

Westminster Abbey



A Service of Thanksgiving and Rededication on Battle of Britain Sunday



Sunday 17th September 2023
11.00 am

HISTORICAL NOTE

This year marks the 83rd anniversary of the Battle of Britain, the first decisive battle in history fought entirely in the air. Battle of Britain Sunday commemorates a dramatic turning point in both the Battle itself, and the history of the Second World War.

The German objective in the summer of 1940 was to eliminate the Royal Air Force, both in the air and on the ground, in order to obtain air superiority in preparation for a potential seaborne and airborne invasion. Operating principally from airfields in France and Belgium, the Luftwaffe began their first heavy onslaught early in July 1940, directed against British shipping and the Channel ports. The intent behind this first phase of the battle was not only to sink shipping but also to draw the Royal Air Force into combat and wear down its strength. The second phase, from 8th to 18th August, consisted of intensive day operations against coastal radar stations and fighter airfields. The third phase began after a five-day lull due to poor weather, with attacks on fighter airfields in the London area and increased night attacks on Britain's cities.

The first daylight assault on London was made on the 7th September and marked the beginning of the fourth phase, lasting most of that month, during which the capital became the Luftwaffe's primary target. These attacks, although serious in themselves, brought vital relief to the fighter airfields, which until that time had been under considerable pressure. The Battle reached a climax on the 15th September, when the Luftwaffe flew more than 1,000 sorties over England during daylight hours. On that occasion the Luftwaffe lost 56 aircraft. Throughout October, the fifth and final phase of the Battle saw the decline of enemy daylight attacks on London and an increase in the night bombing of Britain's major ports and industrial centres. At the beginning of the struggle the Luftwaffe had approximately 2,700 aircraft to launch against England. Britain had fewer than 60 fighter squadrons – around 700 aircraft – and the groundcrew had to work sometimes 16 hours a day to keep aircraft in the air. Between the 24th August and 6th September alone, Fighter Command lost 103 pilots and 128 were seriously wounded; 366 fighters had been destroyed or badly damaged. Fighter Command lost over 1000 aircraft during the

Battle and the Luftwaffe nearly 1900. Through the efforts of fewer than 3000 aircrew from Britain, the Commonwealth, and Allied nations, many firmly under Nazi control, along with some from neutral countries, together with the men and women who supported them from the ground, Hitler's Third Reich suffered its first significant strategic defeat. In all 544 aircrew from Fighter Command were killed during the Battle, and a further 791 died before the end of the War. The cost was grievous but the stakes immeasurably high. The campaign was, in Sir Winston Churchill's words: 'One of the decisive battles of the war.' In a speech that has gone down in history Churchill went on to say: 'The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world... goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of 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.'

The Battle drew to a close with the onset of winter and the Luftwaffe used the longer nights to mount its night-time Blitz which lasted until May of the following year, when Hitler turned eastwards to attack the Soviet Union. With the home base now reasonably secure, the Royal Air Force could turn to wider tasks: including the long fight for Malta, North Africa and control of the Mediterranean; the mounting bomber offensive against Germany; the struggle for air supremacy over North-West Europe without which the Normandy Invasion would have been impossible; and support of the invasion and liberation campaign itself. Without these essential contributions, victory in Europe would not have been possible. The Royal Air Force also played a vital role in the Far East, most memorably in the appalling conditions of the Burma campaign. Nor should we forget the unstinting efforts of our maritime airmen, who doggedly quartered the hostile seas around the globe searching out enemy U-boats, shipping and surface raiders. In commemorating the airmen who fought in the Battle of Britain, we pay tribute also to those who in later years of the war served in all the Allied Forces at sea, on land and in the air.

