

## MAJOR KENNETH GEORGE MAYHEW RMWO (R29-34)

He was born on 18 January 1917 the son of a farmer near Ipswich. At the College he was a Foundation Scholar, prefect and a fine sportsman : he was in the Cricket, Football Hockey and squash teams. After leaving the College he joined Fisons and was there until the war.

Prior to the outbreak of war he played cricket for Suffolk and hockey for Norfolk.

In January 1940 he entered the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He was 2nd lieutenant in the 1st Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment , where he served from 1939-1945. His battalion was part of the 3rd Army Corps, led by the legendary Field Marshal Montgomery. During D-Day, he was commander of a company with 13 Carriers, armored tracked infantry. On 28 June 1944, they fought a bitter battle for the Château de la Londe at Caen, which left some 161 dead on the British side. After that he progressed through to the Netherlands where on 24 September 1944 his battalion arrived in Weert. He had been promoted to captain and was in charge of detecting German positions. To find them, they sometimes had to draw the attention of the Germans - if they started shooting then their position were known. This was then passed to the British mortar units and the Germans then came under fire. During these actions he was injured.

Mid October 1944 he was sufficiently recovered to take part in the Battle of Overloon and Venray . In Venray they had to make a bridgehead so that the allied tanks at Loobeek could cross. On 16 October he was again wounded, this time by shrapnel in the boggy ground. He was evacuated and taken to a hospital in Brussels. In November, he came back to his unit, which experienced a cold winter in Blitterswijk. During the march to the Rhine he got injured again on 25 February 1945 and he was evacuated to England.



On 24 April 1946 he was awarded the Military Order of William for achievements in Venray and Overloon and the liberation of Weert (22 September 1944). He had "During the fighting for the liberation of the occupied Dutch territory distinguish themselves by committing excellent deeds of courage, and loyalty. They repeatedly demonstrated exceptional devotion to duty and perseverance, and in all respects, by a laudable example, had been an inspiration for all in those glorious days. "

The Military William Order is the oldest and highest honour of the Netherlands. The order was established on 30 April 1815 by King Willem I and was presented for feats of excellent bravery on the battlefield and as a

meritorious decoration to senior military officers. The Military William Order is a chivalry order of merit open to everyone regardless of rank and nobility, and not only to Dutch military but also foreigners. To date the Order is extremely rarely awarded and only for excellent bravery in battle.

After the war he represented a fertilizer company and played cricket, hockey and squash for Norfolk.

On retirement he started to play golf and achieved a handicap of 20 and still played at the age of 97, carrying his own clubs.

In 1994 he came to Venray to attend the unveiling in honor of the Suffolk Regiment. He was presented at that time with the highest military decoration in the Netherlands. On 18 September 2011 at the age of 94 he attended a commemoration of the war victims in Venray. In November 2011 he received the insignia of the modern Willems on behalf of the Royal Order of Knights of the Military Order of William from Colonel BD GJC

Slots. On 9 May 2012 he was received by Queen Beatrix and in the afternoon he received the Medal of the City of Venray.



In 2014 he was the oldest living knight and the SOF Norfolk Supper in November 2014 was dedicated to him and his wife Trish.

In May 2014, to mark the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Holland by the Allied Forces there was ceremony at the Dutch ambassador's residence in London called Tulips for Liberators, at which he was the honoured the guest.

