

**Cérémonie de réception dans la Légion d'honneur de**

**3 vétérans britanniques**

***RAF Club, 7 juillet 2016***

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**Sir Andrew Pulford,**

**Veterans,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**On 6 June 2014, on the beach at Ouistreham, in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, French President François Hollande sent a strong message of gratitude to Allied soldiers, and particularly to the British. He announced that the *Légion d'Honneur* would be awarded to all the British veterans who took part in the liberation of France during the Second World War.**

**So today, two years on, it is a true honor and an immense privilege for me to represent, here at the RAF Club, the French Chief of the Air Staff, General André Lanata, who despite his absolute willingness unfortunately wasn't able to join us, and echo the message from the French Head of State.**

**Madam, 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.**

**France and Britain already had a long history of fighting together, especially during the Great War. This year we are marking the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, when hundreds and thousands of British and French soldiers lost their lives on the battlefields of France. Sir Andrew, who joined on 1<sup>st</sup> July the celebration at Thiepval alongside the Royal family, the French President, the British Prime Minister, can attest we will never forget their sacrifices in the name of freedom.**

**This ceremony is firstly a message of gratitude to men and women who were ready to give their lives to liberate us. Through the insignia of *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, France wants to thank you for your absolute commitment to freedom. To you, France owes its freedom.**

**It is also a message to every British person: that we shall not forget. That we shall never forget those who fought for us against terror and division. “Remembrance,” said General de Gaulle, “is not a pious homage paid to the dead, but a ferment always working in the actions of the living.”**

**And I want to say here what a great example you represent for me, for young people, for our countries and for the world.**

**As of today, nearly 4000 British veterans have been awarded the Legion d'Honneur. Many of them, sometimes barely twenty years old, landed on Gold Beach, Sword Beach, Juno Beach or Omaha Beach, and continued to Belgium and Holland, where they risked their lives to ensure peace and freedom throughout Europe.**

**And as I stand before 3 of them, I see as many individual stories of exception, opening us a window on history.**

**Wing Commander Thomas “Ginger” Neil :**

**You joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1938 at the age of 18 and were called up to full time service at the outbreak of war. Posted to No 249 Squadron during the Battle of Britain, you fiercely flew Hurricanes and shot down 12 enemy aircraft, which entitled you as an ace. Attached as liaison officer to the 9<sup>th</sup> USAF’ 100<sup>th</sup> Fighting Wing, you took part in the invasion of Normandy flying Mustang, especially Falaise battle, and you became the first allied pilot to land on the first runway built close to the landing beaches, the A1 airstrip, on 10 June, where you were eventually shot at by a sniper. You then remained with the USAAF until the border of Germany was reached.**

**Leading Aircraftwoman Rose Davies :**

**Leading up to D-Day you were radar operator on duty at RAF Ventnor as part of a 24 hour shift on HPT radar reading shipping movements, which were then translated into friendly or enemy ships. On 6<sup>th</sup> of June, you were on watch when D-Day started and shipping movements reached their peak. Under intense pressure to record all movements, you stayed continuously on shift under overall situation was stabilised. Only after you were relieved, you were made aware of the great event that took place.**

**Lance Bombardier Arthur Jones :**

**You received your call up papers in February 1944, just a few weeks after your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. You were then selected to become a tank driver and became part of the 147 Essex Yeomanry. After 20 weeks in the army, you were sent to the coast of England. You crossed the channel with your Sherman tank on D-Day plus four, and then assured observation posts, selecting potential enemy target across Normandy, up to Liévin, when eventually your tank broke down.**

**Madam, Gentleman,**

**The *Légion d'Honneur* is France's highest distinction, created by Napoleon in eighteen-ô-two, which honours exceptional acts of bravery and devotion, by all those who have served France, whether they be French by blood or "by spilled blood".**

**May your commitment, your bravery and your spirit continue to act as a ferment in the hearts and actions of the new generations.**

**Long live Britain!**

**Long live France!**

**Long live Franco-British friendship!**