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Remembering The Battles For Britain (Eighty-Five Years On)

*Touring WWII Aerial Histories, Mysteries,
and some sobering "What-IF-stories"*

from "Spitfire Over London" by Dan Connolly

*presented by
John Bertram*



photo by Ken Mist

A BATTLE OF BRITAIN 85th Anniversary Tour

text & photographs (unless otherwise credited)

by CAHS Toronto VP John Bertram

By the early summer of 1940, the bulk of Britain's Expeditionary Force, tasked with helping defend France against the brutal advance of Hitler's seemingly unstoppable forces, had just barely been able to get back across the English Channel from Dunkirk, and the UK's still new Prime Minister was already warning his countrymen — and the rest of the world — that the stage was now set for an aerial showdown with far-reaching implications for the future of Western civilization itself.

Today, more than 85 years later, the last pilot to have flown in the Battle of Britain has passed away, and any further first-hand account from that particular group of fliers ("The Few" to whom Churchill paid such eloquent tribute) is no longer possible. How is it then that this pivotal campaign, and the battles that followed on from it over the ensuing four years, are being remembered? How are its participants and the sacrifices they made being honoured? How are its primary locations and surviving artefacts being preserved, protected, and in some cases even re-built? And how are the profound implications of that struggle now being better understood, and more clearly communicated?

This is a personal account of an escorted history trek from September 2025, a tour which directly addressed many of these questions. Over the course of nine very active days, each of its two dozen participants experienced their own, slightly different itinerary. This photo/memoir summarizes mine.

But for everyone in our group, it was a journey through time each us felt deeply grateful for having been lucky enough to take.

[Please send any comments, corrections, questions or suggestions to: jbertram@rogers.com]

Prolog: Saving the World(?)



Some years ago, I attended a Fly-In Day at a private air field northeast of Toronto, an annual event at which a number of home-built aircraft are often featured. I was accompanied by Lou Wise, a WWII RCAF vet who'd become a very close friend, and who at this event introduced me to one of his closest friends: a retired shop teacher, private pilot, and history enthusiast, who was displaying a project on which he'd labored happily for many years. It was a 2/3-scale flying replica of a Spitfire, the iconic British fighter of the Second World War. With video

camera in Record mode, I asked what inspired him to choose a re-creation of this particular aircraft on which to devote so many painstaking hours in his home workshop/garage. Without a moment's hesitation, his no-nonsense answer was a terse but clearly sincere: "Because along with the Hurricane, the Spitfire saved the world".



aerial photo by Lou Wise

While I did have at least a basic awareness of the famous "Battle of Britain", and the prominent place it occupied in the early stories of WWII, I was impressed by such an unreserved and unequivocal response.

But in the years since that exchange, I find myself an increasingly devoted member of that unequivocal camp.

Even with the war's multi-year chain of turning points and key moments — all its "defining encounters", its steady stream of advantage-shifting technologies, and the clash of wills between those in power on every side of the conflict — the against-all-odds defense of one embattled island may well indeed have been the most critical link in that entire chain of world-shaping events.

Had this single defiant domino fallen, had that famously Sceptred Isle been lost to the Allied cause, it's hard to overestimate just how dire some of the ensuing "what-IF..." scenarios likely would have been — not just for Britain, but for the entire planet. (Case in point: without England as a launching point, could the remaining multi-nation Allied coalition ever have been as strategically well-situated to begin liberating an entire continent four years later, on 06-JUN-44?)

1940 <=> 2025:

As I write this, the first quarter of the 21st Century is already behind us, and in the first few years of its second quarter we will lose the last few still surviving men and women whose life stories were forever rewritten by the Second World War, a conflict which includes some of History's cruelest and most destructive pages – yet also make for one of its most consequential chapters.

That global conflict officially ended over eight decades ago, in the Spring and late Summer of 1945. But just five years earlier, its history-defining outcome could easily have been sent down a very different and much darker path.



from the Gatwick Aviation Museum

Which is why during all the ceremonies and speeches surrounding last Fall's Remembrance/Veterans/Armistice Day, I was mostly thinking about an event then only two months in the past: an escorted history tour around southeast England, for which I joined some two dozen other aviation, history, and WWII enthusiasts from across Canada.

Tracing a nine-day path we visited original sites, recent reconstructions, and timeless memorials, all dedicated to Great Britain's defiant struggle against an unrelenting aerial onslaught — a struggle often symbolized by the unmistakable silhouette of a single Spitfire reaching for the sky.

Tributes and monuments honouring not just the pilots, but the technical designers and ground crews, the commanders and the codebreakers, and the too often unsung civilian populations, whose collective resolve is a debt we honor but can never repay. Their resolute defiance of a few ranting, nationalistic "strongman" leaders, each pledging to return their aggrieved followers to an imagined time of former "greatness", is an inheritance we squander at our peril.

And how sad it is then that in so many countries today the forces of unreasoning mob-based populism — the very thing the Allied troops fought so hard against — seem to once more be gaining ground.

The Tour:

Organized by **Merit Travel** of London Ontario, this absorbing history quest was led by journalist, historian, and best-selling author — not to mention always-welcome CAHS Toronto guest speaker — **Ted Barris**.



And as they did for the 80th anniversary "**D-Day & Beyond**" tour my wife Mary and I enjoyed 16 months earlier, Ted shared the microphone with **Ian Cowan** of ConnectionCustomTravel and TheBattlefieldTours.com, with Ian providing much of the "play-by-play" location details & scheduling logistics to Ted's "colour commentary" and deep background stories.



Despite containing almost nine full days of touring, this was a whirlwind trek through not just the sites that played major roles in the initial four month **Battle of Britain** campaign (July-October 1940), but also through many of the subsequent and often audacious operations that kept Great Britain not simply still in the fight, but still at the strategic center of Allied operations in Europe.

A full image gallery of the tour will eventually be viewable online, but for this account I'll just attempt to share an illustrated summary of the main attractions we were privileged to see.

Sat/Sun Aug 30/31:

While the flight that transported most of our group to London was a red-eye from YYZ (Toronto Pearson) to LHR (London Heathrow), arriving Monday morning Sept 1, several of us elected to fly in on our own a day or two early. In my case it was a flight into Gatwick arriving late morning on the Saturday, which allowed for a visit to the **Gatwick Aviation Museum**, about a ten minute Uber ride from the terminal. For an out of the way "boutique" facility it contained a surprising variety of displays (on the history of GWL itself, its connection to the Concorde and the Shackleton, etc), and a larger than expected number of aircraft on static display, most in one long hangar featuring Cold War-era fighter jets, and yes, a Spitfire – plus a few larger aircraft in the field out back.



On Sunday, after strolling some historic London streets, and taking in a show by a promising playwright from Stratford at the completely rebuilt Globe Theatre, I joined an informal dinner Ian Cowan hosted at a restaurant/pub near our Heathrow-area hotel, for the eight or nine of us who'd already checked in ahead of the main group.



(NOTE: This printed summary reflects the geographic order in which we encountered the various sites and memorials, rather than trying to re-order everything into a strict historical chronology.)

Day One: MONDAY SEPT 1
The RAF Museum (Hendon)

Unfortunately, it was only near the end of our first day together that our tour really began, as we reached the **RAF's** mega museum in the **Hendon** neighborhood of northwest London. A bit like the USAF Museum in Dayton Ohio, Hendon is a sprawling facility with a vast range of original aircraft, artefacts, and related exhibits, grouped by types of plane and different eras into a series of separate and very large hangars.



It's a full-day experience (at least!), but having lost valuable time on an out of the way and still unexplained detour to the souvenir shops surrounding Windsor Castle, we just had to make the best of a less-than-two-hour "preview" of this enormous and clearly far more relevant venue.

Given such limited time, several of us hustled directly over to Hendon's extensive **WWII Hanger**, which not surprisingly featured a number of displays highlighting both the people and the planes who fought the *many* "battles for Britain".



Pride of place in that hangar's central hall goes to the always impressive **Lancaster bomber**, in this case an early Mk1 model that began service in 1942. "S For Sugar" (originally designated "Q for Queenie") survived a remarkable **137 combat missions** through to the war's end in '45, a total unequalled by all but just one even luckier Lanc, and far exceeding the typical Lancaster lifespan of only 20 or 21 combat missions. But over a succession of crews, this ship managed to remain intact even after eight separate visits to Berlin itself.



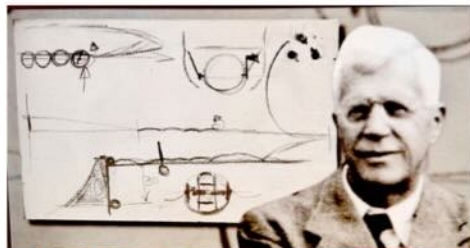
Canadian airman **Frederick Rickie Garvey** flew this particular aircraft more than any other pilot. Its ever growing mission tally (marked by bomb silhouettes on the side of its nose section) was supplemented first by images of sparsely clad maidens, then dancing Devils, and finally, as it neared its 100th mission mark (a feat achieved by less than three dozen other Lancasters, out of the almost 7,400 known to have been built), by a simple, in-your-face quotation: the confident boast from Luftwaffe commander Hermann Göring:



Underneath the Lancaster are full-scale replicas of a 12,000-pound "**Tall Boy**" bomb, the kind used later in the war against the battleship Tirpitz in Norway (along with the V-1 and V-2 rocket facilities in France), and its 22,000-pound "**Grand Slam**" cousin from late in the war. Both were "earthquake" bombs, delivered one Lancaster at a time, and designed to penetrate deep underground before detonating — generating a shockwave that could cripple otherwise impervious subterranean installations.



Both were the creation of famed aircraft and armament designer **Barnes Wallis**, who stands alongside America's Oppenheimer and (for better or worse) Germany's Von Braun, as arguably Britain's most inventive, and certainly most celebrated, civilian scientist and wartime engineer. He will of course be forever best known as the author/inventor of the audaciously original scheme that made the entire **Dambusters** operation against Germany's water-dependent industrial heartland a possibility.



Original artefacts from Wallis' studio can be seen nearby, including some of the models he used to test his theory of a spherical bouncing bomb (the "**Highball**"), before he changed the design to a more controllable cylindrical shape (code-named "**Upkeep**" — of which a detailed full-scale model is also on display).

Of personal family-history interest, and right next to the Lancaster, is one of its Made-In-America four-engine twin-tailed cousins, a late model B-24 Liberator. This added one more B-24 to my list of "in-person Liberator sightings" — now totalling nine of the thirteen still intact airframes known to currently exist worldwide. (Like many other of these few remaining B-24s, this Liberator escaped the scrapyards' guillotine thanks to a post-war stint in the Air Force of India.)



Though primarily associated with the US Army Air Corps — and my own family connection is within that context — the Liberator not only flew in every major theater of WWII operation, it also served in every major Allied air force, including the Commonwealth nations of Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand & Australia, where it led the way in anti-submarine coastal defense.

Back at our Heathrow-area hotel that evening, Ted Barris led an informal chat with local resident **Bill McAlister**, who spoke about his own efforts to learn more about the father he never knew, and *his* experiences as one of the first Canadian RAF pilots early in the war. Bill's father distinguished himself on several fronts, having served first as a Bomber pilot, but then transitioning to Spitfires under Fighter Command, where he soon became the only Canadian ace during the Battle of Britain, taking out five enemy aircraft in the conflict's first few weeks.



Sadly for his British wife and their two-month old son, Bill's father was shot down and killed near the English Channel on November 1, 1940. He was just 23 years old. And sadly for history, that means Bill's father is not included on several B of B memorials, listing the names of those airmen killed during that campaign's official time frame of July 10 through October 31, 1940.

Day Two: TUESDAY SEPT 2, 2025 Bentley Priory; Dowding & Churchill; Imperial War Museum (London)

Embarrassing disclosure: when I first heard that some place called "The Bentley Priory", and someone named "Hugh Dowding", would be the focus of the first stop on our first full day of WWII **histourism**, my initial thoughts were: "What's a Priory?" and "Who was Hugh Dowding?"

Online dictionaries define a Priory as: *a monastery of men or women under religious vows, in the Catholic, Lutheran, or Anglican traditions; or as a religious residence in a building where a small group of monks or nuns live and work together*".



The Bentley Priory was first established in the late 12th Century, but ceased to be a religious facility in the mid-1500s. Over the next two centuries, and across multiple owners, the original structure was demolished and a new building constructed, then repeatedly renovated, finally emerging in the late 18th Century as the stately manor we see today. After brief stints as a high-end hotel (late 1800s) and an exclusive girls school (early 1900s), the property was purchased by the Air Ministry in 1926, and by the mid-1930s had become the central headquarters for the newly formed RAF Fighter Command, led by a First World War Royal Flying Corps vet — now an Air Chief Marshal in the recently constituted Royal Air Force — named **Hugh Dowding**.



As a visitor quickly learns when treated to an escorted tour of the Bentley Priory — re-dedicated as a Second World War museum in 2013 — this is the place where one forward-looking yet often under-appreciated commander became the on-the-ground mastermind of the Battle of Britain.

Hugh Dowding oversaw the creation and operation of a national nerve centre — a complex network of top secret coastal radar towers, linked with inland human observers and anti-aircraft gun installations, while also devising a precise coding system for all that incoming data to be modelled on those iconic 3-D table maps, then immediately relayed to the appropriate group operation centres (four regions covering most of mainland England), where informed decisions could quickly be made as to which aircraft should be scrambled to meet the incoming threat — all in a matter of only a few precious minutes.



Our visit to the Bentley Priory was certainly fortunate, since the museum's limited public hours don't normally include the Tuesday our group happened to be in the neighbourhood. But we were nevertheless given an in-depth tour of its many display rooms and exhibits, from the imposing Entrance Hall; through Dowding's Office; and into the grand Rotunda (now filled with tributes showcasing stories of "The Few" — the almost 3,000 British & Allied aircrew — including some 112 Canadians — who flew during the Battle of Britain.



After the Rotunda, where the Battle's airmen are remembered, the spotlight shifts to their equally important eyes and ears on the ground: the women and men who turned Dowding's theoretical construct into a living, breathing, and highly intelligent entity. And that organism's nerve centre was Bentley's now carefully reconstructed Filter Room (where the raw data from coastal radar installations and Ground Observer posts was received, analyzed, then encoded according to Dowding's signature system). Finally we were taken to a large-scale model of the original Operations Room, which became the template for Ops Rooms at each of the four main regional Group (and even Sector-level) facilities across the country.

It's not often an air defence system gets its own set of stained glass windows. But the Bentley Museum's imposing Entrance Hall pays tribute to the Priory's ecclesiastical roots, both through its architecture and in a series of striking historical panels, each created in modern stained glass designs.



The second of the two main windows highlights England's "Hellfire Corner",

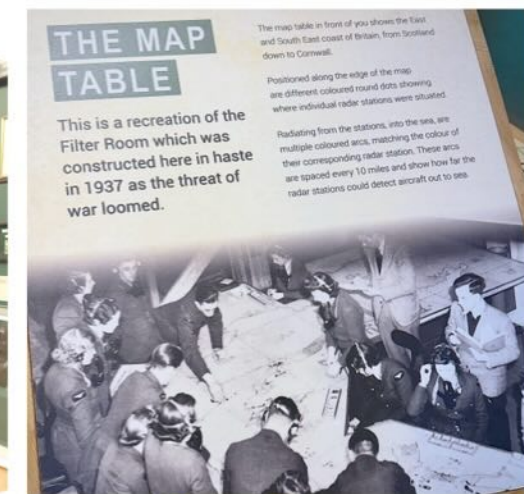


the country's southeast section which of necessity became its most heavily defended region, bearing the multi-year brunt of the primarily London-bound attacks (from fighters, bombers, "buzz bombs", and ultimately rockets) — all launched by the forces of Nazi Germany now occupying most of the continent.

The Dowding Factor:



As the original home of the new **RAF Fighter Command**, the Bentley Priory Museum pays special



homage to Fighter Command's first Commander-In-Chief, and his image can be seen throughout — in photographs, paintings, even sculptures. But although Hugh Dowding today is generally credited as the commander who more than anyone else charted a path to victory in the initial Battle of Britain, he found himself unexpectedly relieved of that command by late November of 1940, mere weeks after the Luftwaffe had put its plans to clear the skies of the RAF — and clear the way for a land invasion of Great Britain — on indefinite hold.

It seems that as much as Dowding earned the admiration of his pilots — whose losses he took very personally — he made few friends within the political halls of power his job required him to navigate, and the defensive battle tactics he favoured were often at odds with those espoused by many of his fellow commanders. His successes

were therefore as much resented as respected; his arguable failures and personal quirks often unduly highlighted.

But there's no denying the critical importance of the innovative network he created and managed for detecting, plotting, and disseminating near real-time data on the fascist forces attacking England from the air, and how that remarkable "Dowding System" was absolutely vital in keeping those threatening forces at bay, and keeping the United Kingdom — and with it the rest of the Allied world — intact and free.

Stamps of Approval:

Over time though, a few posthumous tributes have come his way ~



Above (at right): the viewing area overlooking the Bentley Museum's restoration of Dowding's original office, onto which is projected an audio/visual summary of his time at Bentley Priory. (Inset: part of Dowding's office, as re-created for 1969's *Battle of Britain* feature film.)



Dowding lived just long enough to see (and even visit the set of) that film. The still popular movie was an all-star historical epic, and portraying Lord Dowding was another "Lord" ~ not to mention one of Britain's best known actors from stage and screen ~ Sir Laurence Olivier.

Debates over tactics, technologies, and when they were implemented have continued long after his passing. But in 1986 Dowding was one of five senior airmen to be portrayed on a series of commemorative stamps marking the 50th anniversary of the RAF:



And in 2015, ten years before our tour led us inside the very same room, the Battle of Britain's 75th anniversary included a 6-stamp set in which one of the images showed the nerve centre of the entire "Dowding System" at work: the Operations Room at Bentley Priory:



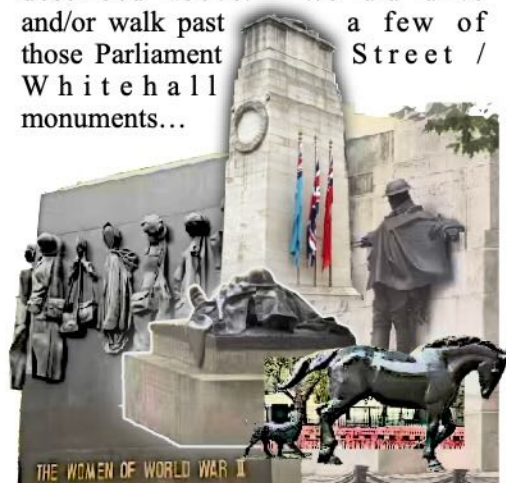
Later That Same Day: (Tues Sept 2) ~

THE PLAN: head back into downtown London for lunch, visit "the RAF church" of St Clement Danes, drive past some of the many monuments and memorials along Whitehall and Parliament Streets (with some time at the impressive **Battle of Britain Monument** along the nearby Thames Embankment), then walk over to the historic **Churchill War Rooms** underneath St. James Park, where an embattled but undaunted Prime Minister used the power of words and the force of will to hold a country together during the greatest struggle in its history.