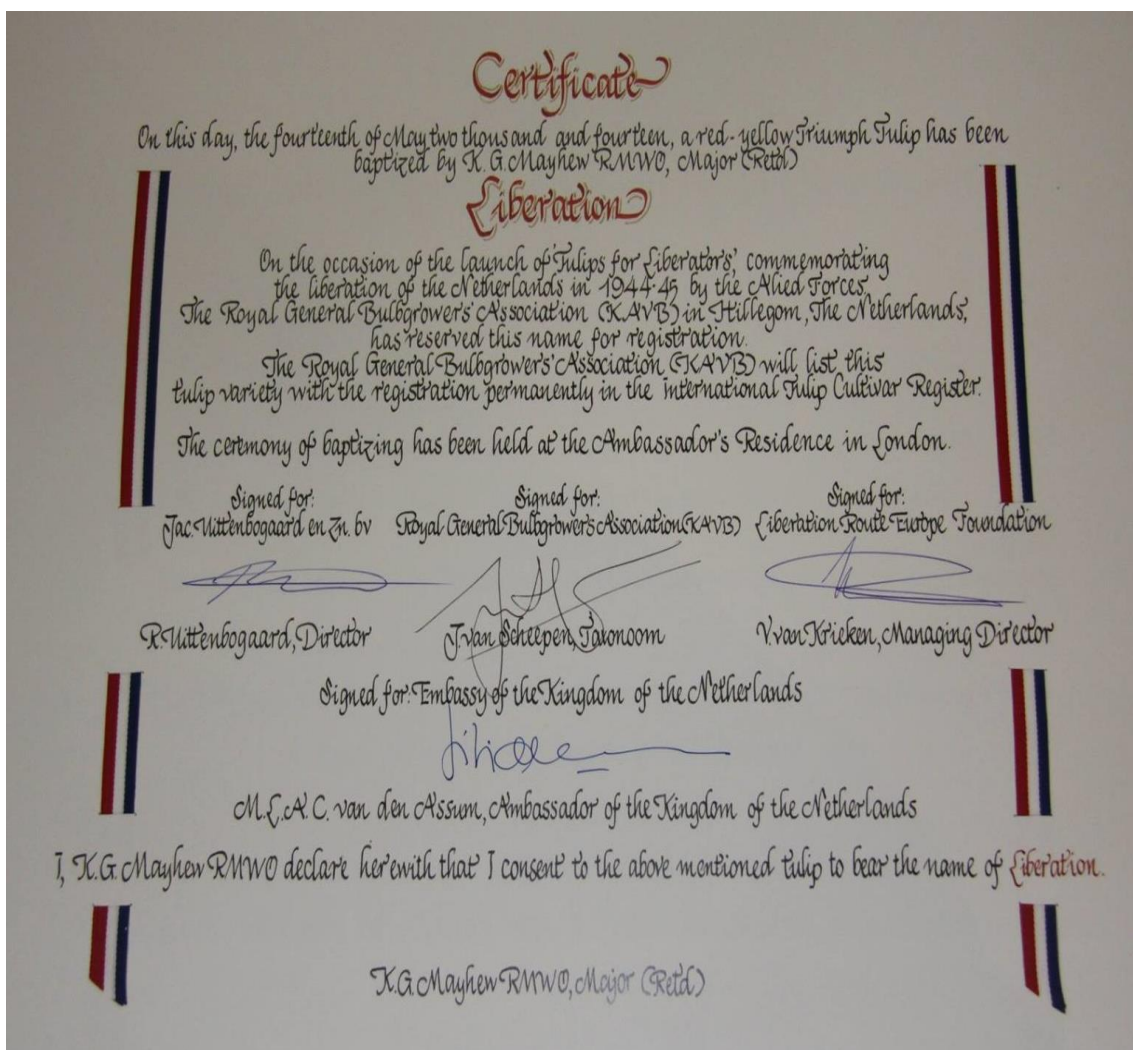




The report reads "Major Kenneth George Mayhew RMWO, bearer of the highest Dutch military Medal of Valour, has officially baptised the new Liberation Tulip at a ceremony at the Residence of the Ambassador of Holland, Ms Laetitia van den Assum. The red-yellow Triumph Tulip was cultivated by bulb-grower JUB Holland for this occasion, which marks the first step in commemorating the liberation of Holland in 1944-45 by the Allied Forces, which started with Operation Market Garden in 1944.

Major Mayhew (97), who played an important role in the liberation of the Dutch cities of Venray and Weert and in the battle of Overloon, baptised the tulip on behalf of all Allied Forces who were involved in the liberation of the Netherlands. Representatives of British, Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, Polish and US forces were also present, as was Major General Hoitink, Director of Operational Readiness, on behalf of the Dutch Chief of Defence Staff.

The launch of the tulip was the first milestone in a flower-themed commemoration project that will run until May 2015, when 70 years of freedom will be celebrated in Holland. The Tulips for Liberators project is a collaboration of the Liberation Route Europe, Keukenhof Holland, JUB Holland and the Embassy of Holland in the UK. The next step in the project will be the planting of two flower mosaics this autumn, one of which will be in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in London and the other in Lincolnshire, from where the RAF carried out Operation Manna. This was the first relief operation, which began on 29 April 1945 and lasted till 8 May. Countless sorties were made and tons and tons of food dropped over the Western part of Holland, for which the Dutch are still deeply grateful. Ceremonies will be held at the Kew Gardens and Lincolnshire sites on the occasion of the planting and flowering of the mosaics."





In early 2016 he additionally received the Legion d'Honneur from the French Government as a Normandy Veteran. The announcement in the autumn of 2014 embraced not only troops but Royal Navy and RAF personnel who operated support for the Landings on 6 June 1944 as well as wider campaigns at that time to assist in the Liberation of France. The award which is France's highest decoration is going to all living personnel; the Embassy expected some 300 to apply; in the event applications came in from 3,500 veterans so the process of distribution has been rather slow.

He was serving in 1st Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment and on D-Day in 1944 he was in the platoon HQ Carrier and driven on to Sword Beach by Cliff Kindred who worked for Jacksons of Bruisyard, near Framlingham.

He has attended many commemorations since and especially noteworthy on the 40<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



In the Gibraltar Barracks Museum of the Suffolk Regiment in Bury St Edmunds, James Ruddock-Broyd (G46-52) spotted recently in the Curator's Office a photograph of Ken leading the 40<sup>th</sup> parade as L-marker at Arromanches in 1984.

On the Normandy 50th Anniversary the President of the Royal British Legion was General Sir Patrick Howard Dobson (1921-2009) who was escorting the Queen on a walkabout in Bayeux Cemetery when he spotted Ken in the crowds of veterans and with his usual magnanimity Sir Pat brought the Queen over to speak to him – a moment never forgotten.

On the 60th Anniversary Bill Collard (S55-58) saw Ken at a distance in a 5,000 crowd in Caen during an hour's wait for the arrival of Prince Charles on 5 June in blazing sun. As soon as the formalities were over he and



James R-B dived through the crowds to meet Ken and Trish and later saw the coach taking the Suffolk Regiment veterans to anniversary events.

On 18 January 2017 he celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and this significant moment was marked in a number of ways, starting off with a visit to his home on his birthday by the Dutch Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mr Simon Smits, and Deputy Defence Attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Rob Arts. They delivered a hand-written letter of congratulations from King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands.

