

**SATURDAY'S BIG READ**

**LORD ASHCROFT**  
Businessman and author



# 'We salute their sense of duty, resilience and determination'

THEIR numbers are shrinking but the poignancy of their annual visit is increasing. They are the D-Day survivors, every one of them a hero, who still travel to Normandy to commemorate the famous June 6, 1944 landings.

Almost every surviving D-Day veteran is now more than 100 years old yet some still insist on travelling across the Channel to pay their respects to fallen comrades. I salute their determination, resilience and their sense of duty – qualities which are as evident today as they were fully 82 years ago.

For some of those travelling to France, this will be a "first" – the first time since a victorious campaign last year by the Daily Express to get the government to pay the veterans' expenses, including bed and board, to enable them to travel to France on D-Day.

In early June 1944, as part of Operation Neptune – within the wider context of Operation Overlord – around 155,000 men came across the Channel to land on five beach areas, each given a codename.

They reached their destination in assorted ships and landing craft, numbering upwards of 6,000 vessels.

Private Albert Holdsworth, of the 2nd Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, later described the feeling as he took part in the seaborne assault: "Very frightening, very frightening; also you were feeling excitement as well. A knot in your stomach."

I still feel emotional on D-Day when I conjure up an image of how the-then young

## 'Officers were briefed to expect 75% casualties, dead and wounded, when the boats hit the beaches'

men, some in their teens, raced up five main beaches – Sword, Gold, Omaha, Juno and Utah – from dawn onwards in the face of heavy enemy fire.

For one of those men was my late father, Eric Ashcroft, then a young lieutenant serving with the South Lancashire Regiment.

He and his fellow officers had been privately briefed ahead of D-Day to expect up to 75% casualties – dead and wounded – as the first landing craft arrived on the beaches.

My father and his fellow "South Lancs" soldiers had been designated to land at Sword Beach in the first wave at 7.30am.

As the ramps of their landing craft dropped down and they raced up the beach, they encountered anti-tank, mortar, machine-gun and rifle fire from a German strong point at the top of the beach.

My father later described his run up the beach in an interview recorded decades later for the Imperial War Museum. He said: "About two-thirds to high watermark, I was knocked sideways when, so it would appear now, an 88mm splinter struck my right arm as I was moving across the beach."

Resting beneath a bank, he applied a field dressing to his bloodied wound and crouched beside his commanding officer, Colonel Richard Burbury, aged 38, who was then shot dead by a sniper. Later in the day my father was ordered from the battlefield to receive treatment for his wounds. He returned to Britain on a hospital ship and eventually made a full recovery.

The exact number of British D-Day veterans still alive is not known but the total runs to only scores of men. Of these, for health and other reasons, only a small number are able to be in France this weekend.

At some point, they will gather with other Second World War veterans and their supporters at the British Normandy Memorial,



Royal Marines land at Juno Beach. Top, following a tank towards Ouistreham on D-Day and, right, commandoes on Sword Beach

which was officially unveiled on June 6, 2021 by the then-Prince of Wales, now King Charles III.

On the memorial are the names of the 22,540 servicemen and women under British command who fell on D-Day and during the Battle of Normandy in the summer of 1944.

The memorial, which is situated on a hillside overlooking Gold Beach, finally brought together the names of these brave individuals from more than 30 countries who gave their lives for their King, their country, their

comrades and for wider freedoms. Even since last year's D-Day commemorations, we have sadly lost several D-Day veterans, including Donald Rose, who died in July 2025, aged 110. He served for five years of the war, also taking part in the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945. British soldiers found some 10,000 dead bodies when they entered the camp.

Inevitably, because of their age, some of these veterans will have travelled to Normandy this week for the final time yet they will all go home with treasured mem-

ories of their 2026 visit. Incidentally, I credit my father with my lifelong passion for bravery. For when I was aged about 10, he recounted his wartime experiences to me for the first time. It filled me with pride that my father had displayed such courage and had played a small part in such a historic event.

As my passion for valour grew, it also transformed into an interest in gallantry medals. I purchased my first Victoria Cross – Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious decoration for bravery in the presence of the enemy – in 1986. Over the

following decades, I amassed the world's largest collection of VCs, currently 245 in number, and a smaller collection of George Crosses (GCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious decoration for bravery not in the presence of the enemy.

That collection, my pride and joy, went on display at the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum from 2010 to 2025.

Following the IWM's baffling decision to shut the gallery, the collection will now go on display at the National Army Museum in Central London within the next two years.

Sadly, I cannot be in Normandy this time due to other commitments.

However, I have visited both Sword Beach, including the precise spot where my father landed, and the British Normandy Memorial in recent years to pay my respects to our fallen heroes.

More than eight decades on, I remain convinced that one of the reasons for the success of the D-Day landings was that those taking part in them had the moral high ground against the Germans, who had invaded France and other European

countries and who were conducting the Holocaust.

