

Allied Air Forces Memorial Day
Olivier Cadic's speech – 6 Sept.

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your invitation.

I am particularly glad to be back here today, in York, as a Senator representing the 2.5 millions of French citizens living abroad.

I want to thank you for your continued action to promote our moral duty never to forget. I also want to thank our countrymen present here today, some of whom come every year to celebrate with you the memory of those heroes of a France that fought.

In 1944, Elvington was a French base, under the command of a French officer. The discipline and the administration were French, but the organisation was British.

On 16 May 1944, the base officially welcomed No. 346 Squadron "Guyenne", then on 20 June 1944, No. 347 Squadron "Tunisie".

They were the only French Air Force heavy bomber squadrons of the Allied air forces during World War Two.

As early as 5 June, on the eve of the D-Day landings, "Guyenne" made a night attack on German gun positions on the coast of Normandy.

Both Squadrons took part in the Battle of the Ruhr and the Battle of Berlin.

Each squadron was comprised of two flights, and each flight included eight Halifax four-engined heavy bombers.

To operate 32 aeroplanes, there were 2,500 men, including 250 officers, who all went through various training establishments in Britain for air-gunners, radio operators, navigators, flight-engineers, bomb-aimers and pilots.

Taking off from Elvington, our airmen led numerous dangerous missions.

They swarmed over Germany in waves.

Symbols and source of their fierce pride, their aircraft bore the French Air Force roundel along with the Cross of Lorraine.

It was cold inside the cabin, bitterly cold.

The bomber crews had to control their fear of Luftwaffe fighters, of German flak, of the bad weather that slowed their progress...

Every day, aeroplanes exploded in mid-air or crashed to the ground.

“We were dead men the moment we climbed aboard, all the way until we made it back”, said André Hautot, gunner on a Halifax of “Guyenne” Squadron.

Let us remember that the two squadrons flew 2834 missions, losing 41 aircraft and 216 men killed in action over eight months.

Today we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the return to France, to Bordeaux, in October 1945, of those two French Squadrons.

By fighting side by side, the British and the French wrote an admirable page of their history.

As General De Gaulle said in 1940: “Our two great nations remain bound to one another.

They will either go down both together, or both together they will win.”

The message of this day is one of hope and peace, sent to us by the souls of our soldiers, whose sacrifice brought about victory over the barbarism of the Nazis.

Let us for ever honour their memories and maintain trust and friendship between our two people.

You do it wonderfully here, every year. From the bottom of my heart, thank you!

Vive la France, vive le Royaume-Uni, vive l’Europe unie et vive la paix !