

Trophies & Awards Banquet Thursday 29th Oct 2015

Your Royal Highness, visiting Masters, distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to our Trophies and Awards Banquet in the magnificent surroundings of Guildhall - and thank you for your tremendous support for this event. After such splendid food, company, music and awards I do not intend to spoil the occasion by speaking for too long.

2015 has certainly been a year of anniversaries and commemorations: 800 years since the first signing of Magna Carta, 600 since Agincourt and 200 since Waterloo. In May we commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Allies' victory over Hitler and his determination to create a greater German Reich. In August we remembered VJ Day. Closer to home - and with an aviation link - Britten-Norman celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first flight of the Islander. 40 years ago, like James Bond in the latest film, Spectre, I was shot at whilst flying an Islander but, unlike Bond, this was my first time under fire - and - it was from rebels in The Dhofar!

More importantly 75 years ago, in the summer of 1940, the only obstacle to Hitler's drive for domination of Europe was RAF Fighter Command and its 3000 aircrew - forever after referred to as "The Few". Of these, 500 were not even born in Britain. They came from occupied and other countries, the Commonwealth and the Empire. Eleven renounced their American citizenship and risked prison to fight in the Battle of Britain. Of course it was not just the Royal Air Force who flew in the Battle - two Fleet Air Arm Squadrons and a number of Royal Naval pilots also flew in Fighter Command.

Contrary to popular belief the Battle of Britain was not fought on the playing fields of Eton. Barely 200 of the 3000 had come from British public schools. The majority were from the Volunteer Reserve and the Auxiliary Air Force. They were part-time pilots, training at weekends and on holidays. These young men, many in their early twenties, were the brightest and best of their generation. Of those 3000 aircrew who took part during the summer of 1940, 544 were killed in the Battle itself and 791 of the survivors did not live to see victory and the end of the war.

We must, though, not forget "The Many". It is easy to overlook the fact that the whole country was behind these young men, particularly those with a direct role in supporting them. The many ground crews and trades in the RAF; the Waffs who did everything from pack their parachutes to follow their last cries of desperation through a headset in a plotting room. Civilians, too, played their part. Ferry pilots (men & women), aircraft makers, telephone engineers and a whole host of auxiliary roles to keep order, fight fires and rescue casualties. It was Total War but, for the first time, it was fought in full view of a watching and anxious public. Sydney Camm and R J Mitchel also deserve mention for, without the Hurricane and Spitfire, this gladiatorial aerial combat would not have been won. This is why The Battle of Britain has become a historical "legend" - and quite rightly so.

However, the efforts and sacrifices of pilots and aircrew of Fighter Command must be put into context. That summer, during the Battle of Britain Bomber and Coastal Commands lost more men than Fighter Command on operations. Particularly in night-time attacks on Channel ports where invasion preparations were taking place. Later in the war Bomber Command would often lose more men in a single night than were lost to Fighter Command during the entire Battle of Britain.

These are parallel figures only – and - they by no means diminish the sacrifice of those who took part in the defence of Britain in 1940.

So let us all ensure that the memory of "The Few" never fades - they gave the world a breathing space and a springboard from which to launch the eventual – and thankfully - successful counter-attack.

Many of our awards presented this evening show the continued dedication, determination, bravery and tenacity of the Aviation fraternity - and are proof that the spirit of 'The Few' lives on to this day. It is both humbling and rewarding to be able to witness the presentation of these awards to such deserving individuals and crews. Furthermore, it is very important that the aviation community recognises these meritorious achievements and brave feats and I'm sure all our members and our guests join me in congratulating all of you - The Award Winners - once again, on your endeavours.

We are joined this evening by three Masters and their wives;

Mr Nick Andrews, Master Patermaker.

Mr Michael Kimber, Master Coachmaker and

Captain Jim Conybeare, Master Mariner

Guests from four of our affiliated Units also join us;

Captain Tim Henry, former CO of and representing HMS Ocean

Colonel Richard Green, Regimental Colonel The Army Air Corps

Group Captain Simon Patterson The Station Commander of Royal Air Force Benson and

Wing Commander Jason Stevens representing the Royal Air Force's Central Flying School

You are all most welcome as are those Masters of Livery Companies and personnel from our affiliated Units here as private guests.

Before I welcome both our Guest of Honour and our speaker, it is my pleasure to convey our thanks to our learned & gallant clerk, Paul Tacon, for his work in making this Banquet so successful. Behind every good Clerk there is an office of stalwarts: Ruth, Pat, James and Julie -thank you for your loyalty and efforts shown to The Company throughout the year. Thanks are also due to the London Banqueting Ensemble for their exceptional entertainment and especially the rousing post horn gallop. Last, but by now means least, this banquet would not have run so smoothly without the consummate skill of the Caters, Party Ingredients and the staff of Guildhall.

Your Royal Highness, it has been a pleasure to entertain you and we are honoured that you have presented the awards this evening. I need not remind you of your long association with our Company, some 63 years now, first as Grand Master from 1952 until 2002, and since then as our Patron. After all this time you remain a staunch supporter of The Company, kindly agreeing to attend many of our events. Your enjoyment of aviation is legendary - as is your spontaneous wit Sir.

I am told that a few years ago, when you used to take the controls of The Royal Flight Aircraft, you were inbound to Marham from somewhere in the north of the Realm. Air Traffic Control was getting rather agitated that you were about to route directly through a certain notified restricted area in north Norfolk. They suggested you should alter track to avoid it. I believe your response to them was,

“Oh never mind, I AM the owner”.

Sir you are most welcome here tonight.

Our speaker this evening is Sir Gerald Howarth, MP for Aldershot. Both his parents served in the RAF during World War II, his father on Lord Mountbatten's Staff, his Mother as a Waff plotter. In 1965 Sir Gerald won an RAF Flying Scholarship and obtained his PPL. He went on to fly with Southampton University Air Squadron and was commissioned into the RAFVR in 1968. Still flying with the RAE Aero Club at Farnborough, he is President of the British Air Display Association, a Trustee of the Vulcan to the Sky Charity and joint patron of the British Disabled Flying Association.

Having been the MP for Cannock & Burntwood for 9 years and now Aldershot for the past 18 years I find it impressive that he has managed to continue in aviation - and that he can count Tigers, the Edgley Optica, the Hawk, the Spitfire and Pilatus PC-21 amongst aircraft he has flown. Sir - you are most welcome and we look forward to your words this evening. Before Sir Gerald rises I would ask you all to join me as I propose the toast.

To

“The Few”, our Award Winners and our Guests !