Private Dennis Bowen, of the 5th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, described his own feelings on June 6, 1944 many years after the event.

I am sure he spoke for many when he said: "I didn't know enough about politics, of course, at 18 years old.

"But I knew at the back of my mind there was something evil about the regime which the Germans were following and the method in which they were conducting their

lives. I knew it was wrong and I knew the only way we would alter it was to defeat them in battle.

"And I was very proud – still am – of the fact that I was instrumental in some small way in preventing that happening here [Britain] or anywhere else in the world for that matter."

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



Young officer Eric Ashcroft recalled being injured on the beach during D-Day landing. Below, his son, Lord Ashcroft, at Imperial War Museum



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SEE PAGE 18 (TERMS & CONDITIONS APPLY; UK ONLY)

# NEVER FORGET

**D-Day hero Paul Terry,**  
**100, returns to the**  
**Normandy beaches**  
**for the first time**  
**in 82 years to**  
**remember fallen**  
**colleagues who fought**  
**to save our freedoms**



**Special D-Day commemorative edition** SEE PAGES 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 AND 14

# 'It was hell on Earth...I just hope and pray the youth of today never have to go through it again'



Paul remembers those who died; top, with brother Victor, left, and twin Peter, right. Above, during the war with 12th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps; below, throwing poppy wreath yesterday



British troops disembark from a landing craft at Sword beach on D-Day

FIGHTING back tears on the beach he last saw soaked in the blood of fallen comrades 82 years ago on D-Day, hero Paul Terry says: "Please, never forget our sacrifice."

The 100-year-old veteran wanted to be in Normandy for today's anniversary, knowing it could be his last chance.

Paul was just 18 when he landed on Sword Beach on June 6, 1944 for the bloody fight to liberate Nazi-occupied France.

Recalling the scene he said: "It was hell on Earth, we were all scared stiff, and at the age I was I just wanted to go home."

"There was so much noise, so much shelling, it's hard to explain. It frightened the life out of me. Even the sight of German soldiers in uniform put the fear of God into me."

"But I know I was one of the lucky ones, and we must never forget."

Paul was a twin, and one of three brothers serving with the King's Royal Rifle Corps, part of a brave generation who did not flinch as they raced into the unknown.

He valiantly fought through France and Belgium and into Holland, where he was

**EXCLUSIVE**  
BY GILES SHELDRICK Chief Reporter  
Pictures by JONATHAN BUCKMASTER  
in Hermanville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France

part of Operation Market Garden, the plan to flank Germany's formidable western border defences by breaking through the enemy line in Arnhem.

Returning to Hermanville-sur-Mer yesterday he tossed a poppy wreath into the water in a poignant solo act of remembrance.

Paul from Pevensey Bay, East Sussex, who turns 101 next month, has returned to Normandy with eight other D-Day and Second World War veterans thanks to the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans.

Each knows their trip across the Channel might be a final chance to remember those who died in the fight to liberate Europe.

Born in Ramsgate, Kent, in 1925 when Stanley Baldwin was Prime Minister, Paul and his brothers all survived the war.

Victor, who served alongside him in the 12th battalion and was four years older, died

in 1999 aged 78. Twin Peter served in the 2nd Battalion, famed for its service in the North African campaign, particularly at El Alamein. He died in 2019 aged 94.

But the service of surviving veterans, and the sacrifice of the tens of thousands who perished in the desperate fight against tyranny, lives on in the freedoms we take

**'There was so much noise and shelling. I just wanted to go home'**

for granted today. As he threw the floral tribute into the sea, and with his twin's medals proudly pinned to his chest, Paul said: "I pray of a night. I just hope and pray the youth of today never have to go through it again. It's frightening."

"I think if there is another war none of us will know much about it. God gave us life to love one another, not kill one another. So

many good men were killed here. This is my first time back in 82 years and I just ask, please, never forget what we did."

Great-great-grandfather Paul, who was conscripted at the age of 18, went on to be decorated with the Legion of Honour, the highest and most prestigious French national order of merit, for his service.

He was nearly killed when he was blown up by a German shell while holed up in a trench in Nazi-occupied Holland, suffering catastrophic leg injuries.

Paul was evacuated back to the UK and medically discharged from the Army, but was so determined to serve his country he later rejoined as a reservist and was on duty at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

After the war he continued helping others working as an ambulance driver for 35 years. Almost without exception the hardy band of brothers and sisters who have made the pilgrimage to France would have still been in school at the outbreak of war in 1939.

By 1944 they would have turned 18 and been called up to form the military might for

the D-Day invasion. Many volunteered, often lying about their age. Some went willingly, and some because they had no option.

