



RAAF Birthday Service
- Chief of Air Force: Air Marshal Mark Binskin
AO –
Air Force Memorial Grove

(Check with delivery)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to welcome you all here today to the RAAF Memorial Grove to mark the 88th anniversary of the formation of the RAAF. On this day in 1921 our Air Force became the third arm of Australia's defence force and only the second air force in the world.

We are celebrating our anniversary here at the RAAF Memorial Grove for the first time. I think that while this location is not the traditional site to mark our anniversary, it is in many ways quite fitting.

When I consider the Air Force personnel, units and events that are commemorated here, and in the Edwards VC Memorial Park next door, I cannot help but think of how well this memorial reflects certain aspects of our Air Force.

The first aspect has been one of diversity.

It is easy for the layman to think of the Air Force as a collection of flying squadrons and little else. The reality is that we are made up of a diverse matrix of formations and people, each responsible for a critical element of Air Force Capability, without which we would be the poorer warfighting force.

Those units and personnel commemorated here are representative of the diversity of the many units that have been raised to serve Australia in time of peace and war.

Look around, and you will see remembered:

The Women's Royal Australian Air Force;

School of Equipment and Administration Training;

Control and Reporting Units;

Army Co-Operation Squadrons; and our Engineering Apprentices, just to name a few.

All of our units and all of our people have contributed to Air Force achieving its mission throughout our 88 years of service.

This is just one aspect of our diversity.

Over the years the Air Force has reflected the changing nature of Australian society.

In 1921 there was not one woman in the Air Force. How that has changed, women now work in nearly every sphere of Air Force endeavour, with airfield defence the only exception.

Like-wise, once we were an organisation with a predominantly Anglo-Saxon heritage, now, like Australia, we are a truly multicultural organisation. We are a richer and stronger force for these changes.

We have also enjoyed a diversity of service experience and employment. The RAAF has performed duties in the four corners of the world and performed a vast array of missions.

For example, many of our early flights during the 1920s were conducted not in preparation for war, but were pioneering flights that opened up air routes across Australia and into the wider region. These early flights resulted in many communities experiencing their first taste of aviation.

Today, as we introduce capabilities and platforms into the force we continue to open up new frontiers in military aviation.

Our people have been employed in so many different tasks that it would be impossible to recount all of them here today. This exceptional diversity of activities in which the Air Force has been called to serve is in part a reflection of the professionalism, training and skills of our people.

We have been called not only to arms in wartime, but also to provide humanitarian relief, fight fires and provide support in time of flood and famine.

Regardless of the task, the one constant has been the outstanding results that have been achieved by the Air Force's men and women.

A second aspect reflected here are the strong bonds that have developed between Air Force and the many communities in which we have come into contact.

This memorial Grove commemorates many units that have had a direct connection with Canberra during their service life. While serving in the area, these units have effectively become part of the community.

Similar memorials could in fact be established in towns large and small all over Australia. The Air Force is now acknowledged in many places as an important element of that region's heritage.

From Horn Island in our north east to Albany in the south west, even as far afield as the Cocos Islands, RAAF units have become integral parts of local communities as they have worked in the security and service of Australia as a whole.

Today we are not only celebrating our birthday, but commemorating a relationship that started with the small community of Point Cook in 1921 and now embraces the nation.

The last reflection I would like to highlight is one of both change and permanence.

This Grove is intended as a living memorial to the men and women of the Air Force, a memorial that continues to grow through the endless cycle of the seasons. It evolves through the hard months of summer, the changing colours in autumn, asperity in the lean winter months, before once again blossoming in the spring.

The life of our Air Force has in many ways been similar. We have endured through all manner of conflict, faced the loss of our people in war and accident, suffered through the same hard lean years that the Australian people have endured and have been rejuvenated when the need arises.

The Air Force is a living and evolving entity, that readily changes as needs dictate, growing new capability as we shed the old in order to face current and future challenges.

Yet, like many of the trees you see around you, in some areas the Air Force has changed little over the years. And like these trees, our consistency is deeply rooted.

I am speaking of the values and ideals that we all share. Our Air Force has a proud tradition of rising to the challenges found in conflict, disasters and in maintaining Australia's security.

That tradition is founded on professionalism, motivation and dedication.

As part of the Australian community, the Air Force shares in the same ideals that have made our country what it is today. We are an organisation that values diversity, embraces change and maintains an egalitarian sense of a fair go for all. Regardless of the task, when called to our country's security or to the aid of our fellow man, we stand ready and willing to get stuck in and get the job done.

Today, as we celebrate our 88th birthday, I wish to acknowledge the achievements and sacrifices of the men and women who have served before us and acknowledge the service of our comrades who are, as we speak, serving on operations in remote and inhospitable locations around the world.

While they may be far away from us and their loved ones, they are never far from our thoughts and our prayers.

Thank You.