wound at the heart of the Tower, which was bombed during the Blitz and still bears some of those scars today. Later, historic landmarks across

the UK will be lit up. On May 7 the Parliament Choir will host a Victory in Europe Day Anniversary Concert at Westminster Hall exactly 80 years to the day victory was declared.

And on May 8 King Charles and Queen Camilla will lead a service at Westminster Abbey billed as a shared remembrance and celebration.

The programme ends with a celebratory concert at Horse

Guards Parade in a nod to how the nation reacted to the news 80 years before, featuring stars of stage and screen and military musicians, and 10,000 members of the public.

And on August 15, the 80th anniversary of VJ Day, the Royal British Legion will lead a service of remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum to those who fought and died in the Far East fighting Japan.

Pictures: ROWAN GRIFFITHS

A VETERAN forced to pay £5,000 a month while living in care homes says he feels betrayed and forgotten.

Hero Ivor Foster, 99, was part of the elite Bomber Command unit that helped destroy Germany's military might at the height of the Second World War.

One of our last remaining wartime RAF legends has spent £180,000 on fees after selling his modest home.

But with money running out the widowed braveheart, who turns 100 in August, is left wondering how a lifetime of selfless service came to this.

Proud Ivor said: "The Bomber Boys were forgotten for decades and some might want to move on but we should never forget the enormous sacrifices so many made during the mighty war effort. I played my part but so many of my comrades were not as lucky as me."

Ivor was 18 when he joined 186 Squadron as a gunner in a Lancaster bomber.

Known as Blondie, he was one of 125,000 airmen who flew with the unit. He was lucky - 55,573 colleagues were killed in action.

But today the decorated hero lives a lonely existence in Plymstock, Devon. His life savings have gone and he is now using the proceeds from the sale of his bungalow and pension to finance care fees.

His daughter-in-law Lynn Foster, 69 - pictured with him right - said: "His money is not going to last much longer. This is no way to treat our heroes. He feels no one cares

£180k bill as 'forgotten' hero, 99, pays own care

EXCLUSIVE By Giles Sheldrick Chief Reporter

what he did for this country and that people have just forgotten. He feels badly let down."

Ivor was married to Bernice for 65 years before her death in 2012. He lost both his sons to cancer - Brian aged 52 in 2003, and Steven, Lynn's husband, aged 64 in 2020.

He spends his days watching TV and looking out of the window wondering why the vets have been forgotten.

Terrible

Ivor is visited by a handful of ex-military mates, including Gulf War veteran Keith Sales, 69, who answered an SOS to keep him company. He said: "These heroes should not be paying for their care."

"We owe them so much and it is terrible to think so many, like Ivor, are sitting thinking no one remembers them. It's heartbreaking to think they are looking out of windows thinking no one cares."

A growing care crisis means one in seven homes charge self-funding residents more than £1,800 a week with fees set to rise again this month,

typically by 10% as National Insurance is hiked up.

The chance of seeing the war out was 500-1 against in Bomber Command. Each man tried to make it to 30 operations, but most didn't.

A memorial now stands in London's Green Park thanks in part to generous donations from Express readers.

South West Devon MP Rebecca Smith said wartime premier Sir Winston Churchill "said of RAF pilots that 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few'."

"If those words hold true today, why, you might ask, is one of The Few being ripped off in his old age? I have been passed around the Civil Service merry-go-round to seek support for Ivor and am now on my fourth department, HM Revenue and Customs. It beggars belief.

"I'm hoping the Government will finally come up with an answer soon. It would be good to get some positive news before VE Day."



Wren... Marie Scott, 98



have been a "terrible injustice" had heroes not been able to go.

On May 5 it will be 80 years since the Netherlands were freed from Nazi occupation. Elsewhere veterans will be keen to visit Normandy in June for the 81st anniversary of D-Day.

The Taxi Charity for Military Veterans, run by London cabbies and funded by donations, plans to take up to 25 heroes to

events in Europe. Geoff Roberts, 100 in June, hopes to visit Wageningen to mark Dutch liberation. The Battle of Arnhem veteran has been back 80 times and appreciates this year may be his last chance.

He recalled of the foiled wartime mission: "We failed, and they paid a heavy price for us trying to liberate them, but they're still greeting us now and

thanking us." Marie Scott was a 17-year-old switchboard operator

with the Women's Royal Naval Service under Fort Southwick in Hampshire, operations centre for the D-Day invasion fleet. She will join the King and Queen at Westminster Abbey for a VE Day service on May 8.

Marie, 99 in June, said: "Major landmarks, like last year's 80th anniversary of D-Day



and this year's VE and VJ Day anniversaries, should be commemorated.

"I have been tremendously lucky that my later years have been a ball. "Thanks to the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans I have been

taken to places and met people I never dreamed possible." Charity vice president Dick Goodwin said: "This is a wonderful decision that will mean the world to our vet-



Ivor in his care home. Above top right, with his squadron and below on duty in 1945



COMMENT

LORD ASHCROFT

Businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster



I CONGRATULATE the Express for its successful campaign on behalf of our war veterans. I also salute the Labour government for finding the funding to ensure those who have served our country in its hour of need can attend major commemorations later this year to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War Two.

It would have been a terrible injustice if our war veterans had been unable to attend the VE Day commemorations and other similar events simply because they could not afford to participate in them.

The reality is that for many of our World War Two veterans, now in their late 90s or older, this is likely to be their last significant anniversary of the end of the 1939-45 global conflict.

These brave and noble individuals will have different motivations for wanting to attend such events. Some will want to pay their respects to lost comrades, others will want to enjoy a last day in the spotlight at which their service to their nation is recognised.

For many years now, fines from the Libor interest rate-fixing scandal have supported veterans attending such events but this funding recently ran out. This left some veterans unable to attend VE Day and other commemorations because they simply did not have the money to pay for the necessary accommodation and travel costs involved, sometimes in the presence of relatives or carers who are needed because the veterans are old and frail.

It would be a tragedy if money worries deprived these individuals of the opportunity of attending such

'Supporting our war veterans should never be a political issue'

events, including those planned in London for the 80th anniversary.

Now the Government has rightly pledged that funding will be found to enable our veterans to travel to ceremonies across the UK.

Furthermore, money will be made available for those wanting to participate in events being held to mark the 80th anniversary of liberation of the Netherlands in May and the 81st anniversary of D-Day in June.

In earlier backing of this paper's campaign and as a former treasurer and former deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, I made it clear that supporting our war veterans, along with honouring our war dead, should never be a political issue.

Like Sir Keir Starmer, I have been privileged enough to meet hundreds of war veterans as a result of researching seven books on bravery and in building the world's largest collection of Victoria Crosses.

Typically, their valour and sense of duty are matched by a remarkable modesty and humility. I couldn't be happier that, largely thanks to the Express's campaign, these are the very individuals who will now be at the forefront of the nation's commemorations next month and later this year.

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. For more information on his work, visit lordashcroft.com. Follow him on X/Facebook @LordAshcroft.

DAILY EXPRESS VOTE

Should Government fund WWII veterans to attend VE Day celebrations every year?

YES: 0901 133 4440

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