Noor Inayat-Khan was born in Moscow in 1914 to a Muslim family at the forefront of the movement to bring Sufism to the West. She grew up in London, then Paris. When the German army invaded France in May 1940, Noor escaped to Britain. In 1940 Noor enlisted in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force and trained as a wireless operator. In 1943 she was recruited into the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and became the first female wireless operator sent into occupied France. Noor was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943. After making two attempts to escape, she was kept in solitary confinement for ten months in a German prison, before being sent to Dachau concentration camp where she was killed at the age of 30.

Alois Vašátko, nicknamed ‘The Great Amos’, was a Czechoslovakian officer. Born in 1908, after the invasion of his home country, he fought with the French Air Force and became a fighter ace. Following the fall of France in 1940, he joined the Royal Air Force and was promoted to lead the Czechoslovak fighter Wing. Alois was killed in action during a dog-fight over the English Channel in 1942.

We honour and care for the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars, ensuring they will never be forgotten. Funded by six Member Governments, our work began with building, and now maintaining, cemeteries at 23,000 locations all over the world.

Today, over a century after we first began, our work continues through our staff, supporters and volunteers who preserve our unique cultural, horticultural and architectural heritage and ensure that the stories of those who died are told.

Find out more about our charitable foundation at www.cwgc.org/support-us
The Air Forces Memorial, Runnymede, is one of the largest and most celebrated memorials built to commemorate those who died in the Second World War.

The RAF saw some of the earliest action in the Second World War, and more than 116,000 men and women of the Commonwealth Air Forces died during the war. The day after war was declared raids took place in which seven aircraft were lost and 25 airmen were killed, the first casualties in what would become a worldwide struggle to gain mastery in the air upon which victory depended.

The War in the Air

The Air Forces Memorial, Runnymede, commemorates more than 20,000 Commonwealth airmen and women. They were lost in the Second World War during operations from bases in the United Kingdom and Northern and Western Europe and have no known grave.

The memorial was unveiled on 17 October 1953 by Queen Elizabeth II. 24,000 people attended the ceremony. Visitors enter through the ornate doors beneath the RAF motto ‘Per Ardua Ad Astra’ – ‘Through Adversity to the Stars.’ The names of the missing are arranged by year of death on stone panels around a cloistered courtyard. The Stone of Remembrance stands at the heart of the memorial.

The tower, reminiscent of a war-time RAF control tower, offers views across the nearby landscape including the Runnymede meadow where Magna Carta was sealed in 1215, the river Thames, Windsor Castle and Heathrow Airport.

Queen Elizabeth II unveils the Air Forces Memorial, Runnymede, in October 1953.