



Royal Star & Garter

Care with courage

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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'A pint of Guinness saved my life' – WWII soldier dodged a deadly Nazi rocket attack

A WWII soldier has recalled how 'the toss of a coin and a pint of Guinness' probably saved his life from a Nazi rocket attack, 80 years ago.

Army veteran Ken Pusey was set to spend the day at Cinema Rex in Antwerp, Belgium on 16 December 1944, but opted for a new NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) called The 21 Club at the last minute after hearing it was serving draught Guinness.

While Ken was at The 21 Club, the Cinema Rex took a direct hit from a Nazi V2 rocket. Over 1,000 people were inside the venue, and it killed 567, including 296 Allied service personnel from Britain, United States, Poland and Canada. It was the most deadly rocket attack of the war.



Ken at Royal Star & Garter

Ken, 98, was speaking ahead of the 80th anniversary of the rocket attack, from his home at Royal Star & Garter, in High Wycombe. The charity provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia, and also has Homes in Solihull and Surbiton. It has also launched new services reaching into the community.

Ken was 18 at the time, having only just joined the Army, and was serving with the Royal Engineers. He said: "A lot of us were given a day pass, and we were taken by lorry up to the main town centre. It was suggested we go to the cinema, or a new NAAFI called The 21 Club, which was selling draught Guinness by the pint, which was unheard of, for thruppence. We didn't know what to do so we tossed a coin. It came down tails and we went to the club. After an hour or so we heard an enormous explosion. We thought 'what the hell is that?' But it was just another incident. There was a war going on and people were getting killed all over the place. We didn't find



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out until a lot later that a rocket had been fired from Holland and it had hit the cinema directly. It killed all those people and many more were seriously injured. The chaps had no chance, they were annihilated. We just thanked our blessings, because but for the toss of a coin and a pint of Guinness, we'd have been dead."

The day of the fatal rocket attack marked the first day of the Ardennes Campaign, also known as the Battle of the Bulge, where Germany launched a massive attack on Allied forces in the area around the Ardennes forest in Belgium and Luxembourg.

Ken says: "The more I think about it, the more I realise how lucky I was. There by the grace of God I'm here today. It's frightening when you think back, because I was 18 at the time, and now I'm 98. I will never forget. Never."



Ken's battered postcard of The 21 Club in Antwerp. His decision to go to the club instead of the cinema probably saved his life

Later, Ken moved into Germany, and helped build a Bailey Bridge over the River Wesser, near Hamelin. He demobbed in 1947, having served just over three years, and returned to live in High Wycombe. He got a job at an engineering factory, and went on to work on the factory floors for several companies, including Hoover and Unilever.



Ken in Army uniform

He moved to Royal Star & Garter in 2022, following the death of his wife. He said: "I'd recommend Royal Star & Garter to other people. I think this place is unbelievable."

Royal Star & Garter in High Wycombe is welcoming new residents. For more information on this, the new services it provides, or to work at the Home, go to www.starandgarter.org/hw

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Video link: <https://vimeo.com/1036721985/a0bccaf81c>

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About Royal Star & Garter

Founded in 1916, Royal Star & Garter is a charity which provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their families living with disability or dementia, and has three Homes in Solihull, Surbiton and High Wycombe. We have also launched services reaching out into the community including Lunch Clubs, Day Care and a national Telephone Friendship Service.

About Veteran Friendly Framework

The VFF is currently a two-year programme funded by Royal Star & Garter, the Armed Forces Covenant and Royal British Legion, running to December 2025. It aims to tackle loneliness and isolation, and deliver improved health and wellbeing outcomes for over 25,000 veterans living in care homes across England. It supports the practical, emotional and social needs for the Armed Forces community by providing care homes with resources to assess and improve their offer. <https://veteranfriendlyframework.org.uk/>

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