Well, sometimes you just gotta say: "I suppose one outta five ain't bad" Because unfortunately



our own struggles with some unusually snarled traffic (even by London standards) meant having to abandon not only our full-size touring bus but also most of the planned stops described above. We did drive and/or walk past a few of those Parliament Street / Whitehall monuments...



And we did make it to the **Churchill War Rooms**, but after getting our audio guides plugged in and ready to go, and with barely ten minutes inside, we had to join in an orderly evacuation of the entire facility, due to what turned out to be (apparently) a Nothing-To-Be-Seen-Here false alarm.



A prolonged wait across the street made the already uncertain prospect of readmission seem less and less worthwhile. Though disappointed, I was somewhat relieved that on a trip to England two years earlier I'd visited both the **Churchill War Rooms** (which includes an extensive exhibit on the life & times of Sir Winston himself) and the very effective **Battle of Britain monument** along the Embankment —

both highly recommended Second World War venues in the heart of London, each of which I'm *still* looking forward to revisiting.



(pics from earlier trip)

The Battle of Britain London Monument is an 80' long series of bronze panels unveiled in September 2005. Each section is a dynamic portrayal of the people — in the air and on the ground; civilian and military, The Few & The Many — who experienced the half decade of battles and blitzes that began in those darkest hours of summer 1940.

But with only a couple of precious hours still left in the day, members of our tour group went their various ways from St James Park. I joined a group of 8 or 9 others with directions to a bus that would take us south and across the river to the Imperial War Museum's main location in the Lambeth neighbourhood of east London.

This particular venue is one of five facilities operating under the IWM's administrative umbrella. (The other four are the Churchill War Rooms, the HMS Belfast, the multi-hangar aviation museum at the Duxford air base near Cambridge, and the IWM North facility in Manchester.)

As the title "War Museum" suggests, this facility curates and preserves stories from well before, through — sadly — well after the Second World War's mere 6-year span, with permanent and temporary exhibits in multiple galleries over several floors. Given limitations of time it wasn't even on the official itinerary for our Battle of Britain tour, and with only a couple of hours till closing time when our impromptu splinter group arrived, we all just went our own self-guided ways.

For my part, after a browse of the museum's enormous book store, I was able to photo-snap my way through a couple of special exhibits and Second World War galleries — including a Spitfire rising up to meet a Harrier fighter jet in the central atrium; a very dynamic audio/visual presentation on the origins of WWII (with first-hand accounts of the near disaster at Dunkirk); and an exhibition called Witness To War, in which a collection of large-scale original artefacts are used to tell a series of unique stories about how each was employed, and by

whom. The very first of these was the nose section (with brightly illuminated interior) of "F for Freddie", a Lancaster that flew 49 bombing missions, 12 of them over Berlin, while serving in a UK-based RAAF Squadron starting in 1943.

And not to forget those two imposing First World War-era 15-inch naval cannons dominating the landscape in front of the building. Each could fire an almost 2,000-lb shell a distance of over 16 miles. The one on the left (facing the museum) participated in the June 6, 1944 D-Day landings, striking Nazi-held positions near the town of Caen, toward the eastern end of the Allied landing zones along the Normandy coastline, where many Canadians were lost.

Day Three:

WEDNESDAY SEPT 3, 2025

Battle of Britain Bunker (Uxbridge); CWGC Brookwood; RAF Biggin Hill Museum & Chapel

We check out from our London accommodations and make our way to the seaside Lansdowne Hotel in Hastings, on Kent's southeast coast, with stops en route at the Group 11 Operations Centre in Uxbridge (aka "the Battle of Britain Bunker"); and a visit to the RAF Museum & Chapel at Biggin Hill (*one of the Battle's most active stations, where scenes from 1969's Battle of Britain were filmed*)...



3 groups of pics showing what our group saw on Day Three...

Uxbridge:

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN BUNKER
EXHIBITION & VISITOR CENTRE

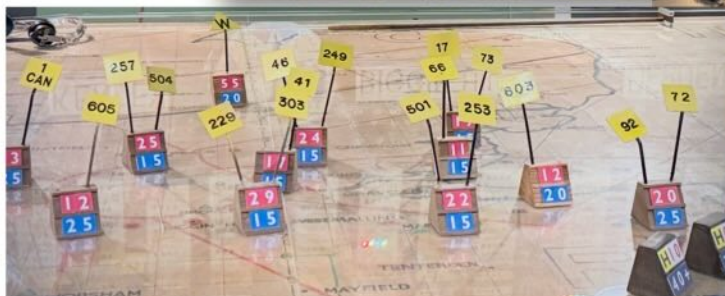
**NO 11 FIGHTER GROUP
ROYAL AIR FORCE
OPERATIONS ROOM
1939-1946**
**BENEATH THIS STONE IS THE SITE
OF THE UNDERGROUND OPERATIONS
ROOM FROM WHICH THE GREATER
PART OF THE HURRICANE & SPITFIRE
SQUADRONS WERE CONTROLLED
DURING THE
BATTLE OF BRITAIN**



statue of Air Vice-Marshall Keith Park, No 11 Group Commander

on August 16, 1940:
(some sources say Sept 15)
Winston Churchill was at the Uxbridge Ops Room, observing Park deploying all of his Group 11 forces during an escalating battle with waves of Luftwaffe fighters...

...The Prime Minister reportedly asked "What other reserves have we?" The reply he received was "There are none".



Brookwood Military Cemetery



With over 5,000 Commonwealth and almost 800 war graves of other nationalities, Brookwood Military Cemetery is the largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cemetery in the United Kingdom. It was established as the First World War (1914-1918) drew to a close and was then extended for the burial of the dead of the Second World War (1939-1945).

The service personnel buried or commemorated here represent all branches of the armed forces and all six of the CWGC's member governments: Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom. We also care for plots of Belgian, Czechoslovakian, French, German, Italian, and Polish war graves here.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

We honour and care for the men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars, ensuring they will never be forgotten. Funded by six Member Governments, our work began with building, and now maintaining, cemeteries at 23,000 locations all over the world.



Biggin Hill:



The average age of a Battle of Britain pilot was 20 years

On 20 August 1940, Winston Churchill famously named the fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain, the 'Few'. Hundreds flew from RAF Biggin Hill, and many never returned. Most were young men. The average age of a Battle of Britain pilot was 20 years. Only 19 during the battle. Plaine Cote, Geoffrey Boy...



IN THE SKY ABOVE YOUR HEAD THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN WAS FOUGHT

Spitfire K9998 QJ-K of 92 Squadron flown by Plt Off G.A. Wellum from Biggin Hill in the Battle of Britain (10 July 1940 - 31 October 1940) stands as a memorial to all Spitfire Squadrons that operated from the RAF Biggin Hill Sector in World War II

BATTLE OF BRITAIN'S
114 DAYS

The Battle of Britain is considered to have lasted between 10 July and 31 October 1940. Following the expiration of the British Evacuation Order (BEE) from Dunkirk at the end of...

Day Four:

THURSDAY SEPT 4, 2025

Kent Battle of Britain Museum
(RAF Hawkinge); Nat'l Memorial
to The Few (Capel le Ferne);
Dover Castle; town of Hastings

*[descriptions adapted from the Merit
Travel advance brochure for the tour]*

We're now in the water's-edge region of southern England, the Battle of Britain's front line that Churchill called "Hellfire Corner". It's in the skies over Kent where Canadian fighter pilots recall seeing more "fighter aircraft and parachutes tumbling to earth" than anywhere else.

Today, near the site of one of the battle's busiest fighter stations, RAF Hawkinge, we'll visit the Battle of Britain Museum, which features artifacts recovered from more than 650 crashed aircraft — purportedly the largest accumulation of aircraft, vehicles, weapons and flying equipment in Britain.



**Cameras
and camera
phones
prohibited**



**SADLY DUE TO THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY TO AID A
SERIOUS THEFT AND SEVERAL ATTEMPTED THEFTS
FROM THIS COLLECTION, TOGETHER WITH
RESTRICTIONS SET BY A NUMBER OF DONORS, MOBILE
PHONES, CAMERAS, VIDEO CAMERAS, ELECTRONIC
NOTEBOOKS AND LARGE BAGS ARE NO LONGER
ALLOWED IN THE MUSEUM.**

**PLEASE LEAVE THESE ITEMS SECURELY IN YOUR
VEHICLE, OR ALTERNATIVELY THEY CAN BE LEFT
SAFELY AT RECEPTION. IF YOUR PHONE IS LEFT IN
RECEPTION, WE WILL HAPPILY ADVISE YOU IF IT RINGS,
IF YOU ARE 'ON CALL' FOR ANY REASON.**

How staggeringly sad that in this case the reason for not allowing cameras of any kind is because of the role photography played in both attempted and ACTUAL thefts of some of these precious artefacts.

But here are a few of the very moving capsule biographies shown on display boards in front of the Museum...



Fought against overwhelming odds

Pilot Officer James Thomas Johnston was from Manitoba in Canada, the son of Scottish immigrants. He joined the Air Force in 1939. On 15 August 1940, his squadron took off to intercept enemy aircraft west of Dover, but they came across a large force of German planes. Four of the squadron's aircraft were shot down, including Johnston's, who crashed into the Channel near Dymchurch. Although he had bailed out of his aircraft, he did not deploy his parachute. His body was recovered by a search and rescue boat. A lake in Western Manitoba is named after him. He is officially recognised as one of 'The Few' due to flying operationally between the 10th July & 31st October 1940.