The following Sunday there was a large family lunch in the dining room at the College

In early February 2017 there was a special visit to the Dutch Ambassador's Residence in London. At the time he was one of only four living people to receive the highest honour of the Netherlands as a knight of the Military William Order and is the only person from UK ever to have been awarded the accolade after playing a pivotal role in the liberation of the Netherlands from Nazi occupation. The award is the Dutch equivalent of the Victoria Cross and the Légion d'Honneur. The Order's motto is "Voor Moed, Beleid en Trouw" (For Bravery, Leadership and Loyalty). As well as the Dutch Ambassador and several high-ranking officials from the British and Dutch military, also present was Major Marco Kroon one of the other 4 bearers of the RMWO. General Middendorp told him he was a "role model for every soldier in the Netherlands". He responded "It is something that has completely changed my life. I never looked for any fuss. But the hospitality and the friendship I have been shown by our Dutch friends has been overwhelming."



Finally on 19 February there was an OF lunch organised by Norman Porter at Woodbridge Golf Club to celebrate this very rare and distinguished OF centenary. The following is his Norman's report on that lunch.

**Norfolkman Ken Mayhew celebrates his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday at Suffolk Golf Club**

*Ken Mayhew, veteran of the Normandy campaign, holder of the highest Dutch military award, a Knight of the Wilhelm Order, the Dutch equivalent of the VC, has had his stamina tested by a series of celebrations of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, which fell on January 18<sup>th</sup>.*

*The celebrations have included a family celebration at the College, a reception at the Dutch Embassy on February 16<sup>th</sup>, attended by the Ambassador and many other dignitaries, and then finally, a special lunch held at Woodbridge Golf Club, attended by some three dozen OFs and wives. Ken has been a fine sportsman, excelling at cricket and golf, and those present included many who had played these sports with and against him, and who had travelled considerable distances to pay their own tributes.*

*This gathering occurred in the week before the Ipswich/Norwich/Derby so it was a good time to remind ourselves not only of rivalries, but also of ties between our two counties. On his tactfully composed sporting cv, Ken includes youthful appearances for Suffolk at cricket, and Norfolk for hockey. Subsequently he played cricket, hockey and squash for Norfolk. He continued to play golf until well into his nineties, still carrying his own clubs. He has many Suffolk friends from his cricketing days, playing for the Old Framlinghamians against the Old Ipswichians, amongst others. Not only did the guests come from these two counties but they also came from Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Essex*

*Balancing things out, his "baby" brother, Jimmy, an ex-WW2 commando, and a mere 97 years old, lives in Suffolk, in Chelmondiston. Jimmy too, was present at the celebratory gathering. We celebrated Ken's birthday in Suffolk – and that perhaps excuses him from having been hugged by Delia at Carrow Road, where he is a season ticket holder. Modestly he had declined to go out on to the pitch to receive due acclaim.*

*OFs from across the country celebrated a true WW2 hero, and fine sportsman. He was advised, at the lunch, celebrating his innings of one hundred, not to give his wicket away cheaply, but to take fresh guard and aim for the second hundred. Not many people receive congratulatory 100<sup>th</sup> birthday greetings from two monarchs!*

The following is a special grace Norman composed for the occasion :

We thank you God before we dine  
For peace and friendship, food and wine  
And as we eat this birthday meal  
We pray our broken world you'll heal  
Keep safe from tempest, fire and foe  
Those now deployed, and those who'll go.  
Bless those who once to war have been  
While serving us, or friends and Queen.

Amen

**The following is an edited summary of the tribute paid by Norman Porter, in the unavoidable absence of our President :**

*Thanks to you all for supporting this occasion. The turn-out speaks for itself. Most of us were still at the short trousers and pigtail stage - some not even at the uteral stage - when Ken was facing the greatest challenges of his life in 1944 onwards. We are consoled in being reminded that one of the great (if not the only!) advantages of old age is that peer pressure diminishes in inverse proportion to increasing age. If Ken's birthday were celebrated by his co-evals, (= same age, not partners in crime) there would be no-one here. It speaks volumes of the man that so many people, so much younger than himself, wish to pay tribute to the first 100 years of his life.*

**Apologies for absence:** Chris Essex, Andrew Wright, James Ruddock-Broyd (who kindly sent photos from the Lunch at the Dutch Embassy); David Turnbull and David Mitchell.

This lunch is the **third strand of Ken's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations:**

**The first strand:** Family – it was very special that the family should have chosen the College as the venue in January – we know in what high regard Ken is held there, and I applaud Headmaster Paul Taylor for his total engagement in this wonderful Mayhew epic. It is great that we have half a dozen Mayhews here today – not all of the same family. It is particularly good to welcome Jimmy and Janice Mayhew – Jimmy is a mere 97, an ex-WW2 commando, also former member of this club. We have a small gift here, to spur him on towards his own personal 100<sup>th</sup> celebration. **(Presentation of token).**



As we all know, and as Ken would be the first to acknowledge, Trish, his wife for the past 25 years, has been at his side and supporting him through these recent heady times. We have something for both of them –at the conclusion of these few words

**Second strand:** The Dutch: they discovered Ken as a Knight of the Order of Wilhelm in 2011 – they thought he was long since dead – he wasn't and isn't! There are only 4 knights left, so Ken is 25% of them. The Dutch Ambassador told us that this award is the equivalent of the VC. As a result Ken and Trish have been entertained by royalty – hence our own mini version of red carpet treatment. They have been regaled by and visited by Dutch ambassadors. The most recent occasion was on Thursday – a special 100<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Dutch Embassy, many uniforms, breasts bristling with medals – but despite that formality there shone through it all a real affection and admiration of someone who is genuinely considered to be a hero of the Dutch nation, and celebrated as such.

