

INTRODUCTION 2017

Vice Lord-Lieutenant, Your Excellency, Chief of the Air Staff, Inspector General of the Polish Air Force, distinguished veterans, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Once again, we take our places in front of this Memorial. We come to commemorate the achievements of the Polish Air Force in the West, whose Squadrons and Battle Honours are set out in front of us. And we come to honour the memory of nearly two thousand Polish airmen whose names are carved into the granite behind. They are the price that was paid for the freedom of Poland, even if that freedom did not come until nearly fifty years later.

In their struggle for freedom, wherever they went, Polish airmen created remarkable bonds with the people around them, and the memories are undimmed even after so many years. The links forged between the Polish Air Force and the communities it served among are as strong today as ever they were. Indeed, as the numbers at this Ceremony grow every year, we could well say that those bonds of shared history are stronger now than ever before. Let me just give you a few examples:

When the Polish Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, visited Britain for the inaugural UK-Poland Intergovernmental Consultations last November, the first piece of business was to come here, with the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, to lay wreaths side by side, to reflect on the fallen together, to meet our veterans, and to welcome them back to a reception at 10 Downing Street.

At the tiny village of Plumetot in Normandy, just behind the Invasion beaches, there are still strong memories of the Polish Wing, based there at an Advanced Landing Ground in August and September of 1944. We have put forward a proposal to establish a monument in the village, to mark its significance as the place where the Polish Air Force started its journey back from exile. The Mayor, M. Tarlet, and his colleagues have welcomed the idea with remarkable warmth and enthusiasm, and have readily adopted this as a joint project. I am delighted that M. Tarlet and his colleagues have made the journey to join us today.

At the Orchard Hotel, the famous Ruislip pub so well known to Polish airmen serving at RAF Northolt, Whitbread plc agreed last year to retain the historic name. This year they have offered to redecorate part of the bar area in tribute to their former customers. Photographs of Polish Airmen, Polish Squadron badges, and information will soon make sure that today's customers understand whose seats they are occupying – and why it matters.

In Kraków, a Monument is under construction to the honour of the Polish Home Army: far and away the largest and most significant resistance force anywhere in occupied Europe. It would not be complete without recognition of the role Polish Airmen played in keeping it supplied from the air, particularly by 1586 Special Duties Flight. Representatives are here today to take a small amount of earth from in front of this monument, to be placed in the foundations of the Kraków Memorial.

At national, regional and local level, at home and abroad, the bonds between the Polish Air Force and those whom history brought them among, endure to day, and will endure for ever.

Remembering now all those airmen who gave their bodies to the earth, their souls to God, and their hearts to Poland, I call on the Officer Cadets of the Polish Air Force Academy, Dęblin to carry out the Roll-Call of the Fallen: Captain Buśko ...