

Dedication of the Airfields Memorial 16th August 2002





the Red Arrows Flyby



Right **Betty Hockey**

DEDICATION OF THE NEW FOREST AIRFIELDS MEMORIAL

FONFA ADDRESS 16-8-2002 : Les White JP, Chairman of the board of Trustees

GOOD MORNING LADIES AND GENTLEMAN.

ON BEHALF OF THE FRIENDS OF THE NEW FOREST AIRFIELDS, I WELCOME YOU ALL.

TODAY'S EVENT IS IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO SERVED ON THE NEW FOREST AIRFIELDS DURING AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR 2. IT IS THE CULMINATION OF A LONG AND DIFFICULT TASK WHICH BEGAN WITH THE ORIGINAL GERM OF AN IDEA SOME SEVEN YEARS AGO. THE CONCEPT AT THAT TIME WAS OF A SMALL CAIRN-LIKE STRUCTURE USING MATERIAL FROM ALL THE AIRFIELDS CONCERNED AND SITUATED AT LYNDBURST, THE HUB OF THE NEW FOREST.

THIS PROVED IMPRACTICAL FOR MANY REASONS AND SUBSEQUENTLY THE SITE UPON WHICH WE STAND TODAY, WAS DONATED BY BERNARD BAILY, LATER TO BECOME A FOUNDER TRUSTEE. THE FRIENDS OF THE NEW FOREST AIRFIELDS WAS DULY FORMED BY HALF A DOZEN ENTHUSIASTS, INCLUDING MYSELF, AND REGISTERED AS A CHARITY. THE DESIGN OF THE MEMORIAL WAS CONCEIVED AND PUT THROUGH PLANNING BY BASIL WHITE, A SOPLEY ARCHITECT WHO SADLY DEPARTED THIS LIFE BEFORE HIS PROJECT HAD TAKEN SHAPE. THIS MEMORIAL WILL BE A LASTING TRIBUTE TO HIS SKILL.

DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PERIOD, MANY CONTRIBUTIONS, BOTH IN CASH AND KIND HAVE BEEN RECEIVED. I WISH TO PLACE ON RECORD THE SINCERE APPRECIATION OF THE TRUSTEES, FOR THIS MAGNIFICENT RESPONSE AND FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT IT HAS PROVIDED. THE PENSIONER`S FIVER HAS BEEN AS IMPORTANT TO US AS THE GIFT OF THE MAIN BUILDING STONE, REFLECTING THE SENTIMENT WE FEEL. IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE MENIAL WARTIME TASKS PERFORMED IN THE WORST OF CONDITIONS WERE EQUALLY AS IMPORTANT TO OUR FINAL VICTORY AS ANY OTHER ACTIVITY, SO NOW ARE THOSE WIDOW`S MITES.

I WOULD ALSO OFFER MY WARMEST THANKS TO MY COLLEAGUES, PAST AND PRESENT, ON THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, FOR THEIR UNWAVERING DEDICATION TO THE FINAL COMPLETION OF OUR PROJECT. TODAY IS A GREAT DAY, ENHANCED BY OUR GUESTS WHO ARE PARTICIPATING IN THIS CEREMONY AND TO WHOM THE BOARD IS EQUALLY INDEBTED. UNAVOIDABLY, SOME OF THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED TOWARDS THE COMPLETION OF THIS MEMORIAL ARE NO LONGER WITH US AND I WOULD SAY A POSTHUMOUS THANK YOU TO THEM, COUPLED WITH AN APOLOGY FOR OUR PROJECT TAKING SO LONG TO COMPLETE.

INCORPORATED WITHIN THE STRUCTURE IS A TIME CAPSULE, TO BE OPENED FIFTY YEARS HENCE. IT WILL CONTAIN BOOKS, LETTERS AND OTHER ITEMS OF MEMORABILIA PERTINENT TO THE NEW FOREST AIRFIELDS.I INVITE ANYONE WISHING TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO CONTACT A TRUSTEE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.

THIS MONUMENT SHOULD NOT ONLY BE SEEN AS A COMMEMORATION OF EVENTS OF SIXTY YEARS AGO. IT SHOULD REMIND US THAT HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THOSE WE HONOUR AND REMEMBER WITH PRIDE TODAY, AND MILLIONS LIKE THEM, OUR LIVES MAY WELL HAVE BEEN LIVED UNDER THE HEEL OF TYRANY. IT SHOULD ALSO SERVE AS AN INSPIRATION TO LIVE OUR LIVES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES FOR WHICH OUR COUNTRY AND ITS ALLIES FOUGHT AND PAID SO DEARLY.