**(A display showing the many aspects of Ken's career was available to be seen by guests)**

**So why are we here? That's the third strand:**

We are here to celebrate Ken, the Framlinghamian and Ken, the Sportsman.

Ken started at Fram in 1929. He played for first teams in cricket, hockey and squash. Showing an early sense of inter-county tact, he represented county of Suffolk at cricket but played hockey for Norfolk.

It is something of a cliché to compare life to an innings at cricket. How often have we heard it said that "He's had a good innings." If someone hits a hundred though and is still playing on, it always merits special consideration, so I'm going to adapt the cliché.

Let me take you through the innings. With all due respect to Geoffrey Boycott, and the virtues of a carefully put together innings, that of Ken has been more in the manner of a Ted Dexter – imperious – but always gentlemanly – (Dexter was known as gentleman Ted):

The innings began on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1934. Early cricket, if there was any, was played in and around Ipswich. Ken was born near Ipswich and actually worked for Fisons before the war. The first flourishes of a burgeoning cricketer were shown at the College, where he played for the first team. Perhaps the most challenging point of his life's innings came in his late 20s - those war years, when metaphorically speaking, Ken could so easily have been run out by a Germanic non-cricketer at the other end. Mercifully he wasn't and Ken survived to put together the rest of this wonderful innings.

After the war, more conventional cricket was played. Sport has been a central part of Ken's life. He played many matches for the OFs against the OIs and formed lasting friendships. He is the spirit of cricket incarnate.



*He also played and enjoyed golf. It was legendary that he was carrying his own bag until he was 98. The nervous nineties weren't really nervous at all. He took on challenges that would daunt many others younger than himself. He went to Australia for an Ashes series. He made and makes frequent visits to Lords – not to play, but to enjoy watching cricket and meeting friends – including many OFs. These were signs of still lusty engagement in life's game. Maybe he is now limited to taking short, leisurely, possibly painful singles, but he's made his hundred, and can reflect back on it with pride. A great and unfinished innings.*

**Conclusion:**

*The Dutch seem to know as much about Ken as we do, so I will pick out two qualities mentioned by the Ambassador on Thursday: the first was modesty – if only some of our pseudo-celebrities nowadays could show more of that! And the second was his being a perfect role model for younger people. As younger Framlinghamians – and that includes all of us – we, and those leaving Framingham, could not have a better example of a life well led – one that can and should inspire all those who know and admire you. You can wave your bat towards the pavilion with pride – the century celebrations must have tested your stamina. Major Kenneth Mayhew – Don't give your wicket away easily. It is time to take fresh guard and to move on to your double century. Ken - We salute you, soldier, sportsman, gentleman, gentle man - a Framlinghamian of whom we are all truly proud.*

**(A special token, courtesy of the OF Trustees, was presented to Ken and Trish)**

The following attended the lunch:

Ken and Trish Mayhew, Chris and Liz Sneath, Mike and Sheila Spencer, Dudley and Jackie Holland Norman and Margaret Mayhew, John Edwards, Ted Edwards, John and Angela Rankin, Richard and Georgina Sayer, John and Jill Kerr, Norman and Virginia Porter, John and Peggy Thurlow, Rob and Anna Smith, Peter Howard-Dobson, Stephanie and Roger Askew, Colin Wigg , Jimmy and Janice Mayhew, Paul Wright.





John Ellerby spotted the following article in the April 2017 MCC Newsletter

## Centenarian

Congratulations are due to Major K.G. Mayhew, a Member since 1973, who brought up his personal century on 18th January. Born on a Suffolk farm and educated at Framlingham College, Major Mayhew worked in the agricultural business until the outbreak of the Second World War when he was called up. In May 1940, he joined the 1st Battalion, the Suffolk Regiment on their evacuation from Dunkirk and took part in the invasion of mainland Europe, landing on Sword Beach on D Day, 6th June 1944.

A keen club cricketer, Major Mayhew also made several appearances for Norfolk in the Minor Counties Championship and, at various times, had the pleasure of playing with the late Michael Falcon, Norfolk C.C. Captain and M.C.C. cricketer, along with several members of the Edrich family and Peter Parfitt and Clive Radley. 🏏



Ken died on 13 May 2021 at the age of 104.

The following is an obituary written by **Richard Sayer** for the Telegraph.

### **KENNETH GEORGE MAYHEW RMWO. Born 18 January 1917. Died 13 May 2021.**

"We never forget that we have regained our freedom thanks to the courage and sacrifices of our allied friends...Major Kenneth G Mayhew volunteered for duty. His leadership and courage shown during the liberation of the Southern part of the Netherlands deserves our greatest respect. The Military Order of William (MWO) – the highest award for valour, conduct and loyalty – testifies to this and expresses our solidarity and lasting gratitude." Those words from King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands prefaced the 2018 official biography booklet honouring Ken Mayhew, the oldest of the four living Knights of the MWO. His award had originally been made in 1946, but Mayhew's modesty in staying out of the limelight was such that it was not until he was 94 years old that the Order rediscovered him, feting him at numerous events in his last decade. As the booklet states, his war-time comrades were the only people Ken Mayhew shared his experiences with. "That box remained closed for citizens and family". It is only from the history recounted in that booklet that any picture of Ken's war has emerged.