Today, we also remember the tireless efforts of RAF servicemen and women in more recent times who have served in nearly every part of the globe, as far eastwards as Hong Kong, Borneo, and Malaya; westwards to Belize; or southwards to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. We also acknowledge and celebrate the achievements and sacrifices of the men and women of the Royal Air Force still serving in the troubled regions of the World some of them familiar to previous generations of RAF Servicemen. Epitomised by the performance of the RAF air transport force in 2021 during Operation PITTING, the evacuation of refugees from Kabul following the Taliban take-over, which exactly mirrors the RAF's evacuation of over 500 people from the Afghan capital over Christmas in 1928–29. The RAF continues to guard our skies against aerial intrusion twenty-four hours a day. The increasingly aggressive stance of the Russian leadership, culminating in the invasion of Ukraine, has shown that the nation must maintain this guard and in recent times the RAF has undertaken similar missions to provide support and reassurance to NATO Allies in the Baltic and Eastern Europe. The air transport force has also been busy moving military supplies ultimately destined for Ukraine whilst other units have maintained wary, if suitably distanced, eyes on the war in the region. In a troubled and uncertain world the Royal Air Force continues to defend the nation as it has for over a century.

*Sebastian Cox OBE
Head of the Air Historical Branch*



Sergeant Joan E Mortimer, Flight Officer Elspeth C Henderson and Sergeant Helen E Turner, recipients of the Military Medal for gallantry, standing outside damaged buildings at Biggin Hill, Kent. All three were WAAF teleprinter operators who stayed at their posts and continued to work the defence lines during the heavy Luftwaffe attacks on Biggin Hill on the 1st September 1940.



Two Hurricanes of 501 Squadron—serial nos. P3059/SD-N and P3208/SD-T—taking off from their base at Gravesend in Kent to intercept an incoming German raid on 16 August 1940. Both aircraft were lost within minutes of each other a few days later on 18 August.



Members of the RAF Regiment try to take some form of shelter from a monsoon as they await orders to move from a beachhead near Rangoon, Burma, in May 1945.



Victor crews being briefed ahead of a Black Buck mission during Operation CORPORATE. Close attention to detail was required for the 11-aircraft formations which were completed in radio silence. In the foreground are Squadron Leaders Barry Neal and Frank Milligan.



Afghan nationals disembarking a Voyager after arriving at RAF Brize Norton during Operation PITTING, 24th August 2021.



British nationals embarking onto an Atlas aircraft at Wadi Seidna, Sudan, 27th April 2023.

Members of the congregation are requested kindly to refrain from using private cameras, video, or sound recording equipment. Please ensure that mobile telephones and other electronic devices are switched off. The church is served by a hearing loop. Users should turn their hearing aid to the setting marked T.

The service is conducted by The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle MBE, Dean of Westminster.

The service is sung by the Choir of Westminster Abbey, conducted by Andrew Nethsingha, Organist and Master of the Choristers.

The organ is played by Peter Holder, Sub-Organist.

The Central Band of the Royal Air Force is directed by Wing Commander Piers Morrell OBE MVO RAF, Principal Director of Music, Royal Air Force.

Before the service, the Central Band of the Royal Air Force plays

Lift up your heads *Alexandre Guilmant (1837–1911)*
arranged by Sergeant Hamish Dean (b 1976)

March from Conquest of the Air *Arthur Bliss (1891–1975)*
arranged by Wing Commander (retired) Barrie Hingley (b 1938)

The Lord's Prayer *Albert Hay Malotte (1895–1977)*
arranged by Wing Commander Piers Morrell OBE MVO RAF (b 1971)

Beyond the Horizon *Rossano Galante (b 1967)*

Nearer my God to thee *Lowell Mason (1792–1872)*
arranged by Corporal Joseph Whelan (b 1992)

Festival Fanfare *Franco Cesarini (b 1961)*

Ad Astra *Barrie Hingley*

Ceremonial *Geoffrey Nobes (b 1954)*

Per Ardua ad Astra *Paul Meador (b 1975)*
arranged by Corporal Jonathan Read (b 1989)

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Before the Service, a Lining Party is formed at the Great West Door, comprising members of The King's Colour Squadron, Royal Air Force, accompanied by the National Standards of the Royal Air Forces Association, the Royal Air Force Regiment Association, the Royal Observer Corps Association, the Air Transport Auxiliary Association, the Bomber Command Association, the Royal Air Force Halton Apprentices Association, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force/Women's Royal Air Force and Royal Air Force (W), the Polish Air Force Association, together with twenty Standards from branches of the Royal Air Forces Association.

