

PRESS RELEASE

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Campaign launched for Battle of Britain hero's statue in Trafalgar Square

***"If any one man won the Battle of Britain, he did."
Lord Tedder, GCB, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, 1947***

Friday 7th March sees the launch of a campaign to erect a statue of Battle of Britain hero Sir Keith Park on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. Supporters of the campaign include politicians Boris Johnson MP, Brian Paddick and Tony Benn; historians Dr Stephen Bungay and Antony Beevor; former senior military officers Field Marshall Lord Bramall and General Lord Guthrie; and broadcaster Sir Patrick Moore.

New Zealander Sir Keith Park played a crucial role in winning the Battle of Britain. As Air Vice-Marshal, Park commanded the RAF squadrons which defended London and the South East of England in 1940. He then led the defence of Malta in 1942 and reached the rank of Air Chief Marshal.

After the war, Lord Tedder, GCB, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, said of Park: "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."

At the photo call to launch the campaign in Trafalgar Square, former Battle of Britain pilots will join senior serving RAF officers, a great-great-niece of Sir Keith Park, politicians and many other supporters of the campaign from across the country. A full-size replica of a Spitfire will form the backdrop for the launch.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Torpy KCB CBE DSO ADC BSc (Eng) FRAeS FCGI RAF, said:

"The plan to erect a statue of Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park to commemorate his contribution to the Royal Air Force is particularly timely in this the 90th year since its formation. A statue situated in an appropriate location in London would be a fitting memorial to this World War I fighter ace and highly decorated airman. Sir Keith's illustrious military career spanned over 30 years during which he progressed from being an enlisted soldier to Air Chief Marshal. This very public acknowledgement of in particular Sir Keith's leadership of Number 11 Group Fighter Command in the defence of South East England and London is perhaps over due. It is an appropriate tribute to a man whose courage and resourcefulness were central to victory during the Battle of Britain and whose accomplishments are in the finest traditions of the Royal Air Force."

A spokesperson for the New Zealand High Commission said:

"The New Zealand Government recognises the vital contribution made by Sir Keith Park during World War II in defence of the United Kingdom. This initiative should contribute to informing people about Sir Keith's life and achievements."

The campaign for a statue of Sir Keith was initiated by Terry Smith, a businessman and keen historian. Terry Smith said:

"Trafalgar Square commemorates Nelson, who defended England in her hour of need. Yet, amazingly, there is no public memorial to Sir Keith Park. It is hard to imagine that the Fourth Plinth could serve a greater purpose than commemorating a man who did so much for this country. Hitler's failure to beat the RAF in 1940 forced him to call off his plans for invading Britain. Had Park lost, think what our future might have been."

"Such a memorial would help keep both his memory alive, and also help educate the young and all visitors to London of the incredible sacrifices made in that epic battle which raged above London and the South East in 1940."

The campaign is encouraging visitors to its website, www.sirkeithpark.com, to sign an online petition calling for the memorial. The website will be live from the 7th March and will also contain a media section and image library

Dr. Stephen Bungay, historian and author of 'The Most Dangerous Enemy: A History of the Battle of Britain', said:

"Like Wellington, Park was never defeated in Battle. His record makes him, without rival, the greatest operational commander in the short history of air warfare".

A bronze statue of Sir Keith is in the process of being commissioned from the leading New Zealand sculptor, Roderick Burgess.

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Notes to Editors

1. The campaign will be launched at 10:30am on Friday 7 March, on the North Terrace of Trafalgar Square.

2. There will be photo calls at 07:15 – 07:45 and 10:30.
3. **Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Rodney Park, GCB, KBE, MC and Bar, DFC, RAF** was the RAF Air Vice-Marshal commanding 11 Group Fighter Command, responsible for the aerial defence of London and South East England during the Battle of Britain. His inspirational leadership and tactical brilliance was central to Britain winning the battle, which in turn helped determine the outcome of the entire Second World War. Sir Keith went on to lead the air defence of Malta in 1942, subsequently reaching the rank of Air Chief Marshal in South East Asia at the end of the war. During the First World War, Sir Keith served at Gallipoli and then the Somme before becoming a pilot and shooting down 20 enemy aircraft.
4. Terry Smith is the Chief Executive of Tullett Prebon plc and Chairman of Collins Stewart plc. He has a keen interest in military history. He and others will be available for interviews.
5. Dr. Stephen Bungay author of 'The Most Dangerous Enemy: A History of the Battle of Britain' will also be available for interviews.
6. Roderick Burgess is a New Zealand-based sculptor who has been commissioned by Terry Smith to make the statue of Sir Keith Park. Initially self-taught, he studied sculpture in 1969 and then worked with Ron Ranby, New Zealand's most experienced sculptor at the time. In 1975 he was invited to study in England. He has completed numerous commissions in New Zealand for government and local bodies. Roderick Burgess is renowned as a sculptor in the classical style and his favoured material is bronze.
7. Leigh Park, great-great-niece of Sir Keith Park, will be attending the launch.
8. Other supporters of the campaign include: Algy Cluff; Dr John Hood, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford; Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burridge; Air Marshal Clifford Spink; Rt Hon Lord Tebbit; Lord Lee of Trafford; Mark Field MP; Richard Benyon MP; and the Hon Nicholas Soames MP.
9. Please visit our website at www.sirkeithpark.com for more information.