TO CONCLUDE ON A HIGHLY PERSONAL NOTE, THE ERECTION OF THIS MEMORIAL IS A REFLECTION OF MY GRATITUDE TOWARDS THOSE IT REMEMBERS, FOR THE ABILITY TO BRING UP MY CHILDREN AND

GRANDCHILDREN IN A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. MY FATHER WAS BORN LESS THAN HALF A MILE FROM THIS SPOT AND WORKED UPON THE LAND AROUND US. IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME, THIS PLOT OF ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND HAS BECOME AS MEANINGFUL TO ME AS IT WAS TO HIM. IT IS MY EARNEST WISH THAT IN THE YEARS TO COME IT MAY BECOME EQUALLY MEANINGFUL TO MANY OTHERS.

MAY I NOW INTRODUCE TO YOU, AIR COMMODORE C. B. BROWN CBE AFC AE, WHO FLEW HURRICANE FIGHTER AIRCRAFT DURING THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN AND AT A LATER STAGE IN HIS CAREER, VULCAN BOMBERS. HE IS CURRENTLY VICE PRESIDENT OF THE HISTORIC AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION.

"Throughout the centuries the New Forest has somehow managed to retain its unique character and charm and, despite a few upheavals, its tranquillity, most of the time. Then came the Great War and with it the Royal Flying Corps - "an ideal place for flying training, plenty of empty space and not too many people around to complain about the noise." A modest intrusion but a harbinger of what was to come in 1939-45.

During the Second World War much of England became one vast clutch of airfields. Inevitably the New Forest had to play its part. This time on a much larger scale and in a number of important operational roles from flying boats to fighters. Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most spectacular, was as an aerial springboard for the invasion of Normandy in June 1944. By that time that were quite large air forces deployed on the New Forest airfields. Royal Air Force squadrons with pilots from all parts of the Empire and from the air forces of those countries that had been over-run by the Germans. There were squadrons from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand; from Poland, Czechoslovakia, France and Belgium. There was also the United States Army Air Corps, as it was at that time. During the weeks before D-Day the sky above the New Forest was filled with its P47 Thunderbolt fighters many of them from the 48th Fighter Group. After all these years the 48th Fighter Group is still with us, at Lakenheath in Suffolk flying F15's. So they are old friends and part of the English scene.

The construction of the airfields, together with the very large experimental weapons testing range at Ashley Walk transformed the landscape somewhat, and there was an influx of an entirely new population of young men and women. I am sure those responsible for running and safeguarding the New Forest at that time must have become increasingly alarmed at when and if ever it was all going to end. with hindsight they need not have worried too much. Today the only signs of that great intrusion are a few crumbling and overgrown hardstandings and some obscured scars at Ashley Walk.

In some respects that might be regarded as a pity. Fewer and fewer people are now aware, or have any idea, of that momentous period in the Forest's history, or

of the contribution made by these airfields and the people on them, and their flying squadrons, to victory in Europe in 1945. Therefore, we are greatly indebted to the Friends of the New Forest Airfields, to their Chairman, Mr Les White and, as this is all about a forest, to his merry men - and his merry ladies, for setting up this striking and impressive memorial, and to everyone who contributed to it.

I know they would wish me to emphasise that although this memorial is, of course, to those who died whilst serving here and flying from here, it is intended as a memorial to everyone who served here whatever their rank or status or however humble their job may have been. Les White has referred me, as examples, to the young NAAFI girls who ran the canteens, to the civilian scientists engaged on a variety of experimental projects, mostly at Ashley Walk, and to a variety of individuals such as Harry Coker of Thomey Hill who ran a pig farm here at Holmsley South not to be scoffed at as that was an extremely valuable source of food at that time.

So - future generations, and especially the holiday makers who pass this way, may pause at this memorial - and ponder!"

DURING WORLD WAR TWO, IN THE HEAT OF CONFLICT, A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WAS FORGED BETWEEN OUR COUNTRY AND THE USA. DESPITE THE PASSAGE OF SIXTY YEARS AND ALL THE VICISSITUDES OF POLITICAL EVOLUTION, THAT LINK IN THE CHAIN OF HISTORY HAS REMAINED STRONG AND UNBROKEN. IT IS THEREFORE MY MOST PLEASURABLE DUTY TO WELCOME AND COMMEND TO YOU, MAJOR MARK POWELL REPRESENTING HIS COUNTRY, OUR FRIEND AND ALLY, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. .

