



# Ambassador's Activities

2011

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Speech by *HE Bernard Emié*

Ambassador of France to the United Kingdom

Inauguration of the French Air Force Memorial,  
York Minster

York , 20<sup>th</sup> October 2011

Minister,

Lord-Lieutenant,

Lord Mayor,

Air Marshal Dalton and General Palomeros,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with a sense of gratitude to our war heroes, and great emotion, that I've had the honour of representing France, along with General Jean-Paul Palomeros, Chief of Staff of the French Air Force, at the very moving ceremony we've just attended.

I'd like to thank Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of North Yorkshire, The Lord Crathorne; the Lord Mayor of York, David Horton; and the Director of the Yorkshire Air Museum, Ian Reed, for involving us, from the outset, in the preparations for today – as well as everyone else who has in any way helped make this event a success.

My thanks go also to Gerald Howarth, Minister for International Security Strategy, and Sir Stephen Dalton, Chief of the Air Staff of the Royal Air Force, for doing us the honour of being here with us, and for the significant air and ground assets provided by the RAF.

At the service in the magnificent building of York Minster, and during the splendid parade which has just taken place, I was pleased to see that the ties between French and British airmen – and, beyond that, those between our two old nations – are just as strong today as in the past.

As for my compatriots from the “Guyenne” and “Tunisie” squadrons – and today, above all, is their day – I would like to express my admiration for the 2,000 and more French who, as mechanics, pilots, secretaries and bombardiers, lived here in York during the Second World War and contributed to the allied war effort. Thanks to them and others, my country’s honour remained intact. Two hundred and sixteen of them died in combat, with 41 aircraft never returning, most of them falling from the skies of a France they were striving so hard to liberate. I pay my respects to their memory. Later I’ll be meeting veterans who have travelled here specially, and who are a living testimony to this decisive engagement.

But, quite obviously, I’m also grateful to the people of York, past and present, and Britain as a whole. On behalf of the French people, I want to express my country’s gratitude to you, the British people, for your support back then and for your welcome today.

Yesterday, as today, we fought together, in the air, as well as on land and sea. Yesterday, as today, our two venerable countries have a special responsibility. In the face of the bloodbath which the Libyan regime promised the civilians of Benghazi, Prime Minister David Cameron and President Sarkozy considered it their duty to intervene, with a clear mandate from the United Nations Security Council and at the Arab League’s request. Together we liberated a people from dictatorship.

Indeed, the fighting which has brought our armed forces together over the skies of Libya since 19 March this year reminds us in many ways of the time we were based in York, from May 1944 to June 1945, fighting side by side for our freedom and against totalitarianism. As part of the efforts to protect the Libyan people, by the end of last month our two countries’ air forces had each clocked up more than 15,000 flying hours and fired over 1,000 munitions.

Ladies and gentlemen, this commemoration is of huge significance and resonates today more than ever since 1945. Our two countries' resolute action in Libya bears witness to the determination of France and Britain to go on strongly defending this shared freedom, whose cost we shall never forget.

Today, as yesterday, the United Kingdom and France are still guided by the same goals, the same universal values and the same ideals: among them, defending the freedom of peoples in the face of regimes which oppress and seek to enslave them. Beyond any quarrels we may have inherited from history, our two countries often have the same world view and they share a common destiny. Together, they can change the course of history.

Thank you.