Funeral interrupted by German air attack



Sergeant Robert Mercer, aged 24, died on 9 May 1941. One of 'The Few' who survived the Battle of Britain, he was later patrolling over Dungeness when he was attacked by German Messerschmitt fighter aircraft. Trailing smoke he attempted a forced landing at St Margaret's Bay. Tragically his aircraft struck a concealed landmine, and he was killed. Mercer was buried in Hawkinge Cemetery on 16 May 1941. His funeral was interrupted by German fighters strafing the airfield, but his comrades continued the slow-march, calling the enemy's actions 'very bad form'. The engine and propeller of Mercer's Spitfire were recovered in the 1990s and are now displayed in the museum.

His last letter was to his mother

Sergeant Anthony 'Tony' Page was shot down over Stelling Minnis on 8 November 1940. His Hurricane's tail was shot off by a German fighter, causing it to spin and crash in a cornfield near Stelling Minnis Church. Page was 21 years old. The museum holds his medals, recovered artefacts from his plane, as well as personal effects, including a touching letter to his mother about riding his new motorbike safely. Page was buried in Hawkinge Cemetery, and his family frequently visit his grave and the museum.



Former enemy fighter ace now at rest



Hauptmann Hans Karl Mayer is one of several German airmen buried in Hawkinge Cemetery. Mayer was a Luftwaffe fighter pilot with thirty aerial victories to his name. On 14 May 1940, he shot down five British aircraft, making him an 'ace-in-a-day'. After achieving twenty aerial victories, he was awarded the Knight's Cross, one of the highest decorations awarded in the Luftwaffe. However, on 17 October, he took off on a test flight and never returned. It is not known what happened to him, but his body washed ashore near here ten days later. Mayer left behind a

pregnant wife, who gave birth to his daughter in July 1941. The museum has Mayer's Luftwaffe silver presentation schnapps cup, which was awarded to him when he claimed his twentieth victory.



[online image]

Visit the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-le-Ferne

LESS THAN 10 MINUTES AWAY BY CAR! (CT18 7JJ)



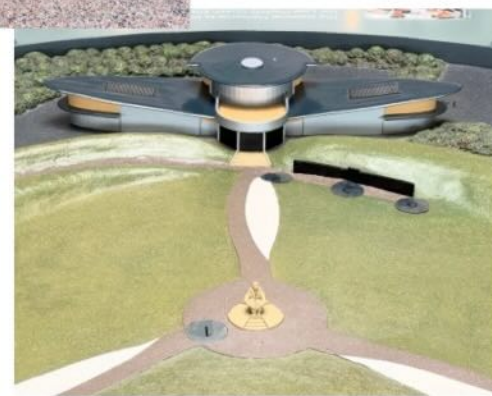
DOWN.TWO.EARTH.

stainless steel sculpture
of a downed Junkers JU 87 B STUKA



Memorial Wall, unveiled by HRH Prince Michael of Kent in July 2005. The inscribed black granite wall lists not just the names of those who died in the Battle of Britain and those who have died since, but the names of every one of the men who took part in the historic conflict that turned the tide of the Second World War. It is sobering to stand in front of just 14 carved panels and realise that fewer than 3,000 men did so much.

THE CHRISTOPHER FOXLEY-NORRIS
MEMORIAL WALL
IS DEDICATED TO THE AIRCREW
WHO FLEW DURING
THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN
10th JULY 1940 ~ 31st OCTOBER 1940
*"Never in the field of human conflict
was so much owed by so many to so few."*
WINSTON S. CHURCHILL
20th August 1940



Then at Dover:



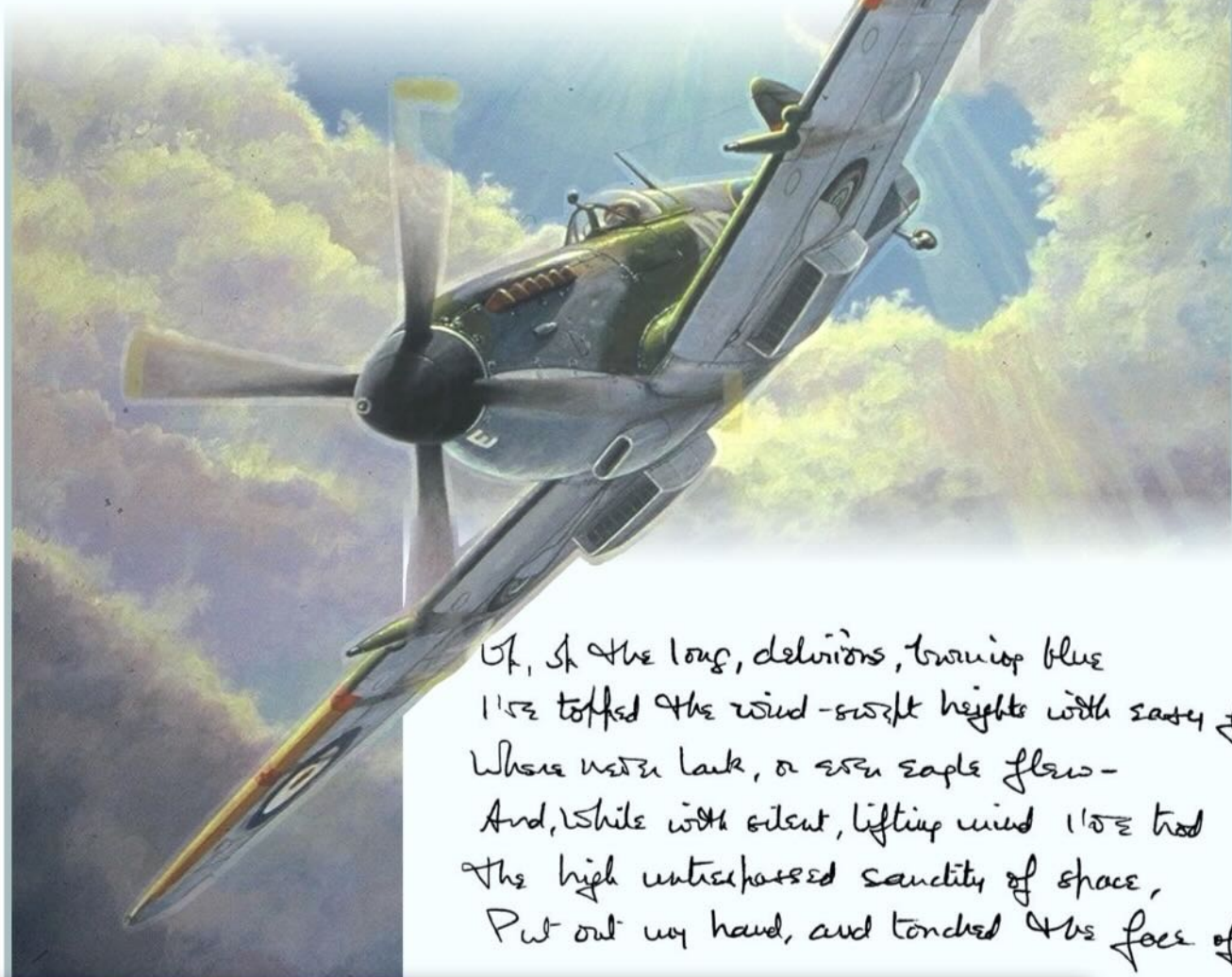
- Some iconic Cliffs (or as close as we got to them)
- An ancient Castle;
- And secret communication tunnels from WWII

Secret Wartime Tunnels



High Flight

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, - and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of - wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Swooping there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air....



Up, at the long, delirious, tumbling blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace.
Where never lark, or even eagle flew -
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

* Normally a section for aviation photos captured by CAHS-T members; in this extended Flypast edition it's an extra space for some famous words by John Magee (1922-1941), and details from three more historical depictions by artist Don Connolly (1931-2023).

Don Connolly
2023

OPPOSITE PAGE:

In the months following the initial Battle of Britain, more pilots underwent advance training in the UK, including many from North America. Inspired by his time in the nimble British-built Spitfire, and still only 19 years old, an RCAF Pilot Officer from the US named John Gillespie Magee — not long before his tragic loss in a freak training accident in late 1941 — penned an ode to the freedom and sheer exhilaration of flight itself, a poem which remains universally admired to this day.

In mid-June of 1944, only one week after the D-Day landings in France, Hitler began launching the first of his London-bound, unmanned "Vengeance Weapons" — starting with the V-1 Buzz Bomb.

Post-Second World War RCAF vet Don Connolly became one of Canada's most highly regarded aviation artists. His painting of a Spitfire (opposite) captures the same universal spirit as Magee's sonnet. And other of his many canvases remind us how even during the final year of the war, Britain continued to battle newer and deadlier airborne threats.

Ten months earlier, in mid-August of 1943, the Allies began a series of bombing raids in an attempt to disrupt the building — and delay the deployment — of these weapons, including the even more daunting V-2 rockets, at their heavily-defended manufacturing facility at Peenemunde.

Many Allied planes & their crews were lost in the effort.



Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay

KCB KBE (1883-1945)

This statue commemorates Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay, the inspirational commander of the naval forces during the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940 and D-Day in 1944. He served in the tunnels below Dover Castle.



