

Press release: UK prepares to host veterans and world leaders for unprecedented D-Day commemorations

The UK is preparing to host unprecedented commemorations in Portsmouth this week to mark the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Over 4000 personnel will be involved in D-Day events in the UK and France, making this one of the biggest mobilisations of the UK Armed Forces in recent years.

On Wednesday 5 June, world leaders will join Her Majesty The Queen, The Prince of Wales and members of the armed forces to pay tribute to the bravery and sacrifice of the troops who fought to secure Europe's freedom.

Representatives from every country that fought alongside the UK in Operation Overlord – the Battle of Normandy – will attend one of the greatest British military spectacles in recent years, alongside over 300 veterans.

This includes President Trump – on the final day of his State Visit – President Macron of France, Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada and Prime Minister Morrison of Australia, as well as leaders and senior representatives from New Zealand, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Denmark. Chancellor Merkel of Germany will also attend, in keeping with previous D-Day anniversary events.

This is the first time the UK has hosted this many world leaders outside a formal summit since the 2012 Olympics.

Wednesday will see an hour-long performance on Southsea Common – produced by the BBC – telling the story of D-Day and the meticulous planning by allied forces that paved the way for the invasion of Normandy.

The event will feature testimony from veterans, theatrical performances and live music, culminating in a flypast of 24 aircraft – old and new – including the Red Arrows and the historic Spitfire.

During the performance the Prime Minister will read a letter written by Captain Norman Skinner of the Royal Army Service Corps to his wife Gladys on 3 June 1944, which was in his pocket when he landed on Sword Beach on 6 June. He was killed the following day, leaving his wife and two young daughters. The letter includes the following lines:

My thoughts at this moment, in this lovely Saturday afternoon, are with you all now.

I can imagine you in the garden having tea with Janey and Anne getting ready to put them to bed.

Although I would give anything to be back with you, I have not yet had any wish at all to back down from the job we have to do.

After the display the leaders will join veterans at a reception where they will have the opportunity to pay their respects to those who played a role in this critical moment in our shared history. Leaders will then sit down to a lunch together where they are expected to discuss the enduring importance of the western alliance, and the values that underpin it for our shared security and prosperity today.

Ahead of the D-Day commemorations, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

This week, people throughout Britain will pay tribute to the men and women who gave their lives during D-Day and for the liberation of Europe in World War Two.

This year's commemoration will be particularly poignant and I am honoured to be able to mark the 75th anniversary of the landings alongside the veterans who were there.

It is the sheer scale of D-Day that made it such an awe-inspiring feat. Troops from around the world fought together with a common goal and with a shared ideal.

And so it is right that together we reflect on and celebrate the cooperation that helped to secure the freedom we cherish today.

Defence Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

It is government's hope that D-Day75 leaves a lasting legacy and provides an opportunity for people young and old to reflect on the achievements and sacrifice of our Second World War generation. Over the next few days it will be a privilege for us all to learn more of these extraordinary men and women.

Early on Wednesday evening, the 300 veterans – all over 90 years old – will leave Portsmouth on the MV Boudicca, a specially-commissioned ship chartered by the Royal British Legion and escorted by HMS St Albans – a Type 23 Frigate. The veterans will sail once again to Normandy – retracing the journey they made across the channel 75 years ago.

As the MV Boudicca emerges into the Solent it will be met by a flotilla of Royal Navy vessels – with sailors lining the decks in salute to pay their respects, while a lone Spitfire flies overhead.

The Prime Minister will be aboard the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth, which will be docked in Portsmouth for the commemorations, to wave off the veterans. The Defence Secretary and the First Sea Lord will join her on the

deck to watch the historic sail-past.

In Normandy, Wednesday afternoon will see the Army's 16 Air Assault Brigade descend from the skies from RAF C-130 Hercules aircraft and C-47 Dakotas on Wednesday afternoon, alongside French Army paratroopers, to recreate the historic airborne landings. D-Day veterans will also be jumping from Dakotas as part of the re-enactment.

The Normandy commemorations will begin on Thursday 6 June in Arromanches at 0726 local time with a lone piper from the British Army marking the exact moment the first British soldier landed on Gold beach.

The Prime Minister will be in Normandy on Thursday to witness the inauguration of a new memorial to British servicemen at Ver-sur-Mer, alongside President Macron, and attend services of commemoration and remembrance at the cathedral and cemetery in Bayeux – the first town to be liberated by the allied forces.