

# Speech: Defence Secretary keynote speech at the Land Warfare Conference 2019

D-DAY

In a few days' time the nation will pay tribute to those who fought on D-Day. From Portsmouth's Southsea Common to Bayeaux Cathedral...we will stand in silence recalling the incredible operations off the coast, in the air and on the beaches of Normandy.

When we commemorate those events this week what will be in our thoughts? Will it be the landing craft, or the reconnaissance planes, or the supply ships. No. Our focus will be on the veterans, and all who made that immense endeavour possible.

From the civilians who came together at a moment's notice to build the Mulberry Harbours... wrap up small arms components and sew ID badges...

...to the merchant sailors that swelled our naval force...and enabled the critical transport of men and supplies...

...to the mighty endeavour of that 62,000-strong British element of the 21st Army Group who charged up the beaches

...and those who made the ultimate sacrifice in those dark days.

It was, according to Churchill, "the most difficult and complicated operation that has ever taken place". It was so called ordinary people doing extraordinary things. It is the testimony of those who were there that will captivate us in the coming days. People like Bill Fitzgerald, just eighteen years old, as he along with his comrades stormed those beaches. Then as now it is the people who made the difference. And in defence, if we do not put our people first we will fail to generate and maintain the capability that we need. And we will have broken that covenant between the state and our communities and those who step up to protect them.

As I speak the men and women of our armed forces are working across the globe ...combatting terrorism ...working with allies and partners to build up the resilience of fragile states... ...delivering humanitarian aid to those most in need... ...standing up for our values of democracy, tolerance and justice and achieving great things.

I want to put on record my congratulations to Brigadier Celia Harvey who was selected today to be the Deputy Commander Field Army as a Major General. The third Female Army Major General 2\* and the first female reserve 2\*. My congratulations to her.

LIVING WAGE FOR OUR ARMED FORCES

We often say what an amazing job they do, because they continually provide us with opportunities to say so. We must take care of them. While they are serving and after they have served.

That is why we will shortly consult on protecting against repeated investigations and litigations against our veterans and AF personnel into historic operations outside the UK. Actions which are not motivated or serve justice, and also consult on paying higher levels of compensation for those injured on combat operations, or to the families for those who have been killed.

Nor should any soldier, sailor, airman or woman be asked to serve our country and not be sufficiently rewarded. The armed forces are exempt from the living wage, as they are in effect, on call 365 days a year, but I am determined to ensure the lowest paid members of the armed forces are lifted to ensure that none of them are below an acceptable salary to live well on. We are undertaking work to determine what a living wage looks like for those who can be called on day or night.

They should get a living wage.

That is what I will be arguing for in the decisions on this year's pay review, and it will be a spending priority for me. It is the right thing to do, but I also recognise that the decision to serve is not motivated by money.

People are motivated by what they will be doing and what that achieves in the world and the values that underpin it: protecting, serving, doing your duty for your country.

Central to that is to understand what the Army is for.

That sounds a simple question, but it is one that I am often asked, including by members of the British Army themselves. How can we build connections with our communities, how can we have a strong narrative to recruit if we cannot say what our purpose is.

The reality is, the world is changing and the threats increasing from a diverse range of sources. As earlier speakers have said, Cyber attack is now the new normal. Between 2016 and 2017 NATO saw such attacks on its infrastructure increasing by 60 percent. Whether the origin is Russia, China or North Korea...or from hacktivists, criminals or extremists...the cyber threat can bring down our national infrastructure and undermine our democracy.

All the while, we're having to deal with the hybrid dangers as nations increasingly employ proxy actors to carry out aggression and intimidation at arms-length but now below the threshold of armed combat.

Whatever the correct response to these new forms of aggression, in many cases their deterrence relies on a credible threat of hard power. And the reality is wars are still won or lost on land. We need to seize and hold territory endures and yes, the future may look very different in years to come, but meantime, while armour is relevant it must be capable, and we must be

competitive.

We have not been.

Challenger 2, has been in service without a major upgrade since 1998. During this time the United States, Germany and Denmark have completed two major upgrades, whilst Russia has fielded five new variants with a sixth pending.

Warrior, is even more obsolete, and is twenty years older than those operated by our key allies. Since Warrior's introduction in 1988 the United States and Germany have conducted four major upgrades and Russia has invested in three new variants.

So we must invest in our warfighting division, and it is critical we honour the commitments we made in the SDSR 2015 to maintain a world-class divisional war fighting capability, through upgrades and new vehicles, equipped to win wars in the information age...with advanced sensors and automated search, tracking and detection systems.

At the same time, I am keen that we shouldn't overlook the advantages of more joint ways of working. Look at the successes of the Joint Helicopter Force which brings all battlefield helicopters under a single command.

