

From Frenches Farm to the Liberation of France!

In many an English village, there live quiet men and a few women, in their nineties, respected by their communities but whose vital contribution to the freedom of the Europe we are all now discussing, goes unknown or forgotten.

One such is our BILL (WILLIAM JAMES) BROWNSELL. Born 91 years ago in Chipperfield, he has lived most of his adult life and all his married life in Sarratt. Bill 'senior', as he is often now called, has always worked locally, from a boyhood job milking cows at Frenches Farm, to the 'secret' site at Latimer, then post war as a gardener, followed by Bovington Airport, and for 17 years at Rickmansworth Water Company.



But in 1943, as soon as he was 18 years old, he took himself to St Albans to enlist with the Suffolk Regiment to defend the way of life he and his generation had inherited, against the horrendous Fascist scourge that threatened to destroy everything his family, neighbours and Country held dear.

He will not talk about his experience crossing the Channel on D Day, wading through the sea under fire or being shot and wounded

on the beach by German guns. But the French Government, all these years later, has decided that those still alive, to whom they owe the ongoing freedom of 'the Republic of France' should be personally recognised.

Here is part of the letter that Bill Brownsell has recently received, together with the beautiful insignia of the 'Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur.

It is well deserved and particularly timely as our relationship with France and indeed the whole of Europe is now so finely balanced.

AMBASSADE DE FRANCE, LONDRES

Dear Mr. Brownsell,

I have the pleasure of informing you that the President of the Republic of France has appointed you to the rank of Chevalier in the Ordre national de la Legion d'honneur.

I offer you my warmest congratulations on this high honour in recognition of your acknowledged military engagement and your steadfast involvement in the Liberation of France during the Second World War.

As we contemplate this Europe of peace, we must not forget heroes like you, who came from Britain and the Commonwealth to begin the liberation of Europe by liberating France. We owe our freedom and security to your dedication, because you were ready to risk your life.....

Yours sincerely,

*Signed by Sylvie Bermann
(French Ambassador to UK)*

In an age of 'selfies' 'Twitter' and 'in-your-face' self-publicity, we should give thanks for men like Bill Brownsell, who quietly risked their young lives for others and who has lived his life here in Sarratt quietly and with dignity ever since. **Angela Colman**