

UK Government denied war hero Harry Penny an increase in his state pension because he moved to Australia

Harry's last few years were spent fighting the UK government over an injustice that hits more than half a million British pensioners. Their crime? They retired abroad - but to the wrong country

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War hero Harry Penny celebrated his 94th birthday with his family on Monday. Sadly, he died suddenly on Thursday. But his son Nick reports that "he was still in fighting form" at the end.

Harry fought injustice his whole life. He joined the RAF as an 18-year-old to fight the Nazis as a Bomber Command crewman and became a war hero after being shot down over Holland and having to spend 10 weeks dodging capture while making an arduous journey to safety in Gibraltar via Belgium, France and Spain.

He continued serving with distinction after the war, receiving an OBE for service in Iraq tackling an uprising. And he was decorated in Singapore during the Indonesia conflicts in the 1960s.

But his last few years were spent fighting the UK government over an injustice that hits more than half a million British pensioners. Their crime? They retired abroad - but to the wrong country.

Harry and Gaye, his wife of more than 70 years, moved to Australia in 1970 for work. The couple were unaware that, as a consequence, their state pension would be frozen at the rate applying when they left the UK. They didn't discover the anomaly until Harry eventually retired

in 1987 and he was paid just £39.50 a week, while his wife was handed £24. If they had moved to, say, Germany or the US, they would have ended up receiving three times that.

Harry told *The Independent* in 2014: "It's quite unjust. It's the principle. I wasn't aware that my British pension would be frozen; I would have otherwise thought twice about moving to Australia."

He was an active member of the campaigning group British Pensions in Australia, part of the International Consortium of British Pensioners, which fights for justice for its members who mainly live in ex-Commonwealth countries. The injustice is that if any of the half a million pensioners had moved to a different country, they would be getting the full annual increase in their pension, as around 600,000 British expatriate pensioners do every year.

Gaye survives Harry to continue the fight, but their son Nick had a bitter message for David Cameron and the current Tory cabinet: "The UK government will now not have to worry about an increase to my father's frozen pension."

But Nick added: "Let us hope my mother's paltry payout will be rectified soon."

There was some glimmer of hope for justice this week at a Westminster debate on the issue. Sir Roger Gale, MP, chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Frozen British Pensions, said: "It's nonsense. You could live one side of Niagara Falls and be uprated or live the other side with a frozen pension. There are too many cases where people have to leave families and move back to the UK, becoming a burden on services."

Ian Blackford, the SNP pensions spokesperson, said: "We need to hold the Government to account on this issue and take a more hard-nosed approach in our bid to unfreeze pensions. Pensions minister Ros Altmann should tell the Treasury to fix this."

Angela Rayner, Labour's shadow pensions minister, said: "The situation is unfair, illogical and doesn't make sense – and I welcome cross-party support on the issue. We have to find a solution."

We do have to find a solution before more victims of this continuing injustice pass away. In the meantime, I hope Harry Penny may have at last found peace.