

**19** I will rejoice over Jerusalem  
and take delight in my people;  
the sound of weeping and of crying  
will be heard in it no more.

**20** "Never again will there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days,  
or an old man who does not live out his years;  
the one who dies at a hundred  
will be thought a mere child;  
the one who fails to reach<sup>[a]</sup> a hundred  
will be considered accursed.

**21** They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

**22** No longer will they build houses and others live in  
them,  
or plant and others eat.  
For as the days of a tree,  
so will be the days of my people;  
my chosen ones will long enjoy  
the work of their hands.

**23** They will not labor in vain,  
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;  
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,  
they and their descendants with them.

**24** Before they call I will answer;  
while they are still speaking I will hear.

**25** The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
and dust will be the serpent's food.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,"  
says the Lord.

## **Psalm 130**

### **A song of ascents.**

**1** Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;  
**2** Lord, hear my voice.  
Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.

**3** If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?

**4** But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

**5** I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.

**6** I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

**7** Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.

**8** He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins.

The list of names we read out annually is a sobering reminder of the cost of our freedom and a shock to think of all those lives lost from one small community.

It's a grief to us that wars are being fought even as we remember the costly peace won for our nation.

Israel is at war with her neighbours, a conflict that is spreading. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia continues. Neither are forgotten or overlooked as we earnestly pray for a cessation of hostility and peace.

But it would be wrong to only focus on the cost and loss of life, there is also immense bravery and daring and an example set for us to follow.

It's 80 years since D-day but the landing on the Normandy beaches was not the first action of D-Day.

Leading up to it there were deception operations designed to fool the High Command in Berlin and distract them from our chosen target area.

Operation Glimmer and Operation Taxable. Aircraft flying with incredible precision throwing out chaff – aluminium strips – which showed up on radar and looked like a fleet was heading across the channel, the 617 Dam-busters squadron was involved in that operation.

A pair of German spies had been turned and had become double agents known as Mutt and Jeff. They fed false information to Berlin advising that the fictitious 4<sup>th</sup> British Army was amassing in Scotland ready to invade Norway. It worked and Hitler sent a fighting division to Scandinavia just weeks before D-Day.

The events I wish to recall though are of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. Before the landing on the beaches on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June the planners knew that two key bridges needed to be secured across the Caen (Kon) Canal and River Orne.

On the far side of river were German armoured troops who had the potential to derail the British landings on Sword Beach. The bridges needed to be taken and held.

On the night of 5 June, a force of 181 men, led by Major John Howard took off from Dorset, in six Airspeed Horsa gliders towed behind Halifax bombers. They were to capture the Bénouville Bridge, and Ranville Bridge.

At seven minutes past midnight, the pilot Sergeant Jim Wallwork of the lead glider cast off his tow-rope and began his descent. He could see nothing and had no guidance except from his co-pilot John Ainsworth who had a map and a stopwatch.

The success of the mission and the success of the British landing on Sword Beach weighed heavily on him. He had to get it right.

At exactly 3 minutes and 42 seconds after casting off the tow rope he turned starboard to steer for the Kon Canal. He was in a near panic situation. He couldn't see anything. He flew on and made another starboard turn to fly parallel with the canal or so he hoped. He slowed his glider dropping to 110 miles an hour and from 7000 feet to 500 feet. He had the very real fear of crash landing this thing and killing everyone aboard.

Then a miracle happened. Directly ahead he saw the landing zone. He was bang on course. Shouting for the troops to get ready he flew in over the tree tops and hits

the ground at about 100 miles an hour. As the plane judders to a halt both Wallwork and Ainsworth are thrown through the front screen of the plane and every man aboard has been pretty banged up BUT, as glider landings go it had been near perfect. The glider was a mere 150 feet from the bridge.

In moments the troops were out of the aircraft and making a mad dash for the bridge. Other gliders landed nearby.

After just 10 minutes of intense fighting, the bridge was secured. And at 26 minutes past midnight, six hours before the first troops landed on the beaches Major Howard could send the coded message "Ham and Jam" meaning that both bridges had been secured.

In honour of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, the Canal bridge was renamed Pegasus bridge after the emblem they wore on the shoulder of their jackets. The Orne River bridge was renamed Horsa Bridge.

The fighting was fierce and deadly. In taking the Pegasus Bridge Lieutenant Herbert Denham Brotheridge led his platoon across the bridge but he was shot and killed. He was the first allied soldier to lose his life on D-Day.

At the Horsa Bridge the fighting went on for hours with members of the airborne division regularly taking casualties.

Sergeant Charles Thornton was positioned out ahead of the bridge waiting for a response from the German Armour. In the darkness they could hear the rattle of the tank tracks coming their way.

The Germans were uncertain as to what to do and the lead vehicle stopped at the crossroads near where Sergeant Thornton was hiding. The Airborne troops had ONE, 83mm anti-tank weapon. Thornton fires it at the lead tank, hits it and as he reported later, all Hell broke loose.

The ammunition in the tank starts exploding. The fire is intense but turned out to be helpful to British Paratroopers further East as they could get their bearings from it. The burning vehicle blocked the road and misleading the German commanders they withdrew thinking that the British had anti-tank weapons. They did – they had one.

What caught my attention in the story of this dramatic, costly and violent fight was the action of Private Tommy Clare who heard the cries of a wounded German soldier near the burning and exploding tank. He broke cover, ran forward, picked the man up and got him over his shoulder and took him to a British aid station. There in the middle of fighting, killing, desperation and defence was an act of utter courage and humanitarian compassion.

There's a great deal more to the story. Further daring exploits, the tragedy of lost lives.

Later that day the airborne division were relieved by 1<sup>st</sup> Special Service Brigade Commandoes led by Brigadier Simon Fraser – Lord Lovatt – who approached the zone at the head of his troops with a bagpiper playing, Private Bill Millin.

They took the bridges and held the bridges at great cost and the success of the D-Day landing is in no small part down to the exploits of a few pilots and 181 men many of whom didn't see the day dawn.

You can visit these places. You can read of the exploits in much greater depth. The original Pegasus Bridge is now in a museum, it's been replaced. But so what? Why have I been re-telling this story?

We are unlikely to face the immediacy of life and death as the 181 men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division or the Commandoes or any of the others who fought on D-Day.

But if we are to honour their sacrifice and commitment and for the lost lives to be more than just a list of names read out once a year...surely, we have to have the same courage and commitment, fortitude and determination to make the community in which we live, one of peace, compassion and selflessness.

Peace can be hard work. We can get weary and have compassion fatigue. It's easy to denounce or ignore others because we find them different or difficult.

All of us are realists, we don't pretend that Sunningdale will instantly become Nirvana and I don't expect to see every house planting a vine under which each will sit...

In 1 John 3 verse 16 it says – this is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid **down his life** for us. And we ought to **lay down** our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Lieutenant Brotheridge gave his life that others could live. Private Tommy Clare risked his life to save an enemy.

Jesus said <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Let us give ourselves again to a life of commitment and service to our community following the example of Jesus Christ and seeking to build his kingdom here.

**Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 10 November 24**