

M the Vice-President of Indre Department, the Mayor of Valençay.

M the President of Libre Resistance

M the Representative of the Prefect of Indre

Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an enormous privilege and a pleasure to be here amongst you today as the representative of the British Ambassador in Paris. It is also a huge honour for me as an officer of the Intelligence Corps to commemorate the achievements and sacrifices made by the forebears of those present today.

77 years ago today Georges Bégué jumped into the unknown close to Valençay to make contact with Max Hymans. That was less than a year after the launch of the SOE. Nobody could have known that the operations in France alone would lead to 90 networks with 470 agents, along with thousands of French volunteers as well as the naval, air and other support.

Even if the dangers might have been apparent, the enormous scale must have been impossible to fathom. Taking off by night, crossing the Channel in the dark, parachuting in or landing in the fields. These agents were often entirely alone in a secret war, knowing full well that if discovered they would be tortured and shot.

This year marks the centenary of the formation of the Royal Air Force, and it is appropriate that we should commemorate and celebrate their role supporting Section F. 138 and 161 Special Duties Squadrons flew from Tempsford in Bedfordshire, very close to the current home of the Intelligence Corps, parachuting in agents and supplies. 148 and 624 Special Duties Squadrons in North Africa carried out a similar role into Southern France. Their aircrews were not only British but included personnel from many countries including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, France and the United States of America.

As we remember the 104 names on this memorial, it is worth noting that ten of these people, four men and six women, were from the RAF. The legacy of their sacrifice is the source of inspiration for today's generation of airmen and airwomen, which is epitomized by the presence of our two RAF colleagues here today.

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I would also like to thank the "Fédération Nationale de Libre Résistance" for organizing this commemoration and for keeping alive the memory of the SOE agents and all members of the "Buckmaster Network". These agents created a network of networks with the French Resistance. Together they helped win the war and handed us peace and liberty.

Now we are the network charged to take forward their memory, bring to life their courage, their values and their sacrifices.

I salute them, and I thank them. We will remember them.