IN MEMORY OF OPERATION DYNAMO,

THE RESCUE OF ALLIED FORCES
FROM DUNKIRK, MAY-JUNE 1940.

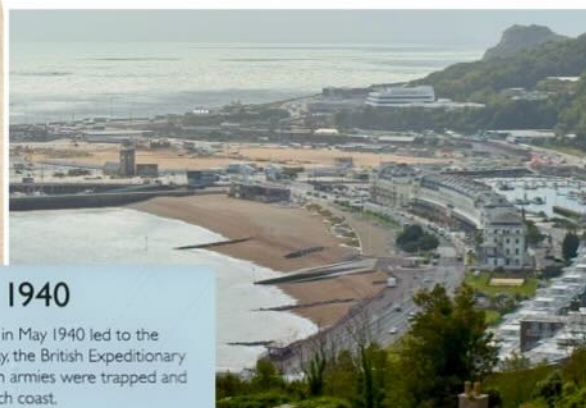
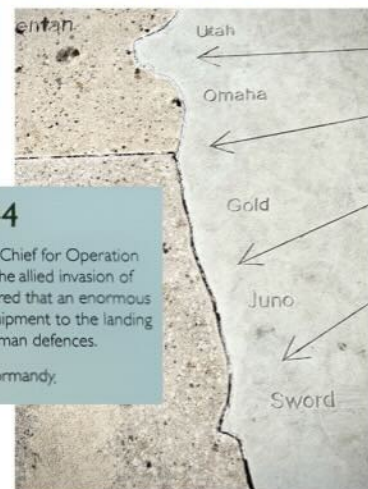
TO THE RESCUERS,
WHOSE COURAGE MADE IT POSSIBLE.

AND TO THE RESCUED,
WHO LIVED TO FIGHT AGAIN.

Operation Dynamo 1940

The German attack into western Europe in May 1940 led to the allied armies rapidly retreating. By late May, the British Expeditionary Force and parts of the French and Belgian armies were trapped and facing death and destruction on the French coast.

Vice-Admiral Ramsay had less than a week to plan Operation Dynamo to rescue the stranded army from Dunkirk. Officials thought that only 45,000 soldiers could be saved. Yet, under his inspired command, over 900 ships and boats of the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy, allied navies and civilian volunteers (the 'Little Ships') evacuated over 338,000 men in just ten days, often under intense German attacks.



from DUNKIRK to D-DAY:

On the grounds next to Dover Castle, above the underground tunnels from which he once worked, and overlooking the beach where many of the more than quarter million Dunkirk evacuees — whose escape he had

suddenly been given the job of making possible — finally made it back to British soil; is a small plaza paying tribute to **Royal Navy Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay**, who also participated in the planning of Operation Torch (the 1942 Allied landings in North Africa) and Operation Husky (the invasion of Sicily in 1943). That same year he was appointed the Allied Naval Commander-In-Chief, and led seaborne operations during the Normandy landings in June '44. Sadly, Ramsay would not live to see the end of the war. He was killed in an air crash in early January of 1945, while taking off from Paris to meet with Field Marshal Montgomery in Brussels.

Back in Hastings at days end, Ian Cowan leads an informal walking tour of the seaside town, whose scars from having been in such a vulnerable position during the war have now largely healed. But we do get to see the exterior of a distinctive corner house, which in the early 2000s was used as the Hastings home of

police detective Christopher Foyle, whose investigations on the popular series **Foyle's War** were cleverly interwoven with the real-life circumstances of WWII, especially as those events affected life in a seaside town that suddenly found itself in the direct flight path of an unrelenting enemy from the skies just across the water.



Day Five:

FRIDAY SEPT 5, 2025

Thorpe Abbots USAAF Museum (Norfolk); Bill Tutte memorial (Newmarket); American Military Cemetery at Madingley (Cambridge)

[descriptions adapted from the Merit Travel advance brochure for the tour]

Leaving the historic Battle of Britain region, we travel north to the **Thorpe Abbots Air Base**. Originally an RAF station, from mid-1943 this base became home to the **100th Bomb Group** of the **US Army's Eighth Air**

Force, and its story was depicted in the recent "Masters of the Air" mini-series. It was from here the real life airmen & Flying Fortresses of *The Bloody 100th* launched their 306 daylight combat missions over occupied Europe. **The Memorial Museum** (in the extensively restored control tower) features artifacts, combat reports, letters, diaries and photos.

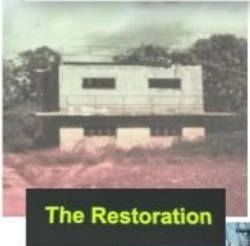
As well as opening the facility specially for our group, the volunteers there presented a slideshow of the base's history, and even treated us to a meal!



The 100th Bomb Group Memorial Museum



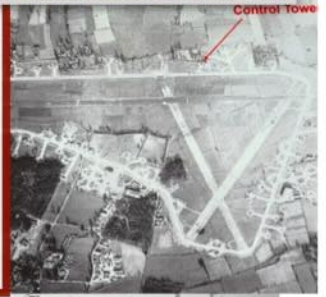
From RAF to USAAF - 1943



The Restoration



An all-North American day begins with a warm welcome at the Thorpe Abbots airfield, now a memorial museum dedicated to its principal occupants during the war. The US Army Air Corps' **100th Bomb Group** was one of many **8th Air Force** bases which would never have existed had 1940's Battle of Britain been lost, but whose B-17s and B-24s now alternated with night missions flown by the Halifax & Lancaster bombers of the RAF. Both operations incurred heavy losses, and sadly ended up inflicting same on civilian populations of Allied and Axis cities alike.



BREMEN
Friday October 8 1943
TARGET MAP



German 88mm flugabwehrkanone (flak)



ITEMS FOUND ON THIS AIRFIELD



The 'Bloody Hundredth'

100th BOMB GROUP'S WORST MISSIONS

Date	Target	Crew Losses
August 17, 1943	Regensburg	9
October 8, 1943	Bremen	7
October 10, 1943	Munster	12
March 6, 1944	Berlin	15
May 24, 1944	Berlin	9
July 31, 1944	Munster	8
September 11, 1944	Ruhrland	13
December 31, 1944	Hamburg	12

"DID WE DESERVE TO BE CALLED THE 'BLOODY 100TH'? OTHER OUTFITS LOST MORE PLANES AND CREWS THAN WE DID. WHAT MARKED US WAS THAT WHEN WE LOST, WE LOST BIG. THESE EIGHT MISSIONS GAVE US OUR NOTORIETY." —HARRY H. CROSBY, A WING AND A PRAYER

Coded Transmissions...

...yet another airborne threat to Britain's survival in WWII. And in the town of Newmarket we attend a ceremony at a memorial to British-born Canadian mathematician **Bill Tutte**, whose breakthroughs in cryptanalysis, while less well known than those of Alan Turing and his code-breaking coworkers at **Bletchley Park**, made equally vital contributions to air, sea and land intelligence during the war.



The Brothers Duntley...



above:
John Duntley (1924-2018);
Fred Duntley (1916-1944);
Burt Duntley (1921-1944)

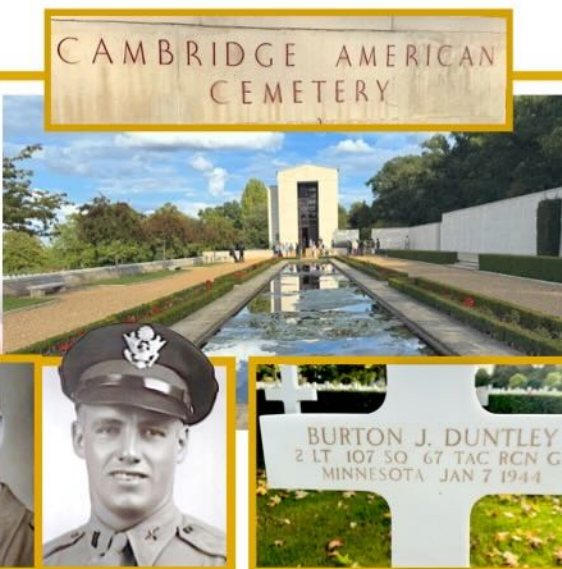


photo: Ted Barris

One of the USAAF bomber crew vets I've been fortunate to have known was John Duntley from Minnesota. In Sept 1944, and still just 19 years old, Duntley began flying combat missions as a Navigator on B-24 Liberators for the 485th Bomb Group, part of the Fifteenth Air Force based in Italy.

He and I met some seven decades later, through the annual reunions of the 485th. When we later spoke at his home near Minneapolis, John was 92 — but still had clear memories of seeing the plane on which my great-uncle-in-law and his crewmates were riding fall out of formation, moments after breaking apart in a sudden ball of flame.

Another day he would never forget came the following Spring, when he returned to the 485th's base from a much later mission, and was immediately summoned to his Squadron HQ. There he was told of his eldest brother's death fighting in the Philippines, and how instead of being the youngest of three brothers, John was now his family's only surviving son, and as a result would be sent back home immediately.

And that was because earlier that same year, months before arriving in Italy, John's other brother, Burt Duntley, had been killed in a training accident at an air base in England, and was interred here at **Madingley**. It's the only American WWII Cemetery in the UK, but just one of 26 such First & Second World War Cemeteries (+ 31 Memorials) across Europe and the Pacific, all immaculately maintained by the **American Battle Monuments Commission**. Our group's visit to this ABMC location was a chance to pay respects to one of two brothers lost to a gentleman I was privileged to have known, however briefly, so many years later. And it was a sobering reminder of how inherently dangerous simply *training* for any kind of aerial combat often became.

