

AGAINST ALL ODDS

1940 AT TIMES THE BLEAKEST OF OUR ISLANDS YEARS
SEEING BRITAIN GRIPPED BY INVASION FEARS
OUR ARMY IN FRANCE HEAVILY DEFEATED
ON DUNKIRK BEACHES SORELY DEPLETED
NOW FACING OCCUPATION BY A NAZI STATE
FORGED FROM VENGEANCE AND SUPREMACIST HATE
UNLEASHING A LUFTWAFFE FURY IN OUR SUMMER SKIES
AIRFIELDS- RADAR- FACTORIES THE STRATEGIC PRIZE.

RAID AFTER RAID BOTH DAY AND NIGHT
TO CRIPPLE THE RAF AND OUR ABILITY TO FIGHT
SPITFIRES AND HURRICANES SCRAMBLED TO DEFEND
AND REPEL THE AGGRESSORS THAT SEEMED WITHOUT END.
FOR THREE DRAGGING MONTHS THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN RAGED
SEEING FIGHTER SQUADRONS CONSTANTLY ENGAGED
FRESH FACED YOUNG PILOTS WHO'D BARELY LEFT SCHOOL
DETERMINED THERE WOULD BE NO INVADERS RULE.

OUTNUMBERED, SCRAMBLED SEVERAL TIMES A DAY IN A DOG FIGHT WAR
OF MERCILESS FEROCITY NEVER WITNESSED BEFORE
SURVIVAL MANTRAS IN THEIR HEADS INSTILLED
FLYING TOO LONG STRAIGHT AND LEVEL SEES YOU KILLED
RELAXING YOUR VIGILANCE IN COMBAT SKIES
IS THE TIME A FIGHTER PILOT DIES
BUT AS RAIDS REACHED TOWERING PEAKS
SURVIVAL EXPECTANCY A MERE FOUR WEEKS
SEPTEMBER 15TH WAS TO BE THEIR HISTORIC DAY
GERMAN TROOPS MASSED IN FRANCE POISED FOR THE FRAY.
1,000 LUFTWAFFE SORTIES IN DAYLIGHT HOURS
AN ONSLAUGHT TO BREAK OUR DEFENSIVE POWERS

WAAF, PLOTTERS, CONTROLLERS BUNKERED UNDERGROUND
A STIFFLING TENSION BARELY A SOUND
ANXIETY FRAMED IN COLLECTIVE EYES
AWAITING FEEDBACK FROM EMBATTLED SKIES
TO ASSESS THE ENGAGEMENTS EVERY EBB AND FLOW
LOCATE WITH PRECISION WHERE SQUADRONS SHOULD GO,
A DESPERATE DAY CHALLENGING EVERY NERVE.
ALL PILOTS AIRBORNE NONE IN RESERVE
WITH DOGGED RESISTANCE REPELLED THE ASSAULTS
FEROCIOUSLY FIGHTING TOOTH AND NAIL
INVASION PLANS LEFT IN TATTERS, DEEMED TO BE OF NO AVAIL
THE SECOND WORLD WAR FIVE MORE YEARS RAGED ON
BUT FOR THIS OUR FREEDOM WAS A BATTLE WON

COVID MEANS THERE CAN BE NO BATTLE OF BRITAIN PARADE
OR SERVICE AT STAMFORD'S MEMORIAL WALL
BUT WE STILL REMEMBER THOSE WHO FOUGHT IN SUMMER SKIES
DETERMINED OUR NATION WOULD NOT FALL
TAKING TO THE AIR IN SQUADRONS WHOSE NAMES
NOW ARE LEGEND, 605, 3030, 87, 54
SO VERY MANY MORE.

WE REMEMBER

PERSONNEL FROM 14 NATIONS, SOME REFUGEES RALLIED TO THE CAUSE
544 PILOTS DIED, 312 GROUND CREW PERISHED TOO.
AS THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN RAN ITS COURSE
INCLUDING THOSE FROM WOMENS AUXILLARY FORCE,
A FACT THAT STRIKES A PARTICULARLY POIGNANT NOTE
SO MANY OF THOSE THAT DIED WERE STILL TOO YOUNG TO VOTE.

YOU SHONE LIGHT ON OUR DARKEST HOURS
WITH RESPECT, WITH DEEPEST THANKS WE REMEMBER
HOW AGAINST ALL ODDS YOU SAW IT THROUGH
THE DEFENDERS, THE PROTECTORS OF OUR FREEDOM
WE CALL THE FEW.

Poem by Rob Ellks, Stamford Poet Laureate 2020-21

Written for the Battle of Britain Commemoration, September 2020