Allied soldiers launched an air assault on occupied France just after midnight on June 6 and, hours later, from the sea when troops stormed five beaches codenamed

**'God gave us life to love one another, not kill one another'**

Gold, Sword, Juno, Utah and Omaha.

The largest air and seaborne invasion ever mounted hoped to establish a foothold on the Normandy beaches and from there a springboard from which to liberate Nazi-occupied Europe.

As the first wave of troops scrambled off landing craft and raced up heavily fortified beaches, all that could be heard was the incessant sound of machine gun and mortar

fire punctuated by piercing screams as soldiers were mown down from German positions high on the cliffs above.

Normandy has become a sacred place for returning warriors, who weep when they recall how young friends and comrades died, often by their sides.

Stan Hollis, company sergeant major with D Company, 6th Battalion Green Howards, was one of the first to set foot on Gold Beach and was awarded the only Victoria Cross on D-Day for his actions. The youngest to die was 16 while the oldest was 64.

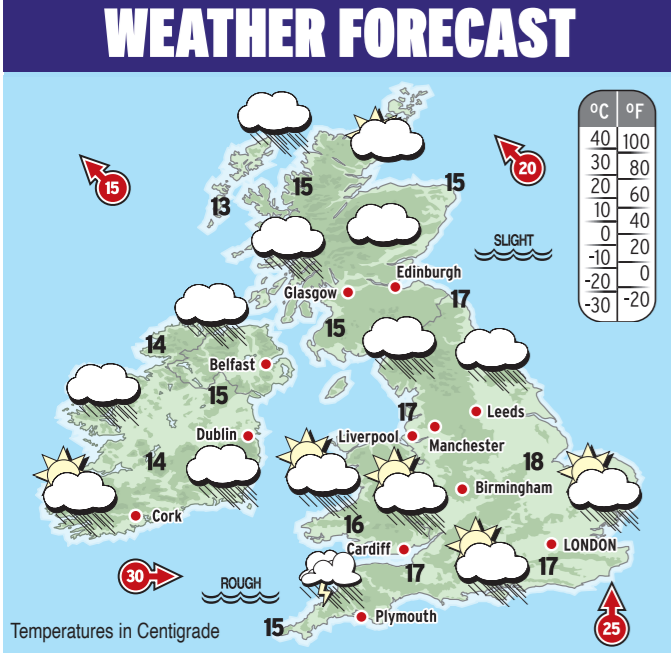
The names of the 22,540 heroes who served under British Command and perished that day and during the three-month Battle of Normandy that followed are immortalised on limestone columns at the British Normandy Memorial in Ver-sur-Mer.

Today it will host a moving remembrance service where the handful of veterans present will be told that their selfless service and sacrifice on D-Day can never be repaid – but will never be forgotten.



REMEMBERING FALLEN COMRADES ON D-DAY ANNIVERSARY

Poignant salute of final two



Today's summary: Rainy morning, cloudy evening
North West: Cloudy with light rain early. Brighter spells later. Breezy and mild throughout. High 18C (64F).

UK OUTLOOK TOMORROW: Expect mild temperatures with scattered showers, easing by evening. Breezy at times, but drier spells will develop later.

SIX-DAY FORECAST table with columns for Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri and rows for London, Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, Plymouth.

Britain yesterday table with columns for City, High, Low, Rain, Wind, and rows for Aberdeen, Hull, Ipswich, Leeds, Lincoln, London, Manchester, Oxford, Southampton, St Andrews.

Today's weather forecast table with columns for City, Today, Tomorrow and rows for Amsterdam, Brussels, Dublin, Frankfurt, Geneva, Lisbon, Madrid, Paris, Rome.

Around the world yesterday table with columns for City, High, Low, Wind, and rows for Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Budapest, Cairo, Cape Town, Casablanca, Corfu, Dublin, Florence, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Jersey, London, Los Angeles, Luxembourg, Malaga, Mallorca, Malta, Melbourne, Miami, Moscow, Nairobi, New Delhi, New York, Nice, Nicosia, Palma, Prague, Singapore, Stockholm, Sydney, Tel Aviv, Tenerife, Toronto, Tunis, Venice, Vienna, Warsaw.

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Patriotic aviator Ralph Ottey

Caribbean Dambuster Ralph dies aged 102

BY PAUL JEEVES

A CARIBBEAN-born Second World War veteran who joined the legendary Dambusters Squadron has died aged 102.

Ralph Ottey was 19 when he left Jamaica to join the RAF in 1944 where he became part of 617 Squadron, saying it was his duty to help his "mother country".

Mr Ottey, who lived in Boston, Lincolnshire, recalled of his enrolment: "In less than no time, I was a little boy from Jamaica flying



Ralph as a young airman

in a Lancaster bomber. I was part of the world's best known bombing squadron."