Day Six:

SATURDAY SEPT 6, 2025

Duxford: The Battle Of Britain Memorial Air Show



Starting late Friday we spend two nights in Cambridge, allowing our group a full day on Saturday at the nearby **Duxford Air Base** (now part of the Imperial War Museum group), to take in Day One of their very special **weekend air show**, saluting the Battle of Britain's 85th anniversary.

**"NEVER WAS SO MUCH
OWED BY SO MANY
TO SO FEW"**

THE PRIME MINISTER



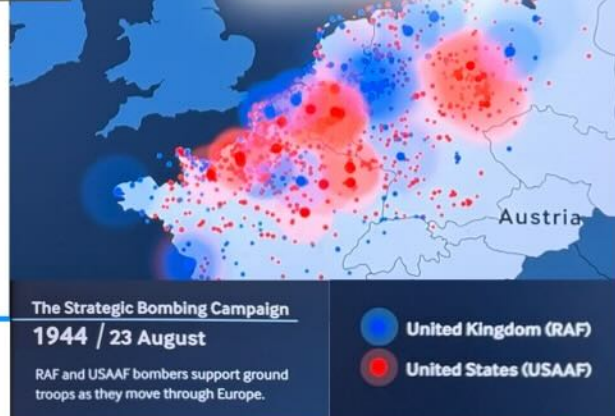
above: the Churchill quotation displayed at pretty much every museum & memorial we visited



In the general Air & Space hangar: an early Concorde with the original generic livery...



Below & right: some of the many exhibits in the American Air Museum hangar...



A Day at Duxford: something you do while already planning your next visit, after realizing there's just too much to see. But *our* day at Duxford concluded with a welcome surprise, when **the RAF's Lancaster**, one of only two such iconic aircraft still flying (alongside Hamilton Ontario's much-prized edition), made it all the way down from Scotland in time for a couple of crowd-pleasing flypasts. (It had only been officially scheduled for the Sunday.)

I'd spent my initial Day at Duxford on a trip two years earlier, but not on a day with such a unique aerial display, an inspiring tribute whose final formation included **nineteen Hurricanes** and **Spitfires** filling the sky together.

The base at Duxford played important roles in both the original **Battle of Britain** and then, some three decades later, as a filming location for scenes from the 1969 drama.



Part of the airshow featured a choreographed simulation of an actual dogfight between Royal Air Force Spitfires and Luftwaffe fighters near the Dover coast, with the vintage narration of a live BBC radio report calling all the play-by-play action (*with arguably a bit more enthusiasm than really necessary*). But an equally engaging highlight for me was an easy-to-miss audio/visual display projected onto the walls of the **Duxford Operations Room**, as voices from the ground and from the air — including that of the supremely confident Squadron Leader Douglas Bader — offer a You-Are-There, in-their-own-words re-creation of the Sept 15, 1940 aerial battle directly over London — now considered the day the tide turned against Göring's vaunted Luftwaffe, along with his boss's plan to render the skies over England RAF-free, and invasion-ready.



14:10

15th of September 1940

'Ops B'
Deputy Controller

All squadrons except 2-4-2
now airborne, sir.

Douglas Bader
Big Wing Commander

40 enemy bombers to port.
Climb to Angels 2-0
to intercept.

Josef Hubacek
RAF pilot

Cockpit full of smoke,
tail coming apart.
Attempting to bail out.



Day Seven:

SUNDAY SEPT 7, 2025

International Bomber Command;
Lincoln Cathedral; Thorpe Camp
Visitor Centre (incl 617 Squadron)



From the Cambridge area our group continues north to the town of Lincoln, home of the

International Bomber Command Centre, and of a unique RAF Chapel inside Lincoln Cathedral.



The museum & memorial for **Bomber Command**, in the heart of Lincolnshire, is yet another site to which I'll have to pay a return visit. But this time the lack of time was mostly just due to my losing track of time – missing out on what I'm told were some very engaging interactive displays in favour of some engaging conversations with other visitors who happened to be on site that day – including one of their volunteer docents, who I noticed was wearing a cap paying tribute to "VeRA", North America's still flying **Lancaster** from Hamilton Ontario.



Describing the rapid growth of **RAF Bomber Command** from its beginning in 1936, the IBC website writes: "By September 1944, around a quarter of a million men and women were putting over 1,600 aircraft in the air every night, in an effort to bring the war to an end." It was an effort that would claim the lives of over fifty-five and a half thousand aircrew, at an average age of just 23, and not including over 18,000 more either wounded or taken prisoner.

Their sacrifice is also remembered in a special chapel inside the nearby **Lincoln Cathedral**, whose prominent towers were used as a welcome landmark for crews returning to area bases from long missions across the Channel.



Memorial Books list the names of over 25,600 airmen — including some 2,500 from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Southern Rhodesia, and almost 700 members of the Polish Air Force — who flew out of seven different Royal Air Force stations in and around Lincolnshire during the Second World War, and who sadly never returned.

A busy Sunday continued over at the **Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre**, which houses a growing collection of displays and artefacts focused on bomber squadrons based in that same Lincolnshire area, including what quickly became the best known group of all: the elite 617 Squadron, formed to take on the audacious and Top Secret **Dambusters** raid of 1943:



Wing Commander Guy Gibson's Lancaster with bouncing bomb in position



Dambusting Duo...

The Team Behind Operation Chastise



Barnes Wallis was the 55-year old aeronautic engineer who devised & field-tested the plan. **Guy Gibson** was the accomplished 24-year old Wing Commander chosen to hand pick, train, and ultimately lead the 19 seven-man Lancaster crews who would risk everything to carry it out; crews who would not be told their precise targets until the day they left England, on the night of May 16, 1943.

That was two and a half years since the official "Battle of Britain" had concluded, but bombers from Nazi Germany had continued blitzing civilian populations in London, Coventry, Liverpool, Greenock and more UK cities – and Allied bombers were gearing up to respond in kind.

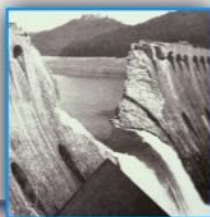
But the goal of the Dambusters raid – beyond a much-needed morale boost at home — was to disrupt the Nazi's ability to wage war by targeting three energy-supplying dams in Germany's main industrial region of the Ruhr Valley. Wallis had created a now famous "bouncing bomb" to overcome the formidable defences of these large reservoir/dams (see exhibits at the *RAF Hendon Museum*), but which required being released at an exact distance from custom-fitted bombers flying at an exact speed — and at the dangerously low level of just 60 feet.



617 Squadron, Scampton.

19 Lancasters (each modified to deliver a single Wallis-designed cylindrical bomb) and 133 crewmen (mostly British, but also cross-Commonwealth) left RAF Scampton on the evening of May 16, 1943. Eight aircraft and 53 crewman did not return the next morning, with three more becoming PoWs.

With two of the dams breached (though not destroyed) the mission was declared a success, albeit a very costly one, especially since the resultant flooding is estimated to have cost between 1,000 and 1,600 civilian lives, many of them forced labourers from Russia. Wallis was deeply troubled by the unexpectedly high loss of life.



THE DAM BUSTERS

Operation Chastise: 16th-17th May 1943



Displays at Thorpe Camp include details of every Lancaster bomber that flew in Operation Chastise, and individual bios of every 617 Squadron member who participated, with descriptions of what each man experienced. One of those was pilot Joe McCarthy of the RCAF, and the only American to fly on the Dambuster raid. Like almost 9,000 other young Americans, he had come to Canada early in the war to get his wings and join the fight against Hitler, but despite the US having now joined the conflict, Joe (like just over half of his fellow "imports") had chosen to continue serving in the RCAF.

Displays at Thorpe Camp include details of every Lancaster bomber that flew in Operation Chastise, and individual bios

McCarthy was by all accounts one of the best-liked members of 617 Squadron. The same perhaps cannot be said of Squadron leader Guy Gibson, the universal respect for whom was more based on professional admiration than personal warmth. Still, his new 617 Squadron continued to take on demanding assignments, including the sinking of the deadly German battleship Tirpitz in November of '44. Tragically, Gibson had already been killed in action two months earlier, when the Mosquito fighter/bomber he was flying crashed on a mission in Norway. Gibson was still only 26.

In hindsight, the strategic significance of the Wallis-devised and Gibson-led Dambuster raid remains debatable, since lack of any effective follow-up allowed the Germans to repair the two damaged dams and their affected factories in a matter of months. But there's no doubt as to the mission's PR impact, how much like the ill-fated "Great Escape" (the bold operation by imprisoned Commonwealth airmen less than a year later), its staggering ingenuity and sheer audacity, plus the inspiring dedication of its participants, still resonate more than eight decades later. So it was no surprise that so many of the venues we saw on this tour included material referencing the iconic Dambusters story (including the images used in this section, all of them taken at the Thorpe centre, which now acts in part as a kind of stand-in for the recently closed RAF Scampton some 30 miles north-west, which had been the Dambuster's actual home base.)



Thorpe Camp also has displays honouring RAF prisoners of war, which naturally feature the still hard-to-imagine preparations at Stalag Luft III in occupied Poland, for what would one day become the best-known PoW operation in history.