Why can't we do something similar with robotics and unmanned vehicles across all the services...by building a hub overseen by Joint Force Command? Not only will we be able to work better with industry and have a more integrated approach, but we will also be able to plug into what the rest of government is doing too.

At DFID in my previous job I did a huge amount of work on drones, new designs able to lift heavy payloads, and get medicine and supplies into conflict zones and solve many headaches that humanitarians were facing. We boosted creativity through challenge funds and setting up an innovation hub. I think we should be doing more of this in Defence and supporting growth.

In that way to we can create a common mission with the country that is wider than defence: The security and prosperity of the UK, that is what we are for. That is how we will serve our country. And those who put themselves forward to serve are special people.

## MAKING THE MOST OF TALENT

There is more that we need to do to avoid people dropping out of the recruitment and training pipeline. Currently, for every eight applicants one soldier enters training. Just last year that figure was 12 applicants for every soldier. So we've made some good progress but we must do better.

I am challenging the army to reduce that ratio to six to one. It's also worth reflecting that, once a candidate passes the assessment centre we still lose up to seven per cent of applicants before they commence training. I want us to re-engage with these individuals that have dropped out. Individuals who felt a call to serve. Why did they leave? Was the army not for them? Have they considered another service? Have they considered a career on the

civilian side?

If we are serious about bringing up all our forces to the required strength then we must pursue every register of interest.

And we also need to do more to encourage our people to remain in the forces –when they’re thinking of leaving or have reached the end of their current contracts. We already allow people to transfer between different services...offering quicker recruitment and rapid promotion to those with unique talents. But to say we haven’t really sold this is an understatement. We need to make sure that is not just feasible but positively encouraged.

It makes sense when the British taxpayer has invested so heavily in a person that we make best use of that person in the service of their country.

#### FULL VALUE OF DEFENCE

We have to maximise every efficiency.

But in making our pitch to the treasury we also need to talk about the full value of Defence. And that’s not just about jobs in industry, supply chain and services , or export sales, or inventions, or defence engagement which we often mention. It’s also about social mobility, and the fabric of our society.

The Army is a place of great opportunity. You take people from all walks of life. You give them a sense of purpose, belonging and family. Indeed, you give them a home away from home and imbue them with those precious values of courage, discipline, integrity, respect for others, loyalty and selfless commitment. As Army Gunner and drummer Hussein Sadiq put it: “I ended up finding that the Army’s core values reflected my own.”

But the Army does something even more than that. It fires ambition. The British Army has a long and proud history of discovering exceptional character and talent in people which nobody else could see or be bothered to look for.

Rebecca Smith from Grimsby was at rock bottom and sleeping rough. She took a decision to walk into an Army careers office. She became a vehicle mechanic within the (REME) and rose rapidly through the ranks to corporal as a Challenger 2 expert. Having been recognised for her exceptional leadership talent she was recently commissioned from Sandhurst and is now on her young officers’ training course...returning to the REME as a second lieutenant. Her previous hard times are now a distant memory.

The British Army has taught many to read and write, academic and practical skills, enabling huge numbers of people to have the tools they need to be active citizens.

And just as I want defence to do more on the UK prosperity agenda I want us to do more on social mobility agenda too. At a time of rising knife crime and prevalent gang culture in some parts of the UK, the Army’s ethos can make a real difference to young people. It can offer hope.

Defence has so much to offer, in our armed forces and our cadet units, but also in the fantastic organisations that sit in our communities alongside us. I have been so struck in particular how Military Preparation colleges have enthused those who other education establishments fail to inspire. They have encouraged study and physical fitness, self-confidence and self-worth, a sense of duty and service. And they have given some youngsters options where they had none.

I believe it is time to use the skills and lesson learned at these colleges and elsewhere in the Army to address this national blight of gangs and weapons on our streets.

Today I wish to announce, in support of the Ministerial Taskforce on Serious Violence, that my Department will be holding a summit involving Military Preparation Colleges and those working to divert young people away from gangs and violence. We will bring all that we have to offer to this issue.

Courage is inspirational.

We will never forget what the Army accomplished on D-Day seventy-five years ago. It still inspires us still today. An achievement which founded not on having the most powerful weapons but on having people equipped with extraordinary courage, ingenuity and determination.

Today's Army shares those qualities and our people are going out of their way across to globe to make a difference...protecting innocents...lifting people out of poverty...and providing hope for others from Estonia to Afghanistan, from Iraq to South Sudan.

Yet, as we look into the future, an age in which the dangers are changing and growing, we will depend on our people more than ever.

So we must look after them, like never before.

That is my priority.