Dr. Jürgen Haffner, Air Attaché German Embassy, London,

at All Cannings, 15th of March 2024

First of all let me thank Amy Gray from All Cannings Parish Council for the very kind invitation. It is an honour to be here today.

Before I go any further, I'd like to emphasize the importance of today. It's a day that is symbolic in so many ways, and I'm grateful to be sharing it with all of you here in All Cannings for a moment of remembrance.

With your permission, I would like to start with some general observations before moving on to reflect on the particular circumstances that have brought us together today.

In 2018, one hundred years after the end of the First World War, Frank-Walter Steinmeier became the first German Federal President to take part in the moving Remembrance Day commemoration at the

Cenotaph and Westminster Abbey. Two years later – 75 years after the end of the Second World War – the then Prince of Wales was the first member of the Royal Family to speak, at the invitation of the Federal President, at the ceremony of remembrance to mark the Day of National Mourning at the German Bundestag.

In his speech, Prince Charles said: (quote) "Together, we are an indispensable force for good in our world. (…). Let us reflect on all that we have been through together, and all that we have learned. Let us remember all victims of war, tyranny and persecution; those who laid down their lives for the freedoms we cherish, and those who struggle for these freedoms to this day. They inspire us to strive for a better tomorrow – let us make this our common cause." (unquote)

If shared acts of remembrance are to be held by Germans and Britons, thoughts of reconciliation must stand at the fore. Today, we stand side by side as former enemies sharing our memories as victims of war.

Twice our countries and their armies faced each other as mortal enemies, yet today our soldiers serve in the same alliance and are on duty together in operations across the world. My day-to-day work consists in organising bilateral cooperation involving our two Air Forces, and it is fair to say that there are a great many areas in which we work in partnership.

What is tragic for members of the German armed forces who fought in World War II is the fact that they weren't even fighting for a just cause, quite the opposite in fact. Like young Unteroffizier Schönleitner and his crew, whose task it was to bomb London. It's possible he may have killed one of your ancestors. Yet here's the amazing thing: even though he was your enemy, you did not forget his crash near this place. You took upon yourselves to mark the spot, to put a memorial plaque on the tree and to commemorate the event and the death of young Unteroffizier Schönleitner. This is not what anyone would expect. It is not the normal way of things. It is in some

ways counter-intuitive. And yet, you did it. By remembering the past in this exemplary way, you chose to see him not so much as the German enemy, but rather as a human being.

Being human implies that, when we commemorate the dead, we should allow ourselves to be guided by the reflection that in death there is no enmity. Death does not acknowledge differences in faith, in the colour of our skin, in nationality.

Nowhere are remembrance and reconciliation more imperative than over the graves of those who gave their lives for us – and nowhere does reconciliation seem easier than when we feel that we are commemorating together with friends! I am incredibly thankful for your friendship and for this admirable and noble undertaking.

I bow my head in deep sorrow and respect before the dead.

I would just like to finish with a few words of thanks. Thank you to Colonel David Carson for doing such a great job of organising this event with such admirable attention to detail.

Let me also express my sincere thanks to Sylvia and Charles Butcher for welcoming us into their home and for erecting in 2021 the memorial. Your warm hospitality has made this gathering even more special for me.

And many others have been instrumental in organising and staging today's event, including:

- **The Reverend Richard Curtis, Team Rector for All Cannings;**
- **The Reverend Squadron Leader Rebekah Cannon, RAF Padre at RAF Boscombe Down;**
- **Tim Daw, local farmer and historian;**
- **Rifleman James Howard of the 7 RIFLES;**
- **Richard Baulu, Landlord of the Kings Arms;**
- **RAF Brize Norton for the flypast,**

and last but not least, the staff and children of All Cannings School, some of whom are here today.

Thank you all for contributing so generously in your various ways.

Without you this momentous event would not have been possible.