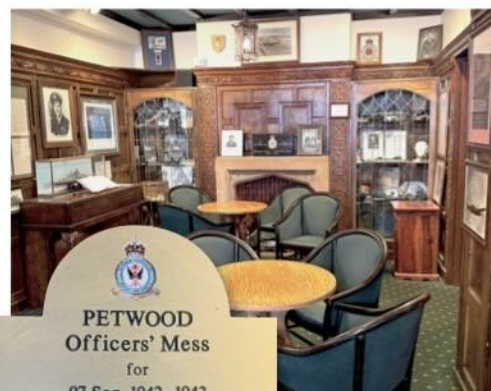


Day Eight:

MONDAY SEPT 8, 2025

**Petwood Hotel (Woodhall Spa);
Battle of Britain Memorial Flight;
Derwent Dam**

Monday night was a truly memorable and historic venue in itself: The **Petwood Hotel**, near the town and former RAF base of **Woodhall Spa**. It had an Old World elegance inside & out, and was especially proud of its WWII / RAF heritage.



Who flew from R.A.F. Woodhall Spa

The hotel's wood-panelled bar served as an **Officers' Mess** for a series of local Squadrons, including No. 617 in its post-Dambuster years. The room now acts a kind of mini-museum, its walls festooned with RAF artefacts, art, and even decor.

The hotel's wood-panelled bar served as an



An unexpected accent to the hotel's landscaped grounds is a full-scale prototype of the **Barnes Wallis "famous bouncing bomb"...**



Despite its less than accurate headline, a vintage clipping from just after the raid shows how quickly Britain's most secret project became the country's most celebrated counter punch against The Reich's unrelenting aerial attacks.

Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (at RAF Coningsby)

First stop on Monday was at the nearby **Battle of Britain Memorial Flight**, with a staff-led tour of the main hangar, followed by time to explore the exhibits. A hangar highlight was seeing "Thumper" (the RAF's only airworthy Lancaster) up close, after witnessing her overhead just two days earlier on its surprise appearance at Duxford, and which was now in aerial dry dock for



The aircraft on display today are:

- LANCASTER - PA474
- SPITFIRE - P7350 (Mk IIa)
- SPITFIRE - TE311 (Mk XVI)
- SPITFIRE - PM631 (Mk PRXIX)
- HURRICANE - PZ865 (Mk IIC)
- HURRICANE - LF363 (Mk IIC)

extensive off-season maintenance. Displays summarized



the original Battle of Britain and the air war that followed, providing additional perspectives on many RAF stories and sites our tour had already visited.



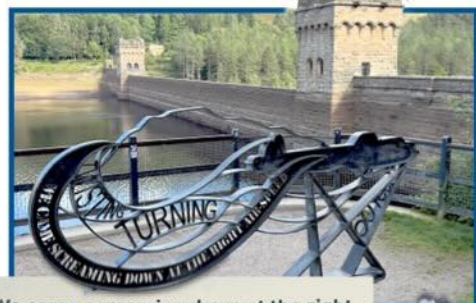
Flying Helmet, Goggles and Oxygen Mask as worn by Battle of Britain Pilots



Sqn/Ldr. Douglas Bader with Canadian pilots of No. 242 Squadron in front of his Hawker Hurricane

Derwent Reservoir Dam

Our string of Dambusters-related sites continued that afternoon, after driving west into England's scenic Peak District — for a first-hand look at the **Derwent Reservoir Dam**. Although smaller in scale than Mohne and other dams they would soon be targeting, its design and surrounding topography made Derwent a suitable practice site for the crews to rehearse the precise (and perilous) extreme low level approaches they would have to follow when they reached the real thing.



"We came screaming down at the right air speed. Then we were twisting and turning our way through the valley"

Wing Commander Guy Gibson



Standing in the place where its hand-picked crews rehearsed the daunting logistics of a mission from which they knew many might not return, made a deep connection to the one-of-a-kind history this site represents.



Day Nine:

TUESDAY SEPT 9, 2025

Dambusters Memorial (Woodhall Spa); Scopwick Cemetery; Bletchley Park (& The National Museum of Computing)



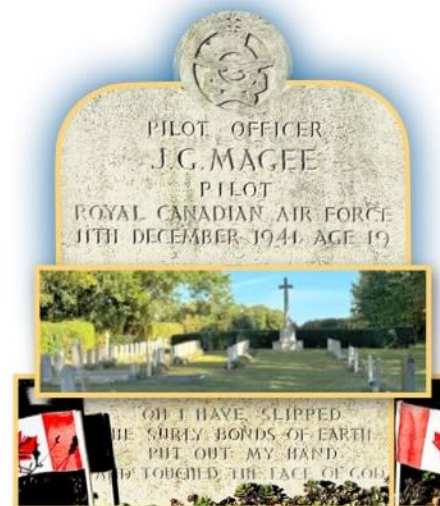
The tour's last full day saw additional attempts to catch up on a timeline that was once again pressed for time (and never did fully recover!).

After another group photo as we departed the elegant **Petwood Hotel** (above), our first two stops were sites we were originally scheduled to have already visited...



First was the **memorial to 617 Squadron and the Dambusters** in the nearby village of Woodhall Spa. It features a cleverly designed remembrance wall that conjures a stylized image of a dam broken wide open.

Then we made our way to what would have been the previous day's final stop: the churchyard cemetery in the town of Scopwick. This unassuming setting is the final resting place of **Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee**, author of the timeless poem **High Flight**, widely regarded as the best known and most quoted meditation on the joyful exhilaration of flight in the English language.



Like Dambuster pilot Joe McCarthy, Magee was one of thousands of young Americans who came to Canada early in the war to join the RCAF. He got his wings at the Uplands base in Ottawa, and then continued his advanced flight preparation in the UK. Sadly, despite his obvious piloting skills, he was killed in a freak training accident while flying his British-built Spitfire in December of 1941, at the nearby base of RAF Digby.

Only three months earlier, Gillespie had sent his parents in the US a handwritten copy of a sonnet he'd composed called **High Flight**. Shortly after his death they affirmed the RCAF's request to use their son's poem in its promotional literature, and its popularity quickly grew. That single poem has become an inspiration to people of every generation and age.

And its author was just 19 years old.

The OTHER Airborne Battleground...

Still officially a secret operation two decades after the war, its former staff still sworn to secrecy and its facilities not made public till three decades after that, **Bletchley Park** is now one of the UK's most visited Second World War histourism sites.

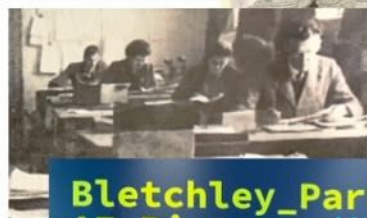


SECRETS REVEALED
INTRODUCING BLETCHLEY PARK



THE TURING BOMBE REBUILD PROJECT

2 BREAKING THE 'UNBREAKABLE'
THE TILTMAN BREAK



Bletchley Park's AI_Pioneers()

THE TUTTE BREAK

Relying on instinct and lucky guesses Tutte uncovered the fixed patterns of dots and crosses generated by both the 1st 'Chi-wheel' and the 1st 'Psi-wheel', as he called them. He also deduced that



The threats to Britain during the war came not only from the air, but over the airwaves as well. And the effort to keep your own communications secret, while secretly struggling to unravel the secrecy of your enemy's, resulted in its own ever-escalating see-saw battle. It spurred the forces of Nazi Germany to develop a diabolically opaque coding system using a series of ever more complex, multi-rotor "Enigma" machines, and in turn compelled the Allies – first in Poland, then in the UK, and finally in partnership with the US – to discreetly recruit their best code-busting brains, throw them together in one spot with every resource they could want, and turn them loose.

In Britain those brains were assembled at an elegant country estate an hour west of RAF Duxford. In the large grounds surrounding the mansion a network of "huts" – unassuming low-rise bunkers and workspaces – soon housed an ultra-secret army of technicians, translators, clerical staff and support workers (many thousands by the end of the war) – all serving the needs of a core team of a dozen or so mathematicians, cryptanalysts, and puzzle solvers.

The vital success this group achieved was never a single Eureka moment by just one person, but a succession of evolving victories which the Nazis (fortunately for the world) never fully appreciated. Not only did the Bletchley team's work save countless lives, and shorten the war by what many now estimate as much as two years, it also led directly to the world's first examples of programmable computers. This work continued following the war, and is why the Bletchley facility now includes the separately housed National Museum of Computing. The NMC has its own impressive series of displays, with areas for special exhibits, such as (when our tour visited) an interactive overview of Artificial Intelligence.

This was my second visit to Bletchley in as many years, and I left it with still much more remaining to be uncovered.

RIGHT: when you can't help noticing how state-of-the-art tech you once used is now on display in a museum (in its "early history" section).



Day Ten:

TUES/WED SEPT 9/10, 2025

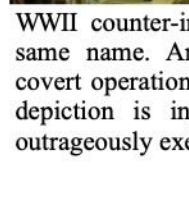
A Farewell Dinner, and a Final Express Bus



Back at one of London's Heathrow-area hotels, the tour officially winds up with a traditional Farewell Dinner.



Back on the bus the next morning, attendee Ken Mist takes the opportunity to capture one last group photo, as we head to Heathrow for our flights home. (Most of us, at least. In my case it was to connect to an Underground station, and proceed to the London neighbourhood where I'd be spending two additional nights for some



The show was the highly successful West End production of **Operation Mincemeat**, which a few early arriving tour attendees had already seen. Challenging to describe, it's a cheeky, high-energy, five-person musical (yes, a musical) telling the unlikely but absolutely true story of the high-stakes British WWII counter-intelligence gamble of the same name. And just like that original covert operation from 1943, this theatrical depiction is ingeniously conceived and outrageously executed. ★★★★★

And the Days Beyond:

Mission Debrief...

Below is a day-by-day summary of the highlights our group was able to see (plus a few more we weren't).

