

PAFA TRUST DISSOLUTION LUNCH – 4 Nov. 2010

Chairman's Speaking Notes

Ladies and gentlemen, this is justly a celebration of much that has been achieved by the Polish Air Force Association Trust. But it is also, inevitably, a poignant occasion.

Seventy years ago the Battle of Britain had just been fought and won in the skies above us. Young men of the Royal Air Force and of the Polish Air Force gave their all: 'for your freedom and ours'.

Today, we mark the ending of the Polish Air Force Association Trust – the last direct and unbroken link with the wartime Polish Air Force. It cannot be other than a sad moment for those of us who were part of that exiled struggle and who remember fallen comrades.

But we have to face the future realistically and, as the Trust approached a point at which it would no longer be viable, the Trustees have identified other organisations to continue the most important of our functions. I am delighted that we are able to welcome today representatives of the RAF Benevolent Fund, the Polish Institute & Sikorski Museum, and the War Memorials Trust. I am very pleased that they have been so ready to take up the baton on our behalf. Their enthusiasm and professional care will give great confidence to our members about the future.

Over the years we have enjoyed great support from the Royal Air Force and from the Embassy of the Polish Republic. The London Borough of Hillingdon has done much to help us, most recently in the beautiful restoration of the Northolt Memorial. And to the Station Commanders and staff of RAF Northolt, past and present, we owe a great debt for their unfailing commitment and friendship. To all of you, on behalf of the Trust, can I offer my warmest thanks and appreciation.

But there are others whose contribution has been less visible but without which the Trust could not have operated. I must pay a special tribute to Mrs Slawinska and Mrs Merryfield who have run our office for many years with good humour and common sense – we really could not have functioned without you. Mr Reid has kept our accounts in order - and the Charity Commission off our backs. And Aberdeen Asset Management has handled our investments most ably, even keeping their nerve as the economy has flown through the extreme turbulence of the last few years. Aberdeen Asset Management has also very generously sponsored this luncheon, and I am sure you will all want to join me in showing your appreciation. [Applause]

But while this is the end of the Polish Air Force Association Trust, it also marks a new beginning. With very strong support from the Polish Air Force and the Royal Air Force, we are now finalising proposals for a Polish Air Force Memorial Committee. This would have as its objective to maintain the memory of the Polish Air Force's achievements in the Second World War, and to honour the fallen. It would not be a grant giving body, but it would provide: a focus of interest, a link for the Polish Air Force with its heritage in the west, a body to arrange annual memorial ceremonies, and a way of ensuring that the Polish contribution is

represented in British commemorative events. Most importantly, it would help the next generation to learn what the Poles contributed to the allied cause.

The memorabilia and artworks owned by the Trust have now been given to the newly formed Polish Air Force Museum at RAF Northolt. We will also place our colours there – on display when they are not required ceremonially. We hope that the future Polish Air Force Memorial Committee will be able to build strong links with the Polish Air Force College in Dęblin – for it is their heritage too – as well as with the Middlesex Wing of the Air Cadets who have supported Trust events with such professionalism. It is young people of their age who now need to hear this story.

Ladies and gentlemen, during those difficult war years, a deep bond was formed between the Royal Air Force and the Polish Air Force. Our histories are interwoven. You cannot fully understand one without the other. And, if anything, over the years that bond has grown in strength. Similarly, we developed a special and continuing relationship with the local communities among whom we lived, and for whom we also fought. I am proud indeed to see those bonds and relationships now being taken up by another generation. Younger officers in both services, local authority Councillors and officers, and families and friends are committing themselves to preserving the memory of those extraordinary events and of the people who made them. And it moves me that they do it not as a duty to be inherited, but as a privilege to be welcomed.

That is why I think the Polish Air Force Association Trust can finally say
with some confidence:

That we have done our job;

That we have passed on the mantle;

And that we have honoured the promise made so often:

‘We will remember them’.