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From: Group Captain E J Flynn OBE ADC MA MEng CEng FIET RAF
Station Commander



Royal Air Force Brize Norton

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Royal Air Force has a long and distinguished association with West Oxfordshire. As the current Station Commander of RAF Brize Norton, the RAF's largest operating base, it is an honour and a privilege to be here with you today representing the Royal Air Force as we unveil the memorial to the men and women of RAF Stanton Harcourt.

In use as an active RAF airfield for 5 years from 1940 to 1945, its contribution, and the sacrifices of those who constructed it and operated from it, are significant.

Whilst under construction, RAF Stanton Harcourt was attacked by 3 Junkers 88s which dropped 30 bombs and machine gunned the site, killing nine civilian construction workers and injuring others. In an act of huge bravery, the Wimpey Construction team continued with their task and the airfield was declared operational just 3 weeks later, a phenomenal achievement.

The station largely functioned as a training airfield, providing essential training using Whitely bombers and Airspeed Oxfords.

However, two notable operational missions were conducted from RAF Stanton Harcourt during World War II:

Firstly, an operation to attack the German battleship Scharnhorst. A formidable German battleship which posed a significant threat to supply convoys and troop ships travelling across the Atlantic, she had already facilitated the German invasion of Norway and sunk several Royal Navy ships including an aircraft carrier.

The mission was launched on 24 July 1941 from RAF Stanton Harcourt. Fifteen Halifax bombers of Number 35 and 76 Squadron conducted a daylight mission to destroy the Scharnhorst, the crews having slept here on the hanger floors the night before. Alerted to their presence, the Luftwaffe launched over 30 Messerschmidt 109 fighters and a barrage of flak. Undeterred, the RAF bomber crews pressed home the attack scoring 5 hits on the starboard side of the ship. The Scharnhorst limped back to port and was out of action for months. In the course of the mission, the RAF lost 4 Halifaxes with one crew becoming POWs.

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The second significant event took place in 1943 when Winston Churchill departed from RAF Stanton Harcourt to attend the Casablanca conference. Churchill met with US President Roosevelt and military chiefs to discuss strategy for the next phase of the war and opening a second front in Europe to force Germany to divert troops from Russia. Churchill endorsed Roosevelt's declaration that peace would only come with the unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy and Japan. They agreed to establish a combined staff in London to plan a large-scale invasion of Northern Europe in 1944; to defeat the U-boats in the Atlantic, intensify the bombing offensive on Germany, retake Burma and to increase aid to China. Certainly a connection Stanton Harcourt can be proud of.

The Royal Air Force's association with West Oxfordshire continues. Royal Air Force Brize Norton is today home to the Air Mobility Force's C130s Hercules, A400M Atlas, C17 Globemaster and A330 Voyager aircraft; 7 Fg Sqns, 5 reservist units, medical, force protection, movements, air despatch, trials units and the force headquarters. In all, over 7000 personnel work at RAF Brize Norton delivering daily on operations including those in Afghanistan, the Broader Middle East, Africa, the Falkland Islands and the UK. The Station has been instrumental in delivering support to combating the Covid-19 pandemic transporting vaccines, PPE and oxygen supplies across the globe, conducting aeromedical evacuations, receiving evacuation flights to repatriate British nationals and deploying personnel in support of the NHS.

The Royal Air Force of today continues to give to the nation with the same distinguished service as those who served here during World War II. The effort that has gone into restoring historical buildings and commemorating this site through the creation of this memorial is a fitting tribute to the phenomenal men and women who served here. I offer my sincere thanks to those at Hayfield Homes, the Stanton Harcourt Parish council and the RAF's Air Historical Branch for their efforts to ensure that RAF Stanton Harcourt and its personnel are immortalised. This memorial will ensure that their memory lives on and the significance of the site is remembered.

It gives me great pleasure to unveil this memorial today.