Born in Helmingham, Suffolk, the second of four sons of farmers Wilfred and Ada Mayhew, Ken attended Framlingham College from 1929 to 1934. He became a prefect but was by his own admission less interested in scholarly matters than in sport - at which he excelled, playing in the cricket, hockey and squash teams. The College was to remain of life-long importance to him, attending Old Framlinghamian events to the end of his life. After a traineeship with Fisons in Suffolk he moved into fertiliser sales in Norfolk, starting up his own successful grain and transport business post-war. With war threatening he joined the Norwich TA in April 1939 and on the outbreak of war was mobilised as a sergeant before going to Sandhurst. He was commissioned into the Suffolk Regiment as a 2nd lieutenant, joining up with the remnants of the 1st Battalion in Somerset on their escape from Dunkirk.

On D-Day as a Captain in command of a carrier platoon of lightly-armoured tracked vehicles he landed on Sword Beach where the Battalion's target of the Hillman bunker fortress was attacked and taken. From the bridgehead thus established on 28 June the Suffolks mounted an attack on the Château de la Londe just north of Caen, encountering German Tiger tanks for the first time. Operation Goodwood saw heavy losses on both sides until Caen finally fell on 14 July. On 16 August, with the enemy being forced north from France, Mayhew's carrier platoon "Ken Force" was amongst the first liberators into Flers. As the advance through Belgium continued into the Netherlands Mayhew's platoon operated ahead of the main force, frequently accompanied by Dutch resistance, seeking intelligence on German positions. At the battle of Weert he deliberately drew enemy fire to reveal enemy positions, resulting in casualties to his men and to himself, before the town was liberated on 22 September. By mid-October Ken was promoted to Major, taking over a rifle company in the battle of Overloon and Venray. Tanks were unable to cross a ditch with steep banks but Ken pressed on across swampy terrain under heavy fire to cross the obstacle, thus liberating the town. Wounded in the face by shrapnel he was given the choice of treatment in Bournemouth or Brussels. He chose Brussels. He discharged himself, against doctor's orders, after 3 weeks, got a lift in a truck back to his Battalion, and resumed command of D Company.



In a very severe winter the company was dug in on the banks of the Maas at Blitterswijk, frequently encountering German night patrols, and short-staffed as men were evacuated with frostbite. On 25 February 1945 during the march to the Rhine he was wounded again, this time requiring repatriation to England. After treatment he was on recovery leave when the German surrender occurred in late April. He was posted to Gibraltar for 6 months before being demobbed at the end of 1946.

Ken's commanding officer recommended him for an award in these terms:

*He proved himself a magnificent and courageous company commander, showing a contempt for his own safety which shortly was to win for him the admiration of every man under his command.*

*[At Venray] without hesitation Major Mayhew decided to continue the advance...he pressed forward, encouraging his men, doubling from platoon to platoon to give out his orders rather than send for his platoon commanders...At this point he was wounded. In less than three weeks however he was back with the Battalion, before he had fully recovered. He remained a constant source of comfort and inspiration to his officers, NCOs and men during the long winter months spent on the banks of the river Maas. His very tall figure, proceeding unconcernedly from man to man under the most dangerous conditions in action have won for him a place of admiration and respect achieved by the few in the campaign in North West Europe.*

On 24 April 1946 he was knighted by Royal Decree, signed by Queen Wilhelmina, the only Briton to have received the honour, with the Military William Order "for distinguishing himself during the battles leading to the liberation of the occupied territory of The Netherlands through the exercising of excellent deeds of valour, conduct and allegiance... an extraordinary devotion to duty and great perseverance...an inspiration for all in those glorious days."

Ken believed in duty and in honouring those who had given themselves in service to their country. He attended commemoration services in The Netherlands, in France and in Belgium. In 1984 he was a leader at the 40th Normandy landings anniversary parade at Arronanches. In 1994 at the 50th anniversary he was presented to Queen Elizabeth II at Bayeux Cemetery when his fellow Old Framlinghamian General Sir Patrick Howard-Dobson, then President of the Royal British Legion, who was escorting the Queen, noticed Ken in the crowds of veterans and brought the Queen over to speak to him – a moment never forgotten. In 2004, on the 60th anniversary, he was one of a crowd of 5,000 waiting in hot sun for the arrival of Prince Charles.



The happiest of all those chance moments of recognition occurred on 18 September 2011 when, at the age of 94, Ken attended the annual war veterans' commemoration at Venray. Ken was spotted in the crowd by a Dutch historian wearing the ribbon of the Knighthood of the MWO and he was joyously welcomed back by the Dutch from supposed death. Within six weeks he had been invested with the modern version of the insignia and, in May 2012, was received by Queen Beatrix. He was then given the medal of the City of Venray, having already been given the freedom of Flers in 1994.

