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**VISIT BY HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AND HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE
OF EDINBURGH TO NORMANDY TO COMMEMORATE THE FORTIETH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE NORMANDY LANDINGS**

*Her Majesty's Ambassador at Paris to the
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*

SUMMARY

6 June 1984 is likely to be for many of those involved the last major anniversary of D-Day at which they can join in commemorating their own exploits. The day's ceremonies, attended by The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh, were worthy of the momentous events of 1944 (paragraph 1).

2. The French tend to give most credit for the liberation of France to de Gaulle's forces and the Resistance. President Mitterrand's invitation to the Allies who participated in the Normandy landings to attend this year's ceremonies was intended in part to remedy past neglect of their contribution. But the impact of this gesture was dented by the obstructions created by French officials in the face of our attempts to plan a worthwhile programme for The Queen. There were long and difficult negotiations and many changes of plan. Gratitude for Her Majesty's patient understanding (paragraphs 2-5).

3. **The visit itself.** The Queen was warmly received in Caen. The British ceremonies in Bayeux and Arranches, the former to honour the dead, the latter the survivors, were dignified but intimate and moving. The French ceremony at Utah Beach was grander but less personal (paragraphs 6-9).

4. The Royal visit and the large British participation in the ceremonies helped to remind our European partners of our role in the liberation of Europe at a difficult moment in our relations with them (paragraphs 10-11).

5. Thanks to those involved in planning the visit and the ceremonies (paragraph 12).

Paris
20 June 1984

Sir,

"There are only a few occasions in history when the course of human destiny has depended on the events of a single day. 6 June 1944 was one of those critical moments". These words were spoken by Her Majesty The Queen to British D-Day veterans at the end of a memorable day of ceremonies on the Normandy beaches to mark the Fortieth Anniversary of the Allied Landings. They captured the mood and thoughts of all the participants. This year was probably one of the last opportunities for many of those who played a part in the landing to join in commemorations of their own exploits; and the ceremonies attended by Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, King Olav of Norway, King Baudouin of Belgium, President Reagan, President Mitterrand and Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg were worthy of the momentous events of 1944.

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2. The celebration of D-Day does not fit easily with the Gaullist myth, widely accepted by Frenchmen of all political persuasions, of how France secured her liberation from German occupation. Post-war generations of Frenchmen have been brought up to believe that a predominant part in ousting the Germans was played by the Forces Francaises Libres, loyal to General de Gaulle, and by the Resistance. The Allies are accorded a secondary role; and even that is credited to the Americans: only a small minority of Frenchmen appreciate that British forces played at least an equal part with the Americans in the Normandy landings. With the passage of time, and as memories of what actually happened fade, the myth has taken root even among those who have cause to know better. It may have been thought necessary in enabling Frenchmen to come to terms with their 1940 defeat and in restoring a sense of national pride after the War. It is nevertheless galling to those who remember that 75,000 British and Canadian troops landed on the Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944, and that there were some 3,000 casualties on D-Day alone.

3. De Gaulle never forgave the Americans and the British for having kept him in the dark until the very last moment as to the date and the place of the landings and for having questioned his right to establish his own civil administration in liberated territory. As a result he always played down the commemoration of D-Day. Although national commemorations in Normandy were attended by the first post-war Presidents, de Gaulle preferred instead to celebrate the anniversary of the landing of de Lattre de Tassigny's 1st French Army on the Provence coast on 15 August as the decisive step towards the liberation of France. De Gaulle's successors as President followed suit. But on coming to office, President Mitterrand made clear that he considered that de Gaulle's failure to give due recognition to the Allies was a historical injustice which ought to be rectified; and his invitation to the Heads of State of those countries which participated in the Normandy landings to attend the Fortieth Anniversary celebrations was intended in part to remedy the years of Presidential neglect.

4. There was thus a generous impulse underlying President Mitterrand's invitation, but unfortunately he undid some of its effects by the conditions he subsequently attached. He and his officials seem to have assumed that his guests should be so pleased to have been invited that they should be ready to fall in with any programme which the French Government chose to propose. They completely failed to take into account that both The Queen and President Reagan would wish not only to attend international ceremonies arranged under French Government auspices but also to have an opportunity to honour the part played by British and American troops in separate national ceremonies. This was all the more important for The Queen in that the French chose to hold the principal international ceremony on Utah Beach in the American sector, a part of the Normandy coast with which British D-Day veterans feel no particular affinity. French officials at various levels were also engaged, under guidance from the Elysée, in a number of sub-plots. One was to downgrade the ceremonies organised annually by the Comité du Débarquement lest they compete with the Presidential events (although the Committee's programme in the end went ahead, and provided the usual valuable opportunity for contact between veterans and the local population). Another was to frustrate the generally Right-wing local Mayors who might acquire lustre from a royal presence. A third was to limit President Reagan's use of the day's events for electoral purposes. And a fourth was to impress on all concerned that in 1984, in contrast with 1944, Britain and the United States could not dispose of the soil of France: they could proceed only with permission and subject to various rules and constraints.

