

News story: Prime Minister praises Royal Air Force at Centenary Reception

The Prime Minister hosted the Defence Secretary, three Service Chiefs and current and former service personnel at Downing Street today to recognise the dedication of those who have served in the RAF over the last 100 years.

More than 150 guests attended the event, including personnel from the Navy and Army, in recognition of the contribution that all three services made in the formation of the RAF in 1918. Attendees were greeted with a ceremonial welcome guard at the entrance of Number 10, while inside the RAF Salon Orchestra played music from across the three services.

Commemorative items were displayed during the event, including memorabilia from World War One, marking the centenary of the Great War's conclusion this year. Guests also passed by a Red Arrow Hawk facsimile, noting the key role played in national events by the RAF Aerobatic team since their formation.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier, introduced the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson MP to cadets, new recruits and veterans, including the last surviving female pilot from World War Two, 101 year-old Mary Ellis, who were thanked for their contributions to the service at home and abroad.

Addressing the audience, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

For one hundred years, the RAF has proved it is not only the first independent air force in the world, but the finest. It stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines and the Army in defending our nation and promoting our values, and I am delighted that members of each Service are here this evening.

Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

It is an enormous privilege to be in Downing Street to commemorate the rich heritage and the legacy which the RAF of today is proud to inherit. We celebrate the successes of today's Force – still young and diverse, at the cutting edge of technology and innovation, attracting and inspiring people of outstanding talent who are the future of our Service.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

From the Battle of Britain to countering Daesh in Iraq and Syria, the RAF has played a proud and vital role in keeping Britain safe

for a century. It is an honour to meet veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country, and to meet some of the RAF's inspired new generation who will continue to keep watch and protect our nation over the next 100 years.

[News story: Wreaths laid to honour sacrifice of British peacekeepers](#)

United Nations (UN) peacekeepers from 120 nations were recognised today, and tributes were paid to more than 3,700 personnel from those countries who have died while serving as UN peacekeepers.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We pay tribute to those who work tirelessly to protect families threatened by war and we're resolved to step up our efforts to prevent violence against women in places of conflict. We have played a leading role in this area but I am determined that we do more, by sharing crucial training and expertise to help those facing these terrible crimes.

Today, UN peacekeepers are actively engaged in 14 missions taking place in some of the world's most challenging environments. In the last two years there has been success in Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, and a transition to a police-led mission in Haiti.

The commemoration on International Peacekeeping Day marks the 70th anniversary of UN missions. Defence Minister for the Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster, marks this day by opening the conference at RUSI.



Minister for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster speaking at RUSI event. MOD Crown Copyright.

Defence Minister for the Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster said:

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of UN peacekeeping I pay tribute to invaluable contribution made by our forces who have served for the United Nations and their country in peacekeeping roles across the globe.

And I am immensely proud that the UK has nearly 700 British troops wearing the blue beret right now in South Sudan, Cyprus, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Libya, protecting communities from the violence and terror of warfare.

This month marks the UK's first anniversary of the deployment of engineers and medics to the UN Mission in South Sudan.

In South Sudan, the UK's largest UN deployment globally, UK engineers have completed infrastructure tasks to improve the physical security of UN sites and improved air access to remote UN camps. Alongside this effort, UK medics have run a field hospital, to provide medical care for more than 1,800 UN Peacekeepers and UN staff.

Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of UNA-UK, said,

The United Kingdom has a commendable track record on UN peacekeeping: financially, historically and through its renewed commitments in Somalia and South Sudan. UNA-UK hopes that peacekeeping will continue to play an important role in the UK's future defence plans well beyond 2020.

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers was first observed in 2003 to recognise and appreciate the efforts and sacrifice of UN peacekeepers. The Cenotaph commemoration is believed to be one of the largest worldwide where the Band of the Irish Guards performed at the wreath-laying at the Cenotaph.



The Irish Bands marching towards the Cenotaph. MOD Crown Copyright.