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Westminster, Councillor Patricia McAllister, is received and presentations are made. All stand as she is conducted to her seat, and then sit.

A Representative of His Majesty The King is received by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster at the Great West Door.

ORDER OF SERVICE

All stand as the choir and clergy move to places in Quire and the Sacrament

All sing

GOD save our gracious King.
GLong live our noble King.
God save The King.
Send him victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us:
God save The King.

arranged by Gordon Jacob (1895–1984)

All remain standing. The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle MBE, Dean of Westminster, gives the Bidding

WE meet in this Abbey church, where our nation so often gathers to remember, to celebrate, and to mourn. Here, we give thanks for the dedication and daring of members of the Royal Air Force and allied air forces during the Battle of Britain. Their sure courage halted the advance of a terrible tyranny. They held fast in days of greatest danger. For their resilience and their skill we give thanks, for their pain and loss we grieve. Once again, we commit ourselves to the duty of an honest remembrance.

Calling to mind those days, and those individuals, we remember too all who have served and still serve in the Royal Air Force. We pray God's blessing upon them and pray too for their safety. Remembering conflict past and present in which they have served, we come before God penitent that we are so often divided and so easily tempted into violence. Now, we renew our commitment to seek out, together, the ways of peace and reconciliation and continue to pray for the embattled people of Ukraine.

As we remember before God all those who serve in the Royal Air Force and those who work alongside them, we look for the coming of a kingdom ruled in righteousness and loving justice praying as Jesus taught us:

OUR Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Standard of No 32 Squadron of the Royal Air Force is borne through the church, presented, and laid upon the High Altar, as the band plays

Fanfare to the Royal Air Force *R E C Davies (1920–95)*

Fanfare on the Royal Air Force Call *R F O'Donnell (1885–1961)*

Standard Bearer

Flight Lieutenant G Edwards RAF

Escorts

Squadron Leader

D Walden RAF

Flight Lieutenant

P Kelly RAF

The Dean says

Let us pray.

ALMIGHTY God, who makest the clouds thy chariots and walkest upon the wings of the storm, look in mercy, we beseech thee, upon the Royal Air Force. Make them a tower of strength to our King and country. Help them to do their duty with prudence and with fearlessness, confident that in life or in death the eternal God is our refuge and strength. Grant this for Jesus Christ's sake. **Amen.**

All sing the Hymn



O GOD, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home;

under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

St Anne 417 NEH
probably by William Croft (1678–1727)
Organist of Westminster Abbey 1708–27

Man frail, and God eternal
Isaac Watts (1674–1748)
after Psalm 90: 1–5

All sit. Flight Lieutenant Louise Tagg RAF reads the first Reading

THE angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.' Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.' So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Exodus 14: 19–end

Thanks be to God.

The choir sings the Psalm

GOD is our hope and strength :
a very present help in trouble.

Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved :
and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea.

Though the waters thereof rage and swell :

and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same.

The rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of God :
the holy place of the tabernacle of the most Highest.

God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed :

God shall help her, and that right early.

The heathen make much ado, and the kingdoms are moved :

but God hath shewed his voice, and the earth shall melt away.

The Lord of hosts is with us : the God of Jacob is our refuge.

O come hither, and behold the works of the Lord :

what destruction he hath brought upon the earth.

He maketh wars to cease in all the world :

he breaketh the bow, and knappeth the spear in sunder,
and burneth the chariots in the fire.