In May 2014 Ken was guest of honour at the Dutch ambassador's residence in London to mark the 70th anniversary of the liberation of The Netherlands – at which he baptised the new Liberation Tulip. In 2014 he was, as the oldest living Knight, the guest of honour in the Hague at the televised Knighthood ceremony of the fourth living Knight. In 2016 the French Government awarded him the Legion d'Honneur.

On his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2017 the Dutch Ambassador to the UK delivered a personal letter of greeting from King Willem-Alexander. Ken and his wife Trish then attended a special celebration at the Dutch Ambassador's Residence in London, organised by Lt Col Rob Arts, Dutch Military Attache to the UK, with members of Ken's family, the Head of Framlingham College and Norman Porter representing the OF Society. Also present were the Commander of the Dutch Armed Forces who spoke of Ken as 'a role model for every soldier in the Netherlands'. Major Marco Kroon RMWO was also there: he had been knighted in 2009 - the first new knight in 50 years. He was later to write that he regarded Ken as 'one of my greatest heroes'. The next year Ken and Trish were guests at the [Buckingham Palace](#) banquet during the state visit of King Willem-Alexander and Queen [Maxima](#).

Sport remained a strong influence for Ken throughout his life. He played minor county cricket for both Suffolk and Norfolk, and hockey and squash for Norfolk. He took up golf at 70, carrying his own clubs until he was 97. At 100 he was honoured by the MCC, ringing the bell for the start of play at Lord's. In his 70s, before becoming a season ticket holder there, he received a letter from Norwich City addressed to Master Ken Mayhew inviting him to attend a gathering of junior members. Ken turned up, apologising that he was slightly older than the other kids. For Ken's 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday Rob Arts took him to a box at Spurs for the match against Norwich, where the goalkeepers on each side, Dutchmen both, presented Ken with signed birthday shirts from the two teams.

Lt Col Arts visited Trish to pay his respects. He later spoke of his great affection for Ken: "We Dutch will always be grateful to the British for their part in liberating our country in the war. Ken was one of our greatest war heroes, a true inspiration to all those members of our Armed Forces who have met this modest, kind, brave man whose bearing touched everyone from the highest in the land to the least. None of us will forget his presence."

Royal Anglian Lt Col Tony Slater, now retired, spent time with Ken in his last month: "Ken felt there were two formative influences on his life. The first was Framlingham College and in particular the grounding that its sport and its friendships gave him. The second was his military career in the Suffolks – whilst life in the infantry was often horrendous, the comradeship in the regiment made him who he was. Always keen to foster and encourage the young Ken never talked about his war experiences but we all knew what he had done. He was a hero. His modesty and dignity meant that of all the veterans he was the exemplar of what we all try to live up to.

Ken's hope for the future was simply expressed. "I hope that I will be remembered as a righteous, reliable and modest man, who has fully enjoyed long-lasting friendships, interest in sports, industrial life and a most satisfactory social life. To the younger generation I would like to say: be courageous with respect to the convictions you have and do the things that you think are good for you. Appreciate your family and friends."



Much revered by all Framlinghamians, he was loved by all with whom he came into contact. A man with no 'side', he was interested in everyone and in everything.

He is survived by his brother, Jimmy, an ex-WW2 commando, a stripling of 101, by his wife Trish, 40 years joyously together and married for 29 years less two days, by a son and twin daughters by his first wife Betty, now deceased, and Trish's two daughters.

The following is the obituary that appeared in the [Telegraph on Saturday 5 June 2021](#), with all except one picture removed.

***Ken Mayhew, commanded a platoon on D-Day and won the highest Dutch honour for his courage in the battles to liberate Holland – obituary***

*In 1946 he was given by decree of the Queen of the Netherlands the Knighthood of the MWO and he would later attend D-Day anniversary parades*

*Mayhew: 'the sight of his tall figure proceeding unconcernedly from man to man under the most dangerous conditions won admiration achieved by few in the campaign in North West Europe'*

*Major Kenneth Mayhew, who has died aged 104, received the highest Dutch order of valour for his heroism during the liberation of the Netherlands in the Second World War.*

*In October 1944 Mayhew, newly promoted to major, was in command of a rifle company of the 1st Battalion, the Suffolk Regiment. When his men crossed the Molen Beek, a deep drainage ditch swollen by autumn rain, tanks were unable to support them because of the unstable banks.*

*Mayhew decided to press on, however, with an advance on the town of Venray, south of Nijmegen, despite coming under fire from small arms, mortar and shelling. Rather than sending for his platoon commanders, he ran from platoon to platoon under heavy fire, encouraging his men and giving out orders.*

*Mayhew: 'a magnificent and courageous company commander'*

*The Germans contested every yard and the Suffolks took severe losses for their part in the liberation of Venray and Overloon, just to the north. Mayhew was wounded in the face by shrapnel.*

*The citation for his award of the Knighthood of the Militaire Willems-Orde (MWO) stated: "He proved himself a magnificent and courageous company commander, showing contempt for his own safety, and the sight of his tall figure proceeding unconcernedly from man to man under the most dangerous conditions won admiration achieved by few in the campaign in North West Europe."*

*Kenneth George Mayhew, a farmer's son, was born on January 18 1917 at Helmingham, Suffolk. Always known as Ken, he was educated at Framlingham College, where he excelled at cricket, hockey and squash. After a traineeship with Fisons in Suffolk, he moved into selling fertilisers.*

*In April 1939 he enlisted in the Norwich TA and, on the outbreak of war, was mobilised as a sergeant before going to Sandhurst. Commissioned into the Suffolk Regiment as a 2nd lieutenant, he joined up with the remnants of the 1st Battalion in Somerset on their escape from Dunkirk.*

*On D-Day, June 6 1944, as a captain in command of a carrier platoon of lightly armoured tracked vehicles, he landed with 1 Suffolks on Sword Beach. The Hillman fortress, a 12-bunker complex and command post, was attacked and taken. On June 28, the Suffolks mounted an attack on the Château de la Londe, just north of Caen, where they encountered German Tiger tanks for the first time.*



*During the advance into the Netherlands, Mayhew's platoon operated ahead of the main force, frequently accompanied by the Dutch resistance, seeking intelligence on German positions. At the battle of Weert, he deliberately drew enemy fire to reveal enemy positions, resulting in casualties among his men and wounds to himself, before the town was liberated on September 22.*

*Following the battle for Venray, his wounds were treated in Brussels, but after three weeks he discharged himself against doctor's orders, hitched a lift in a truck back to his unit and resumed command of his company.*

*In a severe winter, the company was dug in on the banks of the River Maas at Blitterswijck. Under-strength, because men were evacuated suffering from frost bite, there were regular skirmishes with German night patrols.*

*During the advance to the Rhine in February 1945, Mayhew was wounded again and had to be evacuated back to England. After treatment, he was on convalescent leave when the Germans surrendered in early May. He was posted to Gibraltar for six months before being demobilised in late 1946.*

*On April 24 1946, he was knighted by a Royal Decree, signed by Queen Wilhelmina. It is believed that he was the only British soldier in the Second World War to have received the MWO, the oldest and highest honour of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, awarded for exceptional bravery in battle.*

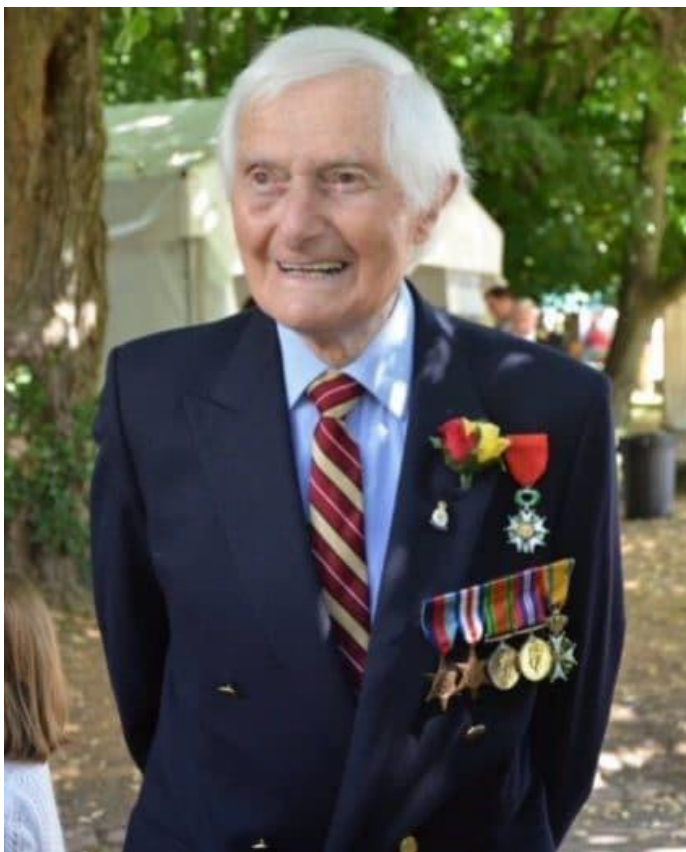
*After the war, he set up his own successful grain and transport business in Norfolk. In 1984 he was a leader at the 40th Normandy landings anniversary parade at Arromanches and, at the 50th anniversary, at Bayeux Cemetery, he was presented to Queen Elizabeth.*

*In September 2011, aged 94, while wearing the ribbon of the Knighthood of the MWO, he was attending the annual war veterans' commemoration at Venray when he was spotted by a Dutch historian who, at an appropriate moment, called for silence, introduced Major Mayhew to those assembled, and summarised his exploits in the battles to liberate Holland.*

*He was given a tumultuous welcome and within a few weeks he was received by Queen Beatrix and invested with the modern version of the insignia. In 2016, the French government awarded him the Légion d'honneur. On his 100th birthday in 2017, the Dutch Ambassador to Britain delivered a personal letter of greeting from King Willem-Alexander.*

*As a younger man, he played county cricket for Suffolk and Norfolk, and hockey and squash for Norfolk. Aged 70, he took up golf and carried his own bags until he was 97.*

*Mayhew married first, in 1939, Rosalie Elizabeth (Betty) Howell. He subsequently married Patricia (Trish) Evans, to whom he was happily wed for 29 years. She survives him with two step-daughters and a son and twin daughters from his first marriage.*



**Major Ken Mayhew, born January 18 191, died May 14 2021**



Register

# Major Kenneth Mayhew

Tall and athletic veteran of the D-Day landings on Sword Beach whose 'carriers' gave crucial covering fire to the infantry

No troops faced greater danger and bore more responsibility on D-Day than the three English county regiments of the 8th Infantry Brigade. Their task was to take Sword Beach, the easternmost of the five Allied landing areas, to enable the rest of the 3rd Division to capture Caen, the ancient Norman capital, and in June 1944 the hub of German defences in Normandy.