But it would seem that at least for now, The Battle of Britain and the campaigns that followed are indeed being remembered with the dignity and respect such a pivotal time in history demands. And in compelling detail, since most of us could easily have spent much more time at pretty much every site we visited.

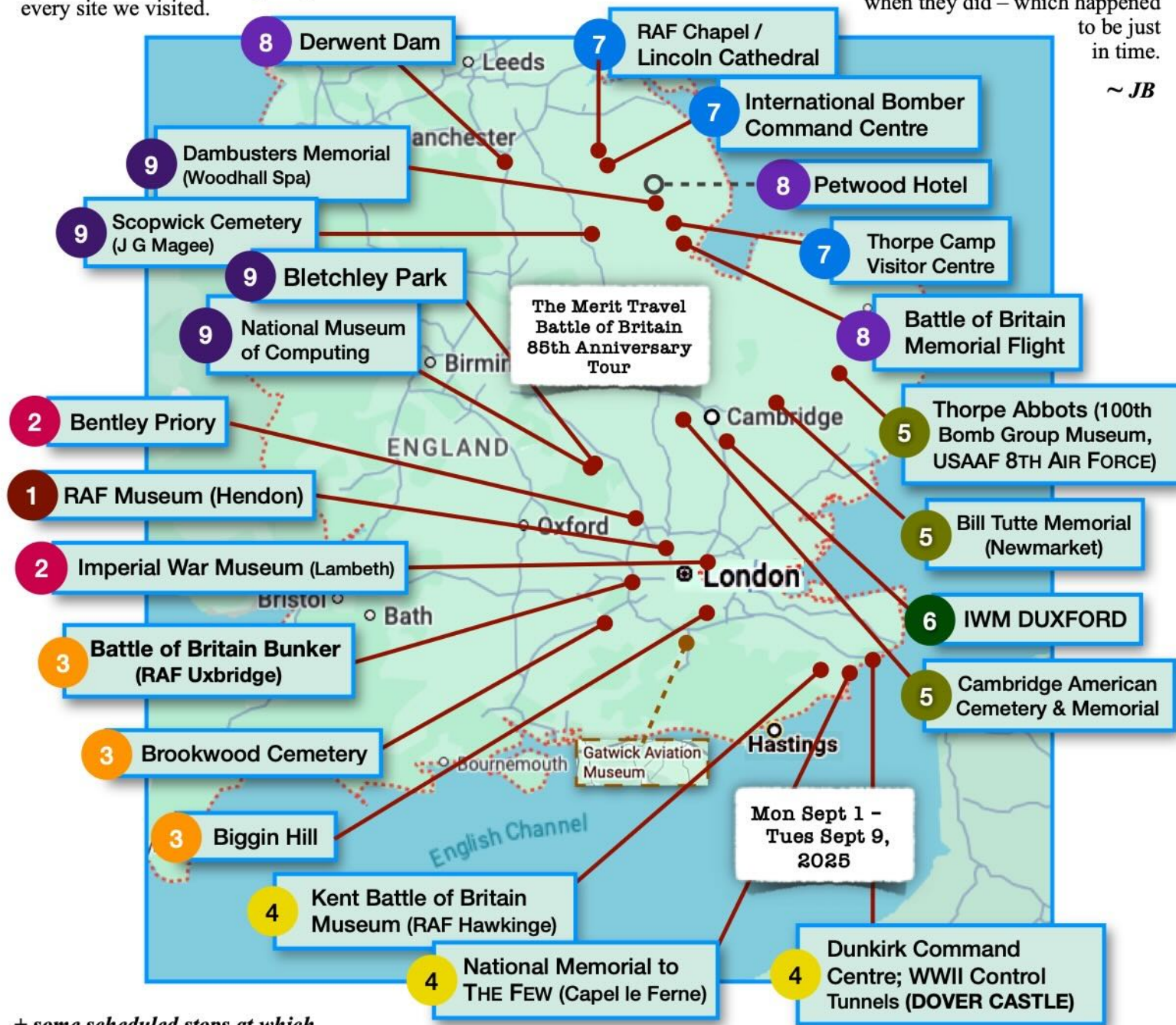
Personally I'm already hoping for a second chance to take in more of the experiences offered at many of these sites — not to mention some of the many other related sights we never had the chance to even consider, none of which could have been squeezed into such an already full, nine-day itinerary, no matter how meticulously planned.

But all that said, what this example of hard-core histourism did include I can honestly describe as a once in a lifetime experience, since it provided

the opportunity in the most direct You-Are-There way imaginable to recall a single time in history in which the parameters of my own life, and the lives of everyone I know or have ever encountered, were being determined in perhaps the starkest way imaginable.

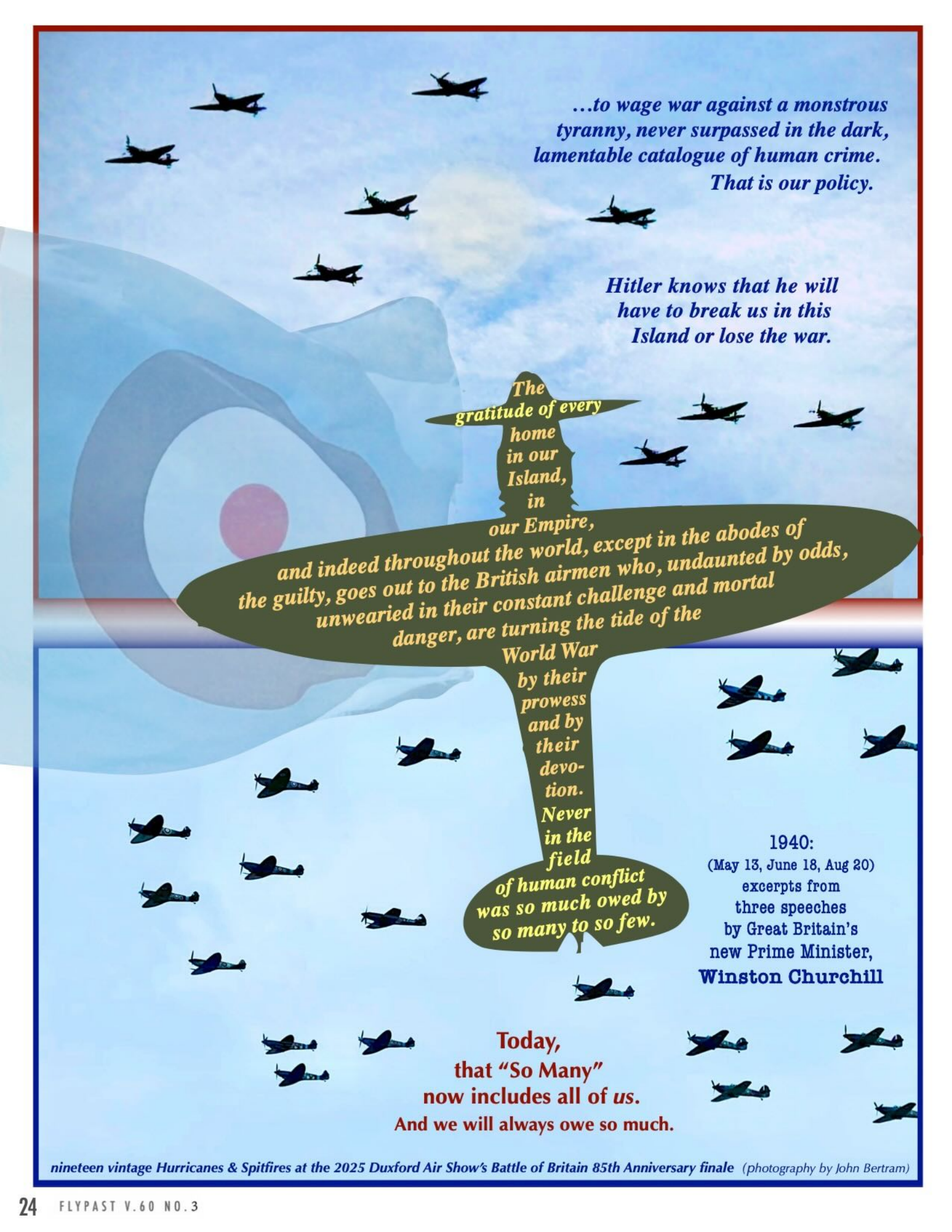
I don't believe it's an exaggeration to say the fate of civilization was passing through a kind of global hourglass, and we're so lucky just the right grains of sand managed to squeeze through that perilously narrow opening exactly when they did — which happened to be just in time.

~ JB



+ some scheduled stops at which we ended up not being able to stop...

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|---|---|---|
| <p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Churchill War Rooms (IWM Westminster); - Bomber Command Memorial; - St Clement Danes RAF Church; - Battle of Britain Monument (Embankment) | <p>7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre (w RAF Lancaster Just Jane) | <p>8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ladybower Inn |
| <p>9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Runnymede Air Forces Memorial | | |



*...to wage war against a monstrous
tyranny, never surpassed in the dark,
lamentable catalogue of human crime.
That is our policy.*

*Hitler knows that he will
have to break us in this
Island or lose the war.*

*The
gratitude of every
home
in our
Island,
in
our Empire,
and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of
the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds,
unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal
danger, are turning the tide of the*

*World War
by their
prowess
and by
their
devotion.
Never
in the
field
of human conflict
was so much owed by
so many to so few.*

1940:
(May 13, June 18, Aug 20)
excerpts from
three speeches
by Great Britain's
new Prime Minister,
Winston Churchill

**Today,
that "So Many"
now includes all of us.
And we will always owe so much.**