

Air Marshal, General, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As a serving airman, it is an honour and a privilege to be present today as we remember the dangers and sacrifice of the generation who served this Country and the Allied effort in World War II.

Today is not without its conflicts and dangers, but they do not come close to the all-pervasive challenges of extended global all-out war and the deprivation of an occupied Belgium.

We are grateful to the Royal Air Forces Association for this Service of Remembrance today to remind us of the 750 or so Belgians who escaped to England in the early 40s and joined the RAF – some to become fighter pilots like Bobby Laumans and some to join bomber squadrons and to become part of the force that in the darkest days became the only sign that Belgian civilians could see that the war was not lost.

Between June 1 1940 and May 8 1945 521 Belgians officers served as pilots or navigator in the RAF. 128 died for their country. Of the 29 belgian pilots who participated in the Battle of Britain only 22 survived. We are reminded too of the enormous contribution paid by Special Agents and members of the escape lines in Belgium: from Comet Line alone, over 800 allied airmen were helped at the cost of the lives of some 150 civilian 'helpers'. Their courage and devotion to duty continues to inspire. We are reminded too of the efforts made in many towns and villages across Belgium to keep these memories alive within the new generation in their communities and with the families of downed airmen that are still remembered today. (Lest we forget).

We do well to remember these linkages with the past and to continue them into the future. To remember, honour and preserve our collaborative history. On behalf of the Vielles tiges of Belgium, the Belgian Air Force Association, the Comet and de la Fraternelle des agents parachutistes, I thank the Royal Air Force Association for their initiative and for giving us this opportunity to come together and for providing the permanent record of the event with the new plaque. We are pleased to see this fine Chapel in the National Basilica expanding in its role to provide a central focus for Air Force Remembrance throughout Belgium.