

Statement by H.R.H. Prince William
Bomber Command Memorial
Daily Express 30.10.10

'Of the 125,000 men of Bomber Command, 56,000 gave their lives for this country and for freedom.

These numbers are so appalling that we risk becoming inured to what they truly mean. Behind each death was a family – parents, friends, often a wife and children, and each would have been utterly devastated by the loss of a loved one – as those who survive no doubt remain so today.

For someone of my generation, the scale of this loss is almost impossible to comprehend. Yet comprehend it we must. Each one of those young men died for you and for me. So much of the analysis of Bomber Command's role in the Second World War has been mired in controversy that it is sometimes forgotten what these young men went through for us.

Their average age was only 22. They were all volunteers. They set forth into the unknown by day and by night, often in freezing conditions. Over enemy territory, they were under near constant attack. And they did this night after night – for up to 12 hours at a time. Just try to imagine that – imagine finding the courage to overcome your fear to climb into your flying gear again, and again, knowing what will confront you.

As a flyer myself, I find this quite extraordinary. But they did it – tens of thousands of times. A memorial to the crews of Bomber Command has been half a century too long in coming. Having seen the plans for this sublimely beautiful memorial, I do feel that at last their wait is at end.

This will be a truly fitting epitaph to the other – sometimes forgotten – Second World War heroes of the Royal Air Force. A yew tree, a gift from the German nation, is to be planted in the Garden of Remembrance nearby.

There can be no greater message of reconciliation than this. Today, only some 3,000 men of Bomber Command remain with us. It is vital, therefore, that this memorial be erected now, while they are still alive and able to appreciate our Nation's gratitude to them, and to their fallen comrades. My great-grandmother, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, was a great champion of Bomber Command.

Instinctively, she knew that it was right to honour these young men and their extraordinary sacrifice. As with so much else in her life, her instincts were correct. You might ask, with a champion such as Queen Elizabeth, what need is there for me to ask you to support this appeal. All I can say is that, as the Patron of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight – with its magnificent guardian of these memories, the lone Lancaster, 'The City of Lincoln' – my own realisation of what these men undertook has only recently really dawned on me – as I think it has with many of my generation in other ways.

Mine is but one among many voices, urging all those who value the freedoms we enjoy today to contribute whatever you feel you can towards the creation of this wonderful monument. And for those who have already supported the appeal it is not for me to say thank you, but I can only imagine the gratitude of the veterans of Bomber Command, their families and the Royal Air Force.'

H.R.H. Prince William

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'William', with a horizontal line underneath.