

## Sir Keith Park Memorial Campaign

### **Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Rodney Park, GCB, KBE, MC and Bar, DFC, RAF**

Sir Keith Park commanded the Royal Air Force 11 Group Fighter Command – the squadrons which bore the brunt of the Battle of Britain. The failure of Nazi Germany to defeat the RAF in 1940 was Hitler's first major setback – and forced him to call off his planned invasion of Britain. So it would be a fitting tribute to Park's leadership that a statue of him should be erected on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square beneath Nelson – another British hero who defended our nation's freedom in her hour of need.

As Lord Tedder, GCB, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, said of Sir Keith Park in February 1947:

*"If any one man won the Battle of Britain, he did. I do not believe it is realised how much that one man, with his leadership, his calm judgement and his skill, did to save, not only this country, but the world."*

Douglas Bader, the RAF ace who also fought in the Battle of Britain and spent time as a POW, said (at Park's Memorial Service on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 1975 at St Clement Dane's Church in the Strand) that the Battle of Britain,

*"...was controlled, directed and brought to conclusion by the man whose memory we honour today. The awesome responsibility for this country's survival rested squarely on Keith Park's shoulders. Had he failed, Stuffy Dowding's foresight, determination and achievement would have counted for nought...Keith Park was one of us."*

*"British military history of this century has been enriched with the names of great fighting men from New Zealand, of all ranks and in every one of our services. Keith Park's name is carved into history alongside those of his peers."*

Dr Stephen Bungay, the military historian and author of *The Most Dangerous Enemy: A History of the Battle of Britain*, said;

*"His record makes him, without rival, the greatest operational commander in the short history of air warfare."*

A statue of Sir Keith on the fourth plinth would be in keeping with other statues in Trafalgar Square. These commemorate Britain's other great military leaders – as well as Nelson, there is Major General Sir Henry Havelock and General Sir Charles James Napier, and busts of Lords Beatty, Jellicoe and Cunningham, all Admirals of the Fleet. There is, however, no statue for any member of the RAF who defended Britain – and London in particular – in 1940.

Our campaign for a memorial statue of this great man already has the support of a wealth of organisations including the RAF, the Battle of Britain Historical Society, Bentley Priory Battle of Britain Trust, the Battle of Britain Fighter Pilot Association, as well as Sir Keith Park's family and the New Zealand High Commission and Government. The campaign is funded by Terry Smith, a businessman and historian, who has commissioned the leading New Zealand sculptor Roderick Burgess to create a statue of Sir Keith.

So we are calling on the various authorities whose permission is needed for such a statue to be placed on the fourth plinth, including the Mayor of London, Westminster City Council and the UK Government, to support our case along with the many individuals and organisations that have already pledged their support.

If you would like to find out more about the campaign and register your support, please contact [karlmccartney@sirkeithpark.com](mailto:karlmccartney@sirkeithpark.com).

## **Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Rodney Park, GCB, KBE, MC and Bar, DFC, RAF**

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|-----------------|---|
| 15 June 1892    | Born in New Zealand, son of a Scottish geologist. Served in the cadets and joined the Army as a Territorial soldier in the New Zealand Field Artillery.   |
| 1915            | Fought at Gallipoli.  |
| 1916            | Park's battery took part in the Battle of the Somme.<br><br>Blown off his horse by a German shell. Wounded, he was evacuated to England and graded "unfit for active service".<br><br>Joined Royal Flying Corps.  |
| 1917            | Joined 48 Squadron at La Bellevue (near Arras). Park flew the new Bristol Fighter (a two-seat biplane fighter and reconnaissance aircraft).<br><br>Awarded the Military Cross for shooting down one, two "out of control" and damaging a fourth enemy aircraft during one sortie. Promoted to Temporary Captain and then Major, commanding 28 Squadron. |
| 1918            | War ends. Park's aircraft tally was five enemy planes destroyed and 14 "out of control" (plus one joint). His 13th victim in 1917 was Lt Franz Pernet of Jasta Boelcke, a stepson of General Erich Ludendorff. Park was also shot down twice during this period.  |
| 1918-38         | Serves with RAF, commanding various RAF stations.   |
| 1938            | Appointed staff officer to Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding.  |
| 1940            | Appointed Air Vice-Marshal, commanding 11 Group, responsible for the fighter defence of London and southeast England. Organized fighter patrols over France during the Dunkirk evacuation. During the Battle of Britain his command took the brunt of the Luftwaffe's air attacks.<br><br>Appointed Head of 23 Group Flying Training Command.           |
| 1942            | Commanded air defence of Malta, and squadrons participated in the North African and Sicilian campaigns.   |
| 1945            | Appointed Allied Air Commander, South-East Asia, where he served until and after the end of the war   |
| 1946            | Promoted to Air Chief Marshal and retires.<br>Returned to New Zealand   |
| 6 February 1975 | Died in New Zealand   |

### **Key Facts about the Battle of Britain**

- The official dates of the Battle of Britain are accepted as **July 10<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> October** 1940
- **2,936** pilots (from at least 12 countries) took part - **544** of them would lose their lives in the Battle of Britain
- It was the first major campaign to be fought entirely by air forces
- On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1940, the RAF had 531 serviceable fighters out of a total of 609, in reserve another 289. The Germans, in total, had 4,539 aircraft.