5. Against this background - which only emerged slowly - we became involved on long and tortuous negotiations with the Elysée in the weeks preceding 6 June in order to persuade the French that an acceptable programme for The Queen's visit required the inclusion of both British national and official French-organised events. I believe that the programme as it finally emerged (see Annex A) * met our essential requirements. But

* Not printed

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until the last, the French authorities continued to raise every conceivable obstacle to any event which fell outside their official programme. The organisation of The Queen's programme was in particular complicated by the Elysée's insistence at a very late stage, ostensibly on protocol grounds, that Her Majesty should not undertake any formal engagements until after the official French ceremonies. Since Mitterrand, for reasons which have never been explained, also insisted that the French ceremonies could not start until the afternoon of 6 June, this meant that The Queen was only able to carry out Her programme by rushing from one event to the next by helicopter - contrary to long-established practice - and by continuing until the late evening. We have cause to be grateful for the understanding which The Queen showed during the long-drawn out discussions about Her programme and travel arrangements in the face of French obstructionism.

6. Fortunately on 6 June itself our difficulties with the French authorities faded into the background. From the moment that the Royal Yacht passed under Pegasus Bridge, which was spectacularly captured by the 6th Airborne Division in the early hours of 6 June 1944, the special quality of the long-awaited Royal Visit began to have its effect. When The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh visited Caen Town Hall during the morning of 6 June, the streets were lined with many thousands of well-wishers. The warmth of The Queen's reception by the people of Caen demonstrated that despite the flattening of their city by British and Canadian forces forty years ago, the Anglo-Norman connection remains a living reality.

7. The ceremonies during the afternoon of 6 June provided a striking contrast between British and French styles of commemorating the epic moments of our common history. Both the Service of Remembrance in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery at Bayeux and the evening parade of British veterans at Arromanches were dignified but intimate occasions. The immaculately kept Cemetery at Bayeux provided a beautiful and peaceful setting for The Queen, President Mitterrand and the assembled British war veterans to pay their tributes to the British soldiers, sailors and airmen who died in the Normandy campaign. The call of Reveille sounded by the trumpeters of the Royal Air Forces at the end of the minute's silence for the war dead provided a particularly moving moment to which even the official French entourage was not indifferent. After President Mitterrand's departure, The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh spent some thirty minutes talking to veterans and a group of war widows whose visit to Normandy had been arranged by the Ministry of Defence. It was apparent at the time, and evident from comments subsequently reported in the British Press, that this opportunity to talk informally with The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh meant much to those concerned. The French Press were impressed by this spontaneous expression of the close ties between the British Monarch and Her subjects.

8. The parade of British veterans at Arromanches later that evening was impressive in a different way. The service in the Cemetery at Bayeux was an occasion to honour the dead. The ceremony at Arromanches was a chance for the survivors of the landings to recall with pride their war-time exploits. To the music of the Royal Marines band some 3,000 veterans marched past The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh. It was a stirring sight to see the orderly and confident step of men now at least in their 60s and 70s as they marched into the town square. (The same magnificent impression was achieved also on the previous day when The Prince of Wales took part in a service in Ranville Cemetery and then took the march-past of veterans of the 6th Airborne Division who had liberated the town at 3 am on 6 June 1944.) Several Frenchmen commented afterwards that it would have been impossible to have mounted such a successful parade of French veterans - particularly without any rehearsal. The march-past, the subsequent parade and The Queen's address, like the ceremony at Bayeux, unleashed much deep emotion.

CONFIDENTIAL

9. The French-organised international ceremony at Utah Beach was very different in character. Whereas the British ceremonies at Bayeux and Arromances gave pride of place to the veterans and next of kin, at Utah Beach veterans of the landings were relegated to the outer reaches. Conceived on a grand scale, the Utah Beach ceremony no doubt made good television but it lacked the human content of the more intimate British ceremonies. Nonetheless, the grandeur of the ceremony evoked in some measure the scale of the landings themselves. The presence, side by side, of eight Heads of State and Government on a beach where forty years before a fierce battle had raged, symbolised the post-war unity of the Western Alliance. President Mitterrand developed this theme in his speech. After expressing France's gratitude towards her war-time Allies, he recalled that "yesterday's enemies were now reconciled and were striving together to build a free Europe".

10. The French Press, like the British, gave a massive build-up to the Fortieth Anniversary of the Landings. The ceremonies themselves received widespread coverage in the Press and on television. Much of this reporting was helpful in correcting the impression that the landings were largely an American affair. But inevitably French national television and the Press tended to focus on those events attended by Mitterrand. For example the British ceremony at Arromanches was televised in Normandy by the regional station, but was not covered on the national networks.

11. From the point of view of Anglo/French relations, I believe that the prominent part played by Britain in the commemoration of D-Day has served a valuable purpose. At a time when Britain finds herself at odds with France and other EC partners on at least one important Community issue and when the spectre of isolation and even exclusion is being waved against us, if only as a negotiating tactic, it is salutary to remind public opinion not only in France but also elsewhere in the Community of our role in defending and restoring freedom in Europe.

12. I am very conscious that the difficulties in our negotiations with the French complicated the task of those in London organising our participation in the various official and non-official events held on 5 and 6 June; and I am grateful for the good humour displayed by those involved when they were forced to revise detailed plans, often at short notice. The efficiency of the military organisation of what turned out to be a highly complex combined operation was a credit to the British Armed Forces. Indeed, the performance of all British forces who took part in the D-Day ceremonies merits great praise. It has enhanced their already high standing in the eyes of their French counterparts. I should also like to pay special tribute to my Service Attaches, who bore the brunt of the military organisation of the ceremonies here in France, and Mr Anthony Millington, First Secretary, who by persuasion and perseverance finally drove the French into conceding a programme which properly reflected the British role in the D-Day landings.

13. I am copying this despatch to Heads of Mission in NATO posts and to the Secretary of State for Defence.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully

JOHN FRETWELL