

**REMARKS TO COMMEMORATE THE  
73rd ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN  
BY  
THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC.  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA - SUNDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013.**

Between July and October 1940, RAF fighter squadrons fought Luftwaffe bombers that pounded Britain's cities and airfields in preparation for a planned invasion. Of the 2,900 British and Allied airmen who took part, more than 500 were killed. Ten of those killed were Australians. However, a further 791 subsequently died in action or died in the course of their duties. But Germany's failure to defeat the young, undertrained and outnumbered RAF crews and conquer Britain's skies helped save the country from Nazi occupation.

Of course we all recall on this day the famous speech that Churchill made in the House of Commons about the few. Like so many of Churchill's wartime speeches it has since resonated with so many people but I thought that you might be interested to hear an account of what it was actually like to have been what we might call one of the many — the British civilians experiencing those awful months. The following is an account of the raids on London on the night of Tuesday 10 September 1940:

“For the third successive night London's civilian population felt the increasing weight of German air savagery, but dawn found the world's greatest city scarred but grimly determined.

“During Monday night the Germans abandoned all pretence of attacking military objectives, and dropped their cargoes of destruction at random.

“Again Londoners spent nearly 10 hours in shelters, while above them the glare of great fires, the crash of bombs and falling masonry, and the ceaseless roar in the sky, resembled an inferno.

“Throughout the night the raiders did not leave the skies over London, and great fires made a mockery of the city's blackout.

“The raiders over the city were increased to about 350 machines after waves of aeroplanes crossed the coast between North Foreland and Hastings. Our fighters immediately made contact and some raiders were chased back across the Channel.

“One Canadian squadron caught an enemy formation approaching the southern side of the Thames and pursued them up the river from London Bridge to Hammersmith, and engaged them in combat over the streets of London. At least three Dorniers and seven Messerschmitts were shot down during this engagement, which at times was over the Houses of Parliament and watched by the crowds beneath.

“A high explosive bomb in South-East London made a huge crater in the road, and hurled a tramcar into the air. Two screaming bombs which fell in line across North London struck residences and lifted several roofs bodily into the air.

“The next main raid increased in fury until at midnight the city was an inferno of bursting bombs, ‘archies’ and sirens.

“The first casualty of this raid, a German machine over Westminster, crashed down to the accompaniment of cheers of crowds near Parliament.

“The New York Times buildings in the heart of London were shattered by 500-pound bombs dropped by successive waves of raiders. The explosions were so great that they knocked fleeing civilians off their feet.

“A bomb struck an air raid shelter, burying people whom A.R.P. officers were still digging out hours later. Smoke covered the city while continual battles went on overhead.

“At various points in London rescue squads tore at debris for hours, without a glimmer of light, to rescue victims.

“Fires burned near St. Paul's Cathedral throughout the night. They were a great danger, but the wind held in the right quarter, and the cathedral escaped damage entirely. St. Paul's and other buildings stood silhouetted in the glare of fires for hours, but by 7 a.m. the fires were under control.”<sup>i</sup>

That’s what the Battle of Britain was all about. Protecting the civilians were those who fought in the air and those who struggled to keep the planes flying; those who toiled in the factories to replace the planes that were shot down and those who ignored the enemy bombing to furnish those that were flying with armaments, all forming a united team dedicated to keeping England and her allies free from Nazi domination.

That team – victorious in the end – was led by the Battle of Britain pilots, but as Wing Commander Bob Doe said, “We do not want to be remembered as heroes, we only ask to be remembered for what we done (*sic*)....that's all.”<sup>ii</sup>

For throughout the dark months of the Battle of Britain all the members of that team – the men and the women – and the civilians – they were all heroes.

Lest we forget.

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<sup>i</sup> Hobart Mercury Wednesday 11 September 1940 page 1.

<sup>ii</sup> Battle of Britain Historical Society <http://www.battleofbritain1940.net/bobhsoc/>; accessed 11 July 2011.