Be still then, and know that I am God :

I will be exalted among the heathen,
and I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord of hosts is with us :

the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :

and to the Holy Ghost;

as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :

world without end. Amen.

after Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Psalm 46

*Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton KCB ADC, Chief of the Air Staff,
reads the second Reading*

WE do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.
If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the
Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the
Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he
might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you,
why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand
before the judgement seat of God. For it is written,
'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.'
So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Romans 14:7–12

Thanks be to God.

All stand for the Act of Remembrance

*The Battle of Britain Roll of Honour is borne from the Grave of the
Unknown Warrior to the Sacrarium, escorted by serving descendants of
Battle of Britain Airmen, serving Royal Air Force Aircrew from former
Battle of Britain Squadrons, and a contingent of Royal Air Force Cadets.*

The band plays

March Theme
from The Battle of Britain

*William Walton (1902–83)
arranged by Barrie Hingley*

Honorary Steward
Wing Commander Dheeraj Bhasin MBE RAF

Roll Bearer
Squadron Leader Richard Crabb RAF

Escorts

Flight Lieutenant
R Higson RAF

Flight Lieutenant
C Edmondson RAF

Flight Lieutenant
S Kynaston RAF

Flight Lieutenant
C Falconer RAF

Flight Lieutenant
J Busby RAF

Flight Lieutenant
R Thomas RAF

Flying Officer
S Holmes-Smith RAF

Sergeant
A McMillan

All remain standing. The Dean says

Let us pray.

ALMIGHTY God, into thy hands we commend the souls of those who laid down their lives for the cause of freedom; praying that thou wouldst grant them the joys of thy eternal kingdom, and, to all who mourn them, fortitude of spirit and constant faith in the power of thy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

All sing the Hymn



O RULER of the earth and sky
be with our airmen when they fly;
and keep them in thy loving care
amid the perils of the air.
O let our cry come unto thee
for those who fly o'er land and sea.

Strong Son of Man, save those who fly
swift-winged across th'uncharted sky;
each anxious hour and lonely flight,
serene, unchallenged, day and night.
O'er land and ocean safely bear
all those in peril in the air.

O Holy Spirit, God's own power
give peace in sudden danger's hour:
bring calm of heart, and be thou near
to those who watch and those who fear.
To thee will rise the grateful prayer
of those who serve thee in the air.

O Trinity of love and grace,
true guide of all who fly through space,
in peace or war, mid friend or foe,
be with them whereso'er they go.
So shall our praise with heaven's blend
and joyful hearts to thee ascend.

Melita 354 NEH
John Dykes (1823–76)
arranged by James O'Donnell (b 1961)

The Airmen's Hymn

*All sit. The Venerable Dr (Air Vice-Marshal) Giles Legood MBE KHC RAF,
Chaplain-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force, gives the Address*

The choir sings the Anthem

WE praise thee, O God : we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship thee : the Father everlasting.
To thee all angels cry aloud : the heavens, and all the powers therein.
To thee cherubin, and seraphin : continually do cry,
Holy, holy, holy : Lord God of Sabaoth;
heaven and earth are full of the majesty : of thy glory.
The glorious company of the apostles : praise thee.
The goodly fellowship of the prophets : praise thee.
The noble army of martyrs : praise thee.
The holy Church throughout all the world : doth acknowledge thee;
the Father : of an infinite majesty;
thine honourable, true : and only Son;
also the Holy Ghost : the Comforter.
Thou art the King of glory : O Christ.
Thou art the everlasting Son : of the Father.
When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man :
 thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.
When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death :
 thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God : in the Glory of the Father.
We believe that thou shalt come : to be our Judge.
We therefore pray thee, help thy servants :
 whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with thy saints : in glory everlasting.
O Lord, save thy people : and bless thine heritage.
Govern them : and lift them up for ever.
Day by day : we magnify thee;
and we worship thy name : ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord : to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us : have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us : as our trust is in thee.
O Lord, in thee have I trusted : let me never be confounded.

Te Deum Op 34
Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

The Reverend Robert Latham, Minor Canon and Sacrist, introduces the Prayers

Let us pray.

