

Just a week ago, we marked the 80th anniversary of German forces pouring across the western borders of Poland. The Second World War had begun. And in 10 days time, we will mark the 80th anniversary of the Second Front, when Russian troops poured across the eastern frontiers of Poland. Their joint intent was to obliterate Poland, politically, socially and humanly. After five weeks armed resistance ceased. But Poland had not died, not while Poles yet live.

The bulk of the Polish Air Force evacuated to France through Romania. France had a million men under arms, the largest amount of armour in Europe, the assistance of the British Expeditionary Force and the RAF, and was fighting on only one Front. Yet it lasted no longer than Poland, and signed an Armistice after just five weeks.

Evacuated again, the Polish Air Force reached Britain, the Island of the Last Hope, Wyspa Ostatniej Nadzieji. Their skill, commitment and success, both in the air and as ground crew, bombers as well as fighters, became famous. And that legend was first created on the airfield behind me, RAF Northolt.

And in five years, the Polish Air Force was back in France. We have just marked the 75th Anniversary of D-Day where the Polish contribution in the air was as determined as ever. The planners had scheduled 50,000 sorties on D-Day, with fighter squadrons each carrying out four missions. But the weather was so bad that less than 30% of the sorties took place. The average number of missions per Squadron was 1.1. But to take just one Polish example, 131 Wing, comprising 302, 308 and 317 Squadrons, carried out its four missions over the beaches on D-Day exactly as planned, did the same the next day, and, by the end of June, this Wing alone had carried out over 2,000 sorties in 4,200 flying hours.

At the beginning of August the Wing moved to the Advanced Landing Ground B10, at Plumetot in Normandy, and became the first unit of the Polish Air Force to be based in France since 1940. They were under the overall command of Group Captain Aleksander Gabszewicz with Julian Kowalski as Wing Commander flying. The sons of both of them are with us today. Among the ground crew was Tadeusz Kwissa, whose widow and sons are here today

Plumetot is a tiny village of 220 people. But it has a great heart. In partnership with the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee, and support from French and Polish authorities, it found itself at the centre of an international architectural competition to commemorate the role of the Polish Air Force in the liberation of France. You can see the results in today's Programme. The new Monument was inaugurated as part of the D-Day 75 celebrations, when once again the villagers found themselves surrounded by Polish airmen, the RAF, and French civil and military authorities. Surely, this is the only small village in Normandy, which has ever needed to have a Deputy Mayor with responsibility for Foreign Affairs!

And the reason for this extraordinary commitment is simple. Remembrance is important to them, as it is to us. Because we are all beneficiaries. We cannot repay the debt. But we can remember, we can honour, and we can pay a heartfelt tribute. So, mindful of all Polish airmen who gave their bodies to the ground, their souls to God, and their hearts to Poland, I call on the Officer Cadets of Dęblin to carry out the Roll-Call of the Fallen. Capt. Sztobryn.