

Saint-Nazaire *Lancastria* Commemoration June 17, 2011

Monsieur le Sous Préfet
Monsieur le Président du Conseil général de Loire-Atlantique
Officiers généraux
Chers Vétérans
Mesdames et Messieurs
Chers ami(e)s

Please allow me to start by thanking you for the support the authorities and the Saint-Nazairians have always shown for *Lancastria* and for us. I thank you for the great honor of the invitation to be with you here today and to speak in front of you. And it is a true honor. The waters off Saint-Nazaire were the scene –on June 17, 1940 – of the greatest maritime tragedy that the United Kingdom has suffered. Over 4,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, women and children were killed. Together we mourn their loss and honor their memory.

The numbers and scale of the loss are, in themselves, an enormous tragedy. But there is even further sadness – because these were people who died in the cruel belief that they had been saved – because, unlike *Operation Chariot* here in Saint-Nazaire, where heavy loss of life was perhaps eased by the strategic victory that was achieved, for the *Lancastria* there was to be no strategic victory.

But perhaps there was... The evacuations from Saint-Nazaire were part of an operation which recovered over 600,000 servicemen – French and British – who would go on to liberate France in 1944. And also – **and always**, amidst such horrific events – there is the victory of human courage, courage which is shown by the survivors, courage by the many French citizens who helped save these survivors from such dreadful carnage, and courage shown by the families who bore their grievous losses so bravely and have been among those who come here year after year to bear witness.

After 71 years, there are no new words to be spoken here. Nor perhaps should there be – at the going down of the sun, and in the morning. It is perhaps best that we maintain an awareness of the debt we owe... and a shared commitment to mourn their loss and honor their memory.

*Captain Nick Stanley Royal Navy,
representing Sir Peter Westmacott KCMG, LVO,
ambassador of Great-Britain in France.*