The brigade's leading battalions, the 2nd East Yorkshire and the 1st South Lancashire, were to clear the seafront, while the third, the 1st Suffolk, would take the strongpoints on the higher ground beyond. Commanding the Suffolks' carrier platoon was 27-year-old Captain Kenneth Mayhew.

The carrier platoon was a battalion's mobile reserve of firepower, a dozen small, open-top, lightly armoured tracked vehicles with a Bren gun, light mortar or anti-tank weapon. Mayhew was acutely aware how crucial his carriers would be to the rifle companies on D-Day. During loading at Tilbury, one of them fell from its slings into the dock and could not be recovered. "I raised hell and got on the phone to higher places," he recalled, threatening not to go unless they got him another. "They said they could get me another, but it wasn't waterproofed. I said we could do it on the way over. I eventually got one and I saw to it that Sergeant Killick got to work Bostik-ing around the plugs."

Although the crossing to France was rough, with the help of the amphibious

tanks of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars, which had swum 5,000 yards to land just before them, the East Yorkshires and South Lancashires managed quickly to clear most of the seafront defences, allowing the Suffolks' landing craft to beach in shallow water. Mayhew got his carriers ashore and across the seawall without loss, though they witnessed a "backdrop of smoke and gutted, blazing buildings, burning tanks, and, strewn about from the water's edge

## He was fêted as 'le libérateur' on many a return visit to Flers

up to the seawall, sodden khaki bundles staining the sand red where they lay."

The Suffolks' first objective, a strongpoint nicknamed "Morris", was a walk-over. Many of the defenders were Poles, evidently shaken by the naval bombardment. However, the next objective, "Hillman", headquarters of the 736th Grenadier Regiment and control centre for the defences of Sword Beach, proved unexpectedly hard to crack: 500 yards wide and 300 deep, it consisted of 18 underground bunkers linked by tunnels, with armoured observation cupolas surrounded by machinegun pits, barbed wire and mines. It had scarcely been touched by the aerial and naval bombardment and was only subdued as night fell, with many casualties. Mayhew and his carriers were in action



Mayhew chose to stay when wounded

without rest throughout what would become known as the longest day.

Kenneth George Mayhew was born in Helmingham in Suffolk in 1917, where his father farmed. He was educated at nearby Framlingham College, the public school founded in 1864 as the county's memorial to Prince Albert. Tall and athletic, he represented Framlingham at football, hockey and squash, and played cricket for the county. On leaving he joined the Ipswich-based agricultural chemicals company Fisons as a sales executive, and in March 1939 enlisted in the Territorial Army. Sent to Sandhurst soon afterwards, he was commissioned into the Suffolk Regiment the following year, joining the 1st Battalion after their evacuation from Dunkirk. In 1939 he had married Rosalie

Elizabeth Howell, a Norfolk nurse. Betty Mayhew died in 1991, and he subsequently married Patricia Evans, who survives him along with two stepdaughters and the three children of his first marriage: Roger, who became an agricultural merchant, and twin daughters, Susan, who married a farmer, and Gillian, who became a headhunter. After the war Mayhew built a substantial grain and transport business in East Anglia.

Caen was not captured on D-Day, and much British and Canadian blood was spilt before it was taken six weeks later. On one day alone the Suffolks lost 40 killed and 120 wounded. During the subsequent breakout, Mayhew frequently found himself in the van, despite the infantry training manual's warning that carriers should not be used as scout cars. "Kenforce", as they became known, single-handedly liberated Flers on the Orne. He was fêted as *le libérateur* on many a return visit.

In the Netherlands in October, however, during the aftermath of Operation Market Garden, he was wounded by mortar fire while trying to recover the Suffolks' commanding officer, who had strayed into a minefield. He chose not to be evacuated home, and a month later discharged himself from hospital in Brussels to rejoin the battalion.

By this time the Suffolks' officer ranks had been much thinned, and Mayhew found himself in command of a company. The battalion remained in action near the German border

throughout the winter, but during the advance from Gochy at the end of February he was wounded again, this time too seriously' to return to duty until after the German surrender.

In October 1945, the Dutch government honoured Mayhew as a Knight 4th Class of the Military Order of William, Prince of Orange for services to the liberation of the Netherlands. His commanding officer's citation read: "He proved himself a magnificent and courageous company commander, showing a contempt for his own safety which shortly was to win for him the admiration of every man under his command."

In Mark Forsdike's *Fighting Through to Hitler's Germany*, a collection of personal accounts of the men of the battalion, a senior officer remarks on the "staunchness" of the rank-and-file Suffolk soldier, his seeming imperviousness to pain and discomfort, and his loyalty: "a little slow, maybe, but what does that matter when one has all the other qualities?"

Field Marshal Sir William Slim, in his seminal account of the Far East campaign, *Defeat into Victory*, wrote, "Armies do not win wars by means of a few bodies of super-soldiers but by the average quality of their standard units." Mayhew was one who ensured the average quality of the standard unit was war-winning.

Major Kenneth Mayhew, Suffolk Regiment, was born on January 18, 1917. He died on May 14, 2021, aged 104