

CRANWELL FOUNDERS DAY 4TH FEB 2022

A cold winter morning at Cranwell brings back memories of many such cold mornings when I first arrived at this College quite some time ago. I do not remember Founders Day being a special occasion but it has perhaps become blurred into just another parade with the ever-present threat of restrictions should turn out or drill not pass muster under the eagle eye of the junior entries drill instructors.

I am therefore delighted that in these times Founders Day is marked with a small but specific ceremony and an opportunity to remember our heritage. In that light I commend to you the Trenchard Memorandum, an admirably concise 8 pages, most certainly available in the library which lays out our Founders vision for the Royal Air Force then so recently formed, and which details the establishment of this College.

It is worth reflecting on this vision and its foundations. The end of the Great war with an Air Force of some 22,000 aircraft and close to 300,000 officers and men and in the throes of a reduction to some 25 Squadrons and 35,000 people. A belief that there would be no war in Europe without at least 10 years evidence and preparation. Trenchard had the wisdom to recognise that such thinking could be wrong and hence he needed to establish centres of excellence on which to build should the need arise.

He therefore established Cranwell, the Apprentice School at Halton, the Central Flying School and then the Staff College. Each of these institutions provided time and space for the development of excellence and crucially at Cranwell and Halton in particular the opportunity for growth of commitment, loyalty, sense of duty- those attributes that we are seeing right now, and have seen so regularly in the past, as retired and serving military personnel work in support of the NHS and its vaccination programme. In my day as a Squadron

Commander, I had nearly a third of my people away driving ambulances, fire engines and collecting rubbish during the winter of discontent when the unions were on strike-and this whilst holding Quick Reaction Alert. I was proud of them then and we can be proud of that enduring spirit and commitment today.

I sum up these ongoing military characteristics as “The recognition that ‘we’ is more important than ‘me.’” The coming together of men and women, bonding around a shared challenge, shared experience, which transcends the individual and becomes ‘us’ – A Cranwellian, A Haltonian, The Squadron, The Unit, all tangible entities not some abstract Metaverse.

RAF Officer Cadets today have all too short a time to achieve this vital ingredient for service in the armed forces; but achieve it you must. A Service in which the individual takes priority over the team will not survive in war, nor succeed in setting standards in peacetime that will deter war. I urge you again to look at the founding vision of our Service, dedicated to the effective formation of the world’s first independent Air Force and with an understanding of the revolution that air power could bring to war fighting; a Service with its own identity and one capable of adapting to change as we see today with space, cyber and artificial intelligence adding to the existing capabilities which air forces provide so well.

You will be the next generation of war fighters, not diplomats or politicians, that is for others. It will require the timeless qualities of courage, tenacity and pursuit of excellence and service before self. These are the qualities that must underpin our Service and that we in the Cranwellian Association are pledged to celebrate and preserve. Founders Day gives us an opportunity to reflect on our heritage and the tenets that have stood us in good stead and should remain at the heart of all we do in the future. I hope you will join the Cranwellian Association and help us in this quest.

