

Mr. Laurent FISCUS, Prefect of Calvados

Mr. Mayor, Ambassador of Poland, Member of Parliament, President of the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee, Director of the Office of Veterans and Victims of Oppression, Vice-President of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, Elected Members, Members of Military delegations, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Mrs Geneviève Darrieussecq, Secretary of State for Defence, was in the Calvados Prefecture on 5th and 6th June, as you will have seen. Unfortunately, because of prior engagements, she could not be with us today. She has asked me to be here to represent her, and also to represent the Government of France at this ceremony, so potent and full of meaning.

Three days ago we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Normandy landings. This was not only one of the most decisive events in history, it was also the symbol of an enduring reality. Because the union of free peoples, the struggle against regimes which “try to enslave and degrade human beings” (in the fine words of the Preamble to the 1946 Constitution of the 4th French Republic, still in force) these are the battles we still face today.

Speaking of symbols – and without straying from the strictly secular principles which the Corps of Prefects has always observed – I must allow myself to comment that it cannot be by chance that our Polish friends have chosen to honour their airmen on the Feast of Pentecost. It was on the breath of the Spirit of liberty, that the wings of their aircraft were carried in the critical days of June 1944. It was the Spirit of courage, which allowed them to persevere through all peril. And it was the Spirit of sacrifice, which pushed them to risk their very lives to free Europe of the totalitarian Nazi regime.

The arrival of Polish pilots at Plumetot is also the symbol of a friendship unshaken across the centuries: the friendship between France and Poland. In the hall of the Prefecture at Calvados there is a bust of Napoleon for historical reasons. But it was he who, in the 19th Century allowed Poland to once again find her place among the nations of Europe. And in return it was the Poles who provided the Imperial armies with some of their finest officers. It was natural that this friendship should be sustained through to the Second World War, during which the Free French under General de Gaulle and the Polish Government in Exile made common cause in London in all their hardships.

But however powerful symbols may be, they need to have a concrete form. That is what commemorative ceremonies are for. It is also what monuments erected to sustain the collective memory are for. The Monument shortly to be unveiled here will remind passers-by of the heroic struggle undertaken by Polish airmen from the Advanced Landing Ground B10, as described by previous speakers.

It is my wish that this Monument should inspire us all with something of their qualities. For all of us, but particularly for the young, who represent the future of our two nations that means following the ideals of the Enlightenment and the values of the Republic in a democratic Europe.

Long live Poland! Long live France!
Long live the friendship between France and Poland!