This year's commemoration was organised by the UN Association-UK (UNA-UK), with its Westminster branch, in partnership with the Royal United Services Institute. The commemoration, and a related conference on the challenges of modern peacekeeping, was held in conjunction with the High Commission of Canada and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Lord Ahmad and Air Vice-Marshal Alison Mardell laid wreaths on behalf of the UK government and defence. MP Harriet Baldwin, Minister for Africa, also attended the event.

Lord Ahmad, the Foreign Office Minister for the UN, said:

As we mark 70 years of UN Peacekeeping, it is right that we pause – and reflect on – the many lives saved, and on the regions and

countries stabilised. Millions of people, living in some of the most challenging places on earth, have been given hope and opportunity.

This is the proud legacy of the toil and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of men and women who have put their lives at risk to protect the most vulnerable. On this UN Peacekeeper Day, we recognise the dedication and efforts of all UN Peacekeepers, and, remember those that have sacrificed their lives for the cause of international peace and security.”

[Press release: UK Royal Air Force marks 100th anniversary by inspiring Canadian youth](#)

To celebrate 100 years of the Royal Air Force (RAF), school and cadet groups across Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec are getting an exclusive opportunity to learn about how pilots from the British and Canadian armed forces continue to work together to support peace and security around the world.

With inspiring future generations being such a big theme of [RAF100 celebrations](#), the UK's Naval and Air Attaché to Canada, Commander Neil Marriott (Royal Navy), called on Ottawa based RAF Exchange Officers, Squadron Leader Drew Anderson and Squadron Leader Andy Wilson, to offer a series of informative and exciting visits for school and youth groups, in partnership with volunteer group Vintage Wings of Canada.

During each session, 30 teenagers are invited to visit Vintage Wings impressive aircraft collection at the Gatineau Airport where they receive an informal presentation on the history of the RAF by current Air Force service members. They also learn about Canada's role in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan during the Second World War and how the RAF and RCAF continue to cooperate today.

So far, school groups from Carleton Place and Ottawa have taken part and at least five further school and cadet groups have trips planned for the coming weeks.

RAF Squadron Leader Drew Anderson, who is currently on exchange with the RCAF, said:

We've got a fantastic opportunity here to help the next generation learn a little bit of our shared history while at the same time

maybe inspiring some of them to consider a career in aerospace.

The volunteer staff at Vintage Wings of Canada have been fantastic and everyone is fully supportive of our RAF100 outreach activities. It's also important to remember that this is not a museum – these aircraft actually fly – and these youth are really excited to get so close to such beautiful and functioning classic aircraft.

Don Buchan from Vintage Wings of Canada said:

As an organization we are all about inspiring young people, so the RAF100 commemoration gave us the catalyst we were looking for to put together an interesting and informative program that we could use to reach a lot of local youths.

The RAF has capitalised on its centenary year to: Commemorate 100 years of extraordinary success, achievement and sacrifice; Celebrate the professionalism and dedication of today's RAF, which is airborne 24/7 supporting UK and allied interests around the world; and Inspire future generations by telling its unique story.

Commander Marriott said:

The focus of these events is to celebrate the history of the RAF and demonstrate its close relationship with the RCAF over the last century and today, at home and overseas.

We will inform you of the significant scientific leaps in aeronautics that were required to form the modern Air Forces of today, hopefully inspiring you to be Canada's future scientists, engineers, medical professionals or even pilots.

[**News story: Flagship AI Lab announced as Defence Secretary hosts first meet between British and American defence innovators**](#)

As part of the MOD's commitment to pursue and deliver future capabilities, the Defence Secretary announced the launch of AI Lab – a single flagship for Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and data science in defence based

at Dstl in Porton Down. AI Lab will enhance and accelerate the UK's world-class capability in the application of AI-related technologies to defence and security challenges. Dstl currently delivers more than £20 million of research related to AI and this is forecast to grow significantly.