The Dambusters famously conducted a night-time raid on dams in the Ruhr Valley in Nazi Germany in 1943. Following his service, Mr Ottey worked as an accountant and married Mavis Reece, from Boston. Their daughter, Lesley Morrison, described her father as "an inspiration".

The Royal Air Forces Association Boston branch announced Ralph's death "with much sadness".

His funeral will be held in the town on Thursday morning.

BY GILES SHELDRIK Chief Reporter Pictures by JONATHAN BUCKMASTER in Colleville-Montgomery, Normandy, France

RETURNING to the spot where giants fell, Ken Hay and Henry Rice salute their lost pals and comrades.

Three years ago D-Day warriors Ken and Henry stood alongside chums Reginald Pye, Alec Penstone, Jack Quinn, Richard Aldred and Stan Ford on Sword Beach in a picture that saw the heroes become known as the Magnificent Seven.

Last year they became the Fabulous Five as Ken and Henry were pictured with Richard, Jim Grant and John Dennett.

This year the Totemic Two are among the last of the greatest generation who remain. Their poignant gesture on the eve of the 82nd anniversary of the Allied invasion was a chance to remember their friends – both those lost during the Normandy landings and the recently departed.

They took their salute on the same golden sands where thousands of soldiers scrambled ashore amid a ferocious volley of fire on June 6, 1944.

For Ken and Henry – both 100 and recipients of the Legion of Honour, France's highest order of merit – it was an overwhelming moment. As the waves crashed on the shore the heroes paused to reflect.

Beaches in the Calvados department were stormed by British regiments and brigades attached to the 3rd Infantry Division, including the 1st Special Service Brigade commanded by Lord Lovat.

Lucky

This headed for the eastern shore of the Orne River to reinforce positions held by paratroopers and glider troops who landed hours earlier in D-Day's opening exchanges.

Great-grandfather of five Henry, from Cranleigh, Surrey, served on the landing ship HMS Eastway which ferried soldiers and supplies to the beaches.

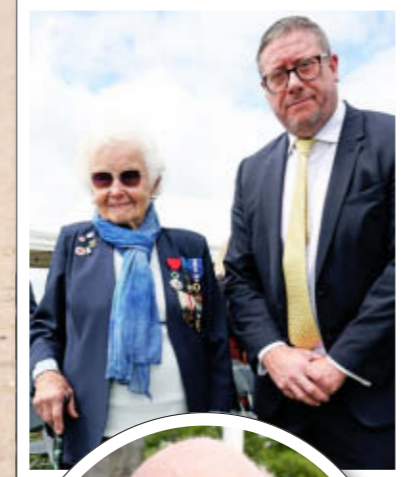
He said: "A couple of years ago we were the Magnificent Seven, then it was the Fabulous Five, and now it is just the two of us. Each year the number is gradually diminishing but I look skywards and think, 'boy, I am lucky' and just say 'thank you, mate' because I am sure someone up there was looking after me."

Ken, from Upminster, East London, served with the 4th Dorset Infantry Regiment and of his 30-man patrol nine were killed, 16 escaped and five were seized, including himself. He was sent to Stalag Luft VIII-B and held as a prisoner of war in Poland and put to work as a slave in a coal mine. Later he and 80,000 fellow POWs were forced on a 1,000-mile death march in freezing temperatures across what was then Czechoslovakia and Germany before being freed by US troops.

He said: "Many did far more than me and I suppose I was lucky I got captured. I didn't get killed or wounded. I suffered but not in the same way as others." Earlier the heroes took centre stage at a moving open



Veterans Henry Rice, left, and Ken Hay, honour their friends on Sword Beach. Below, Giles Sheldrick with Blanche Boulet, and Henry Montgomery



Pair with Reginald Pye, Alec Penstone, Jack Quinn, Richard Aldred and Stan Ford in 2023



With Richard Aldred, Jim Grant and John Dennett in 2025

Royal Navy's big send off for war hero Jack, 106



Sailors line up to salute veteran Jack Meacham

DOZEN of sailors and veterans turned out to honour a 106-year-old Second World War hero they did not know, following a plea from his family for people to attend his funeral.

Jack Meacham reached the rank of Chief Steward and was awarded the prestigious Arctic Star medal for his service.

His grandson Greg Meacham described him as a "war hero, and the loveliest man you would ever meet".

After the service at Portchester Crematorium, Hants, he said: "It was overwhelming. We didn't expect the numbers to turn out like they did. This send-off was

the least he deserved. He was a proud and amazing man. He deserved all of that."

Lieutenant Commander Paul Winch, from the nearby Fareham base, said: "Some of these sailors have only been in the Royal Navy for 20 weeks. When we told them about Jack, they wanted to honour him."

"He maintained a sailor's spirit through his life and he worked into his 100s."

Able Seaman Harry Terrell, 20, said: "Jack's story makes me proud to be part of the Navy, hearing what others achieved."

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