

THE SPEECH

delivered by

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at the

UNVEILING of the WAR MEMORIAL

for the

SUBMARINE SERVICE, R.N.

THE COMMANDOS

THE AIRBORNE FORCES

and

SPECIAL AIR SERVICE

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

21st MAY 1948

TODAY we unveil a memorial to the brave who gave their lives for what we believe future generations of the world will pronounce a righteous and a noble cause. In this ancient Abbey, so deeply wrought into the record, the life and the message of the British race and nation—here where every inch of space is devoted to the monuments of the past and to the inspiration of the future—there will remain this cloister now consecrated to those who gave their lives in what they hoped would be a final war against the grosser forms of tyranny. These symbolic images of heroes, set up by their fellow-countrymen in honour and remembrance, will proclaim, as long as faithful testimony endures, the sacrifices of youth resolutely made at the call of duty and for the love of our Island home and all it stands for among men.

This memorial, with all its grace and distinction, does not claim any monopoly of prowess or devotion for those to whom it is dedicated. We all know the innumerable varieties of dauntless service which were performed by His Majesty's soldiers and servants at home and abroad, in the prolonged ordeals of the Second World War for right and freedom. Those whose memory is here saluted would have been the first to repulse any exclusive priority in the Roll of Honour. It is in all humility which matches their grandeur that we here today testify to the valour and devotion of the Submarine Service of the Royal Navy in both wars, to the Commandos, the Airborne Forces and the Special Air Service. All were volunteers. Most were highly-skilled and intensely-trained. Losses were heavy and constant. But great numbers pressed forward to fill the gaps. Selection could be most strict where the task was forlorn. No units were so easy to recruit as those over which Death ruled with daily attention. We think of the forty British submarines—more than half our

total submarine losses—sunk amid the Mediterranean minefields alone, of the heroic deaths of the submarine commanders and crews who vanished for ever in the North Sea or in the Atlantic Approaches to our nearly-strangled Island. We think of the Commandos, as they came to be called—a Boer word become ever-glorious in the annals of Britain and her Empire—and of their gleaming deeds under every sky and clime. We think of the Airborne Forces and Special Air Service men who hurled themselves unflinching into the void—when we recall all this, we may feel sure that nothing of which we have any knowledge or record has ever been done by mortal men which surpasses the splendour and daring of their feats of arms.

Truly we may say of them, as of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, “When shall their glory fade?” But there were characteristics in the exploits of the submarines, the Commandos and the Airborne Forces which, in different degrees, distinguished their work from any single episode, however famous and romantic. First there was the quality of precision and the exact discharge of delicate and complex functions which required the utmost coolness of mind and steadiness of hand and eye. The excitement and the hot gallop of a cavalry charge did not demand the ice-cold efficiency in mortal peril of the submarine crews and, on many occasions, of the Airborne Forces and the Commandos. There was also that constant repetition, time after time, of desperate adventures which marked the work of the Commandos, as of the submarines, requiring not only hearts of fire but nerves of tempered steel. To say this is not to dim the lustre of the past but to enhance, by modern lights, the deeds of their successors, whom we honour here today. The solemn and beautiful service in which we are taking part uplifts our hearts and gives balm and comfort to those living people, and there are many here, who have suffered immeasurable loss.

Sorrow may be assuaged even at the moment when the dearest memories are revived and brightened. Above all, we have our faith that the universe is ruled by a Supreme Being and in fulfilment of a sublime moral purpose, according to which all our actions are judged. This faith enshrines, not only in bronze but for ever, the impulse of these young men, when they gave all they had, in order that Britain's honour might still shine forth and that justice and decency might dwell among men in this troubled world. Of them and in presence of their memorial we may repeat as their requiem as it was their theme, and as the spur for those who follow in their footsteps the well known lines :

*" Heard are the voices.
Heard are the sages,
The worlds and the ages.
Choose well, your choice is
Brief and yet endless.*

*Here eyes do regard you
In eternity's stillness.
Here is all fullness,
Ye brave, to reward you.
Work and despair not."*

