

Mrs Moneypenny's original column in the FT, 11 September 2010, which sparked the campaign to create a memorial for Sir Keith Park, and an addendum written three years later.

At long last, a statue of the man who won the Battle of Britain



By Mrs Moneypenny

The bronze figure of Sir Keith Park to be unveiled in London is the culmination of a three-year campaign

One man, supported by thousands, succeeds against all the odds. This year, we in the UK are marking the 70th anniversary of the [Battle of Britain](#), which was fought over this country between July 10 and October 31 1940. We have had fly-pasts and nationwide events and the last surviving pilots of the battle (and there are very few of "the Few" left) have been fêted by those of us who are grateful for their bravery and the sacrifice of so many of their comrades. The Royal Air Force has worked hard to show the generations that have come later how much we owe the Few, and has even published on the internet the full [Fighter Command operational diaries](#) for the period of the battle.

Did any one man win the Battle of Britain? I have written before about [Sir Keith Park](#), a New Zealander whose life was spent in support of the British nation, fighting in both the first and second world wars. In the Battle of Britain he led 11 Group RAF, which was responsible for the defence of London and south-east England, which bore the brunt of the attacks by the Luftwaffe.

In 1947, Lord Tedder, Chief of the Air Staff, said of Park, "If any one man won the Battle of Britain, he did." And yet Park, who died in 1975, has remained largely unrecognised by the general public.

Finally, on Wednesday, September 15, on what has become known as Battle of Britain Day, a bronze statue of Sir Keith will be unveiled in Waterloo Place in London. It is the culmination of a campaign launched more than two years ago. Along the way we have seen a larger, fibreglass version of the statue on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square for six months (now at the RAF Museum in Hendon), and Sir Keith's name and achievements have been brought to the attention of hundreds of thousands of people of all ages and nationalities.

Although the statue is of one man, it is emblematic of the real story of the 3,000 or so RAF pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain. Park was not British – and neither were one-sixth of those who fought to save our country from Nazi Germany. The single largest contingent of foreign pilots was Polish, followed closely by New Zealanders, Canadians and Czechoslovakians. It is worth taking a moment on Wednesday to remember all those of other nations who took to the skies to defeat the Luftwaffe. They were very young – the average age of an RAF pilot in 1940 was

20, too young even to vote in the UK, but not too young to lay down their lives for their country, or even a country to which they had no special allegiance.

Against all the odds, they succeeded, against a Luftwaffe which not only outnumbered them but was better equipped.

It is exactly three years since I wrote a column suggesting that Sir Keith Park deserved greater recognition. That column sparked interest from readers all over the world. I was especially delighted to hear from those whose non-British relatives had served in the Battle of Britain, and who were well aware just how great a debt we in the UK owed to those people from overseas.

My original column set off a spark, but it was not I who lit the fire, and more importantly, not I who kept it burning until the campaign to erect a temporary, and then a permanent, statue to commemorate Keith Park was successful. It took one man (and the support of hundreds, including many FT readers) to launch the campaign and see it through, and this week he will see the culmination of all his, and their, work. The chairman of the Sir Keith Park Campaign, Terry Smith, will be at the unveiling of the statue, as will the prime minister of New Zealand and representatives of the other countries whose citizens served alongside ours. As will, I suggest, the spirit of Sir Keith Park, embodied in the tenacity that has characterised both the whole campaign, and the man who led it.

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