AI Lab will engage in high-level research on areas from autonomous vehicles to intelligent systems; from countering fake news to using information to deter and de-escalate conflicts; and from enhanced computer network defences to improved decision aids for commanders. AI Lab provides tremendous opportunities to help keep the British public safe from a range of defence and security threats. This new creation will help Dstl contribute more fully to this vital challenge.

Yesterday's meetings provided the US Defense Innovation Board, a team of experts from across defence and industry, with an opportunity to meet with UK defence leaders to share experiences and innovation priorities. This co-operation further strengthens the excellent relationship between our militaries.

The team of American experts includes notable figures who have led transformative change in government or are acutely aware of the challenges the Department of Defense faces. Members include: Dr Eric E. Schmidt, former chair of Google Inc; Dr. J. Michael McQuade Ph.D, Senior Vice President for Science and Technology at United Technologies; and Sally Donnelly, former Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Defense.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The relationship we have with our American partners is indispensable to both our nations. In the face of evolving global threats, we must harness new technologies and approaches to stay ahead of our adversaries and keep us safe.

Today's meeting of military and scientific minds from both sides of the Atlantic encourages our best and brightest to develop new capabilities in everything from Artificial Intelligence and autonomous weapons to advanced cyber and robotics.

Building upon this hugely important area of research, the Defence Secretary also announced a reciprocal UK Defence Innovation Board visit to the US later this year which will develop joint recommendations based on the needs of the MOD and its American partners.



Defence Minister Guto Bebb meets members of the US-UK Defence Innovation Board. Crown copyright.

The UK's Defence External Advisory Panel published findings from their independent report which examines how the MOD can become 'innovative by instinct'. The report highlighted a requirement to expand capabilities in cyber defence and information technology systems but also the need to streamline procurement processes and the implementation of ground-breaking abilities.

As the MOD carries out the Modernising Defence Programme review, US counterparts are also examining how to strengthen their armed forces in the face of intensifying threats. In a rapidly changing world, military planning must be agile to counter emerging challenges and the MOD must consult widely with our closest allies.

Defence Minister Guto Bebb said:

UK defence has always been at the forefront of significant technological advances, from the development of radar systems crucial to our victory in the Battle of Britain to our Harrier jump jets which revolutionised our air capabilities in the Falkland and Iraq wars.

The UK has invested £800 million on boosting innovation over the next decade to meet future threats. This coupled with our close working relationships with allies provides us with the opportunity to maintain our military advantage for decades to come.

Note to editors:

- The US Defense Innovation Board is made up of leading experts from business, civil society and the military and broadly mirrors the work of the British team.
- The Defence Innovation External Advisory Panel was established, and met for the first time in July 2017.
- The Panel provides independent challenge as the members seek to interrogate MOD's current innovation ecosystem and help ensure that the Department is driving the right change at the necessary pace to meet its future goals. To support this challenge function, the Panel were asked to provide an annual report to Secretary of State for Defence on their findings. This is the first of these reports.
- The Defence and Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) works to apply cutting-edge science and technology (S&T) to keep UK armed forces, and the British people, protected from harm.
- Dstl is an Executive Agency of the MOD, run along commercial lines. It is one of the principal government organisations dedicated to S&T in the defence and security field, with six sites; at Porton Down, Portsmouth West, Fort Halstead, Sandridge, Langhurst and Alverstone.
- Dstl works with a wide range of partners and suppliers in industry, academia and overseas.

For more information contact the MOD News Desk on 0207 218 7907.

[News story: Decontamination work complete at Maltings site in Salisbury](#)

This follows on-going clean-up operations to remove any potential residual contamination following the nerve agent attack on 4 March 2018.

The site was visited by specialist teams and any items that may have harboured residual amounts of the agent were removed. All waste has been removed and will be disposed of safely.

A Defra spokesperson said: "Following extensive clean-up operations in Salisbury to remove any potential residual contamination resulting from the nerve agent attack on 4 March, decontamination work is now complete at the Maltings.

"The site will now be handed back to Wiltshire Council, who will decide when it is appropriate to release it back into public use."