

Right to full state pension is fresh battle for D-day veteran

Seventy years after D-day Ken Briggs, who now lives in Australia, receives a UK state pension of just £25 a week

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Seventy years after serving as a teenage seaman and watching the D-day operation unfold from aboard a destroyer in the Channel, Ken Briggs has become engaged in a fresh battle - with the UK government he once risked his life for.

On 6 June 1944, the 19-year-old Briggs was a stoker on HMS Havelock, and already a veteran of the Arctic convoys - the campaign to deliver vital supplies to Russia.

He recalls they had heard rumours of a possible seaborne invasion. "Early one morning we steamed into the Channel. As a stoker down below, you knew less than most. Only when I came up top did I guess this was it - D-day.

"The sea was full of all kinds of ships. A US battleship was blaring out music 'the Yanks are coming' (from the wartime song, Over There). We sailed out wide as usual, looking for U-boats."

Now 89, Briggs, pictured left, would have loved to have joined the other veterans gathering on the beaches of Normandy to commemorate the operation that turned the tide of the second world war, but he now lives on the other side of the world, in Australia, and it would have been too long and costly a journey.

Little did he imagine when he and his fellow sailors were dodging enemy submarines that, seven decades later, he would be fighting the UK government over what he says is the "disgusting" way it treats thousands of war veterans and other Britons living overseas.

Briggs is one of 558,000 so-called "frozen" British pensioners whose basic state pension doesn't increase annually, as in the UK. If you move to one of more than 100 countries - including Australia, Canada and South Africa - your state pension will be permanently frozen at the date you retire or of your arrival there.

However, if you move to an EU country, the US, or one of a seemingly random list of other places, your state pension will increase in line with inflation.

Some of the oldest frozen pensioners have had their payouts frozen at as little as £6 a week, when the maximum basic state pension is now £113.10.

Campaigners say the UK government's policy is discriminatory and inhumane, and results in financial hardship for British citizens around the world.

Briggs, originally from Pontefract, West Yorkshire, moved to Australia in 1963 after his work as an industrial radiographer dried up in Britain. He is now living in Woolgoolga, a town on the New South Wales coast, with his wife Dorothy. He says that his pension has been frozen at £25.80.

"If the government had been there (on D-day), they would be much more sympathetic. It's a broken promise - we're supposed to have high moral standards as a country, but freezing pensions shows the exact opposite," says Briggs, who has spoken to various UK politicians about the issue, including the late former Conservative MP Winston Churchill, grandson of the wartime prime minister.

Briggs's daughter, Joyce Hammerton, who also lives in New South Wales, said: "It's appalling how my father and many others are being discriminated against. How can one country have uprated pensions and not another? He will go to his grave fighting this injustice."

More than a decade ago, a group of pensioners launched an ultimately fruitless legal challenge - but they refuse to give up.

The International Consortium of British Pensioners (ICBP), which represents expat campaigning groups, runs the Pension Justice website, aimed at highlighting their plight.

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