All kneel or remain seated

LET us give thanks to God for his many gifts; for our creation, for our redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, and for every opportunity to serve the needs of our brothers and sisters. In this year of Coronation, let us give thanks for His Majesty The King; for his example of selfless service and devotion to duty.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Squadron Leader Emma Moore RAF says

LET us give thanks to God for the freedoms we enjoy; for the courage and inspiration of those who served during the Battle of Britain; for members of the Royal Air Force, the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and especially those whose lives were lost in the cause of liberty.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Air Specialist (Class 1) Richard Hean-Marie says

LET us give thanks to God for the service rendered by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, in peacetime and in conflict, to the peoples of this and other lands; for those who fly, and those who support them as mechanics, ground crew, radar operators, engineers, and in logistics; for peace preserved, and for peril averted.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Warrant Officer Emma Kerlake says

LET us pray for all who suffer exploitation or oppression. For the people of Ukraine and all who live amidst warfare, unrest, or the threat of violence. Let us pray for the leaders of the nations and for all who influence opinion, that they may be inspired to act with wisdom, discernment, and integrity.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

The Reverend Dr (Wing Commander) Philip Wilson RAF says

LET us pray for all who bear the scars of war in body, mind, or spirit; for veterans and all who assist them, especially the Royal Air Force Association, the Royal Air Force Charitable Trust, the Royal Air Force Widows' Association, the War Widows' Association of Great Britain, and the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund; that all who have made sacrifices in the cause of peace may know peace in their own lives.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

The Venerable Tricia Hillas, Canon in Residence, says

LET us pray for all who serve today in the Royal Air Force and in all the Forces of the Crown; particularly those currently serving in the Middle East, the Gulf, the South Atlantic, Eastern Europe, and other operational environments. We remember especially those whose duty places them in danger and pray that they may be granted spiritual fortitude, with physical and moral courage.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

The Sacrist concludes

O GOD, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

All stand to sing the Hymn



LEAD us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us,
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy;
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

Mannheim 393 NEH
from Friedrich Filitz's Choralbuch 1847
arranged by James O'Donnell

James Edmeston (1791–1867)

All remain standing for the Act of Rededication

The Dean says

Let us rededicate ourselves to building a world in which there is justice and peace for all, and where each may live with full human dignity.

LORD God our Father,
Lwe pledge ourselves to serve you and all people
in the cause of justice and peace,
and for the relief of want and suffering.
Guide us by your Spirit;
give us wisdom, courage, vision, and hope;
and keep us faithful to our calling now and always,
for the honour of your name. Amen.

The Dean pronounces the Blessing

GOD grant to the living grace; to the departed rest; to the Church, The King, the Commonwealth, and all people, peace and concord; and to us sinners life everlasting; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

All remain standing for the Call of the Royal Air Force, the Last Post, and Reveille

The Standard of No 32 Squadron of the Royal Air Force is returned to the Standard Party as the band plays

Fanfare for the Ensign of the Royal Air Force

Barrie Hingley

The Royal Air Force March Past

*Walford Davies (1869–1941)
and George Dyson (1883–1964)*

The choir and clergy, together with the Representative of His Majesty The King, move from Quire and the Sacrarium to the west end of the church

Music after the service

Days of Glory

*Richard Harvey (b 1953)
arranged by Barry Hingley*

Spitfire Prelude

William Walton

The bells of the Abbey are rung

Members of the congregation are kindly requested to remain in their seats until invited to move by the Honorary Stewards

*There will be a retiring collection in aid of
the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund
and the Royal Air Forces Association.*

*If you would like to donate online, please visit the following websites
www.rafbf.org/ways-to-give www.rafa.org.uk*



The Royal Air Force Memorial Chapel, at the far eastern end of the Abbey, will be open after the service until 1.00 pm for all who wish to visit.

The Royal Air Force Coastal Command Book of Remembrance 1939–1945 will be open in the Chapel during Battle of Britain week.