"Good day, I am Mark Powell and I am a United States Army Signal Corps Major stationed at Blandford Camp. Thank you Mr. White and Mrs. Betty Hockey for allowing me to speak at this wonderful event. Although I am a soldier, I feel a strong bond to those of you in the Air Force, If you didn't know, our Air Force began her service as a branch of the Signal Corps. In 1924? we ex-communicated her to go forth and become the class of the military she is today. So for all of my wayward cousins that proudly wear wings on your chest, remember they were crossed semaphores at the start.

This morning we are here today to remember the airmen, pilots, soldiers and civilians whose dedication to duty ensure the successful completion of many different campaigns, culminating with the defeat of the AXIS nations. This isn't just one day in history like December 6th, 1940 or June 6th 1944, but years of work we are remembering. The 12 airfields of the New Forrest helped ensure the freedom of the world. Stoney Cross, Holmsley and East Boldre (now known as Beaulieu) were home to many different squadrons. Only Hurn

remains true to the aeronautical roots and is known as Bournemouth International Airport. Many lessons learned at these airfields are still in use today, in locations like Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

You look around and ask what are these vital lessons learned long ago by our former warriors. I will only discuss one major lesson TEAM WORK and I will break it down into three ingredients needed for success that was displayed here over 60 years ago..

The first lesson is warrior teamwork. In these twelve airfields over six different countries worked together to defeat the Axis powers. The Free French, Americans, the Canadians, Australians, and British worked hand in hand with Poles and Czechs to defeat a common foe. NATO wasn't yet established, but these airmen put aside personnel differences to form an unbeatable team. You won't find a single airman who served here during that time, who doesn't have strong emotional ties to his fellow fighters regardless of their national origins. Having other lives depending on your actions form ties that never die. Now fast forward to Kosovo, Look at the troops we have on the ground and in the air. Poles, Czechs, Americans, Canadians, Australians, and Brits are together again. As in the past, an air campaign lead by fearless warriors took the fight to the enemy of peace. It's often said, a soldier doesn't fight for money or politics, but for the men in the fight with him. And like those warriors here today, they won't ever forget the friendship they made with each other.

The second ingredient involves the people normally forgotten after wars are over, but are always vital for during the conflict. The twelve airfields here in New Forrest could not operate without hundreds if, not thousands of civilians supporting the effort. Everyone from the brick layers to civilians scientists needed to compete their individual tasks to make our team winners. Most of the love and support the airmen and pilots, enabling to complete their war time missions. The husbands and wives of today's warriors still provide the necessary support from home. Surrogate families through the "any soldier or any airmen" letters and Christmas boxes lift their spirits, and give them the feeling they are doing the "right thing and the right time" in history. Events like the one today ensure we continue to support the memory of the airmen of the past, while continuing to support the force of today.

As I've rambled for the last few minutes, and I'm sure I've lost most of you with my willy-nilly logic, I want to close with this point. with the support of people like you here today, our countries can work

together to meet any challenge. We are here to remember airmen, pilots and civilians who worked, played and died here over 60 years ago. We haven't forgotten the past; we are still living on the lessons those brave warriors passed on to us.

Thank You and God bless

OVER THE YEARS, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT YET LEAST SPECTACULAR ROLES OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, HAS BEEN THAT OF SUPPLYING HUMANITARIAN AID. ROYAL AIR FORCE STATION ODIHAM, WITH ITS CHINOOK HELICOPTERS, HAS BEEN MUCH INVOLVED IN SUCH MISSIONS AND MANY THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE BENEFITED FROM THESE OPERATIONS. I AM VERY PRIVILEGED TODAY TO BE ABLE TO INTRODUCE TO YOU THE CHIEF OF STAFF AT ODIHAM, WING COMMANDER G. DAVEY.

"I AM HONOURED TO HAVE BEEN INVITED HERE TODAY TO REPRESENT TODAY'S ROYAL AIR FORCE, AND IN PARTICULAR THE PRESENT ROYAL AIR FORCE IN HAMPSHIRE AT THIS AUSPICIOUS OCCASION TO MARK THE ENORMOUS CONTRIBUTION MADE BY THE MEN AND WOMEN OPERATING AT THE NEW FOREST AIRFIELDS DURING AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR II. THEIR PART IN SHAPING THIS COUNTRY'S HISTORY - WITH A DAILY THREAT OF ENEMY INVASION - IS RIGHTLY BEING RECOGNISED BY THE UNVEILING OF THIS MEMORIAL TODAY. WE IN TODAY'S ROYAL AIR FORCE HAVE AN ENDURING DEBT OF GRATITUDE FOR YOUR OUTSTANDING SERVICE IN THIS COUNTRY'S HOUR OF NEED - AND SPECIFICALLY TO REPEL THE THREAT FROM OVER THE CHANNEL, AND BEYOND, IN THE DARK DAYS OF WORLD WAR II.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR CAPITULATION - WHICH IS AS UNTHINKABLE A CONCEPT TODAY AS IT WAS THEN - WERE VERY SERIOUS AND FAR-REACHING. UNFORTUNATELY THOSE IMPLICATIONS HAVE NOT FADED WITH TIME. YOU KNOW THAT INTIMIDATION, LACK OF FREEDOM AND SELF-DETERMINATION AND OPPRESSION BY AUTOCRATIC DICTATORS ARE STILL COMMONPLACE IN THE TURBULENCE OF TODAY'S WORLD. SADLY, THEY ARE ONCE AGAIN AN EVERYDAY FEATURE OF MILITARY LIFE AS THEY WERE WHEN THE NEW FOREST AIRFIELDS WERE IN THEIR HEYDAY. ALTHOUGH RARELY IDENTIFIED, THOSE WHO OPERATED HERE HAD MUCH MORE IN COMMON WITH TODAY'S SERVICEMAN OR WOMAN THAN ONE WOULD SOMETIMES THINK.

AS AN INTEGRATED FORCE YOU WERE INVOLVED IN MULTINATIONAL OPERATIONS (AS WE ARE NOW). DURING THE PAST YEAR RAF PERSONNEL FROM HAMPSHIRE HAVE STOOD SHOULDER- TO-SHOULDER WITH AMERICANS. CANADIANS. FRENCH. POLISH, AUSTRALIANS AND MANY MORE (AS YOU DID). IN FACT WE WELCOMED BACK SURVIVING MEMBERS OF THE FREE FRENCH AIR FORCE TO UNVEIL ANOTHER MEMORIAL AT RAF ODIHAM IN APRIL - A VERY MOVING DAY. YOUR

OPERATIONS INVOLVED OPERATING WITH SPECIAL AGENTS ON CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS DEEP BEHIND ENEMY LINES, AND WE CONDUCT OPERATIONS WITH SPECIAL FORCES FROM ODIHAM TODAY. YOUR OPERATIONS WOULD EVENTUALLY ENABLE THE NAVY AND ARMY TO CONDUCT THEIRS - AND THAT IS THE SAME TODAY, WHEN WE CONDUCT JOINT OPERATIONS - AS IN THE FALKLANDS, THE GULF AND THE BALKANS. THE AIR FORCE IN HAMPSHIRE ALSO PLAYED A KEY ROLE DURING THE COLD WAR - REINFORCING THE CENTRAL REGION OF EUROPE WITH SCORES OF HELICOPTERS AND RECEIVING AMERICAN TROOPS AND SUPPLIES, WHEN ODIHAM WAS A FORWARD BASE FOR THEIR HERCULES AIRCRAFT.

BUT IT IS THE PEOPLE WHO OPERATE AT THE FRONT-LINE WHERE THE GREATEST SIMILARITIES LIE, AND I WILL RELATE DIRECTLY WITH THE RECENT DEPLOYMENTS OF A LARGE PROPORTION OF MY STATION ON OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN. THE SPIRIT OF TODAY'S MEN AND WOMEN WITHIN THE RAF IS AS STRONG NOW AS IT EVER WAS. I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT OUR EXPERIENCES EARLIER THIS YEAR WILL RING TRUE WITH MANY IN THE AUDIENCE TODAY - AN UNPREDICTABLE THREAT, INHOSPITABLE LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS, OPERATING A LONG WAY A WAY FROM LOVED ONES. NOT KNOWING WHEN IT WAS LIKELY TO END, - AND SO THE LIST GOES ON. WHEN IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT THE SQUADRON IN AFGHANISTAN SHOULD BE REPLACED AFTER SOME 4 MONTHS. TO A MAN THEY INSISTED THAT THEY HAD GONE THERE TO DO A JOB. AND THEY WANTED TO SEE IT THROUGH. THE QUALITIES OF DETERMINATION, PRIDE, LOYALTY. COMMITMENT AND COMRADESHIP ARE AS ALIVE NOW, AS THEY WERE THEN. IT IS THOSE INESCAPABLE AND ENDURING QUALITIES AND TRADITIONS OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE OVER 60 YEARS AND MORE IS THE PRINCIPAL REASON WHY WE ARE SO PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR ORGANISATION AND ARE HONOURED TO BE PRESENT AT YOUR UNVEILING CEREMONY TODAY AND, I HOPE. IN THE FUTURE."