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Britain's Oldest WWII Veteran, Donald Rose, Passes Away at 110

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Britain has lost a true hero with the passing of Donald Rose, the nation's oldest surviving Second World War veteran, who died at the age of 110. Born on Christmas Eve 1914, Mr Rose is believed to have been the oldest man in the United Kingdom. His remarkable life, marked by courage and resilience, came to an end on Friday, as confirmed by Erewash Borough Council in Ilkeston, Derbyshire.

James Dawson, the council leader, paid a heartfelt tribute, describing Mr Rose as a “war hero” and a proud “Desert Rat” who served with distinction. “Our condolences go out to

Donald's family and all who knew him," Mr Dawson said. "Erewash was privileged to count him as a resident." The council lowered its flags to half-mast in honour of his service and sacrifice.

Mr Rose's wartime service was nothing short of extraordinary. As a member of the Queen's Royal Regiment, he joined at the age of 25 and served as a sniper in North Africa, Italy, and France. He survived a bullet wound to the leg during the D-Day landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944, a pivotal moment in the Allied victory. Later, he was part of the division that liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in northern Germany, witnessing the horrors of war firsthand. For his bravery, he was awarded France's highest honour, the Legion d'Honneur, among other medals.

In a poignant reflection shared at a Royal British Legion (RBL) event in May 2025, Mr Rose spoke about the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day. Speaking at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, where he was a guest of honour alongside 45 other veterans, he recalled the solemnity of the time. "When I heard that the armistice had been signed 80 years ago, I was in Germany at Belsen, and, like most active soldiers, I didn't get to celebrate at that time," he said. "We just did what we thought was right, and it was a relief when it was over. I never would have believed I would be remembering this day at 110 years old." His humility and understated pride resonated deeply with those in attendance.

Mr Rose's life after the war was equally defined by hard work and dedication. Originally from Westcott, Surrey, he took on various jobs, including driving a dust cart and working for the gas board, to provide for his family. His son, David, spoke of his father's selflessness at a ceremony earlier this year where Mr Rose was awarded the Freedom of the Borough by Erewash Borough Council. "Donald fought for the freedom we all enjoy, so it is only fitting we award him the freedom of the borough," David said. Mr Rose, ever modest, responded, "I didn't do anything that anyone else would not have done."

His longevity, which he jokingly attributed to drinking salty water as a Desert Rat and enjoying Maltesers and rum, was celebrated widely. In 2024, a special Spitfire flyover was arranged at his care home in Ilkeston, where he had lived since 2020. A care home employee, Naomi Allsop, remarked at the time, "He's the oldest World War Two veteran in the UK. You learn about it at school, but being with him is something else. The wars are part of our history, and if nobody celebrates the heroes, they will fade away."

Mr Rose's legacy is one of quiet heroism, resilience, and a life well-lived. As the nation mourns his passing, his story serves as a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by the wartime generation. Erewash Borough Council's flags will remain at half-mast, a fitting tribute to a man who embodied the spirit of duty and courage.

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