



Bomber Command 2013 Commemorative Day
Lunch Address
- Chief of Air Force: Air Marshal Geoff Brown AO -
Sunday 2 June

(Check with delivery)

Senator David Feeney; Mr Ross Pearson and Mrs Pearson; Rear Admiral Ken Doolan AO and Mrs Doolan; Veterans; Ladies and Gentlemen,

To the organisers of today's commemorative events I first wish to pass on my sincere thanks for your kind invitation to speak here today.

Throughout my military career I have always counted it as a great privilege to be able to meet with Australia's veterans; these opportunities have given me a greater appreciation of your personal experience, and a far better understanding of the importance of your contribution to the Air Force. A contribution which I believe has had a much greater impact and a far more enduring influence than many people realise.

Allow me to perhaps expand on what I mean about that contribution.

Military aviation is comparatively young when compared to the long history of naval and land warfare. Where my colleagues in the Navy and Army can point to the foundations of their professions emerging hundreds of years ago, we airmen look back no further than the early 1900s for our beginnings. The Navy can speak of Nelson and of iron men in wooden ships, while the Army may speak of Wellington and the 'Redcoats' of Waterloo—for Air Force we look to more recent figures and events for the emergence of our traditions. I speak of the leaders of influence like Australian's Don Bennett of the Pathfinders fame, and of course the members of Bomber Command.

For it was in the skies over the United Kingdom and Europe, that the Royal Australian Air Force deployed to war for the first time. It was in that sphere the RAAF started its journey in World War II. When we consider how our traditions and values have been shaped we look to the experience of Bomber Command as much as we

look to the Australian Flying Corp or events such as the Battle of Milne Bay as the major influences on our culture and the passion we have for our service.

Now while I know that Bomber Command was a very British institution. However, there were nearly 10 000 Australians who served in that organisation, with 3486 losing their lives as a result of that service. That sort of commitment creates a great deal of shared ownership and a common heritage.

When I speak to the Commanding Officers of our squadrons today, when I get feedback from my Warrant Officers and Flight Commanders, I hear a regular theme in their remarks. Our people, our airmen, maintainers, intel and loggies—everyone, all have a work ethic second to none, a drive for success and a willingness to excel.

Why?

Because that is the example that has always been set by each generation of Air Force members, all the way back to the pioneers of Australian military aviation. It has become what the Air Force does—it is what we have been doing since World War II and beyond, it is part of our DNA. In a very large measure we-are-what-we-are because the airmen of Bomber Command set a standard that we've become duty bound to measure up to.

Consequently, the Air Force is the respected and capable organisation you see through the example, devotion and courage of the veterans in this room today. To be able to share a meal with you, to speak with you about your unique experiences, and perhaps share some things we have in common, I find incredibly profound and more than just a little humbling; that's a feeling shared by every PAF and reserve member.

Let me put this influence into a larger perspective. The example of Bomber Command in World War II is already a byword for incredible endurance, resilience and tenacity. That example will be even more esteemed when the RAAF turns one hundred in 2021. When the RAAF turns two hundred in 2121, our decedents will be looking back on your achievements in the same way we look back to the events of Trafalgar and of Waterloo today. Be very proud of your contribution and of your place in history.

The contribution of Bomber Command to the Air Force of today goes even further. In World War I, air operations were very much tied to the needs of the maritime and

land forces. While there were some independent air operations on both sides, they were very limited in scope and, at times, of limited value. It was very much in World War II that air power became global in reach and strategic in nature.

Bomber Command was at the very forefront of these changes to the way world thought of air power and how it could be applied in conflicts. When it set out on its six year air campaign to attack the strategic war-making capabilities of Nazi Germany, it was a world first. No-one had ever attempted an air campaign of this type before, and there have been very few of the same magnitude. So in many ways, our understanding of air power strategy, how we plan an air campaign, our understanding of the pitfalls and dangers have been shaped and influenced by the experience of Bomber Command in World War II.

The hard won lessons learned in the operations rooms in Britain and in the night skies over Germany endure as part of our doctrine to this day.

In the late 1930s, when it seemed war was once again inevitable, the RAF began to refine its plans on the use strategic bombing. These plans were very much in the order of squadron level attacks on very select targets. The reality of mounting these operations was very different to what was envisioned. The advances in radar technology and in the performance of fighter aircraft quickly dispelled the notion '*that the bomber would always get through*'. As the tempo of operations increased, so too did the losses in aircrews and aircraft. Clearly, if Bomber Command was to survive the conflict, let alone help win the war, then it had to change and evolve and do so very quickly.

What we saw in response to these challenges are at the heart of our doctrine today. The first lesson was the value of coalitions. By December 1939 Britain and most of the dominion nations established what was to become known as the 'Empire Air Training Scheme'. An agreement whereby the resources of all the member nations would be pooled to sustain air operations that were to become global in scope. Some 27 000 Australians were trained and committed to the scheme, of which nearly 10 000 aircrew were to go to Bomber Command. There they fought shoulder to shoulder with men and women from across the Commonwealth in RAF units, and the notionally Australian 'Article 15 Squadrons'. Without every member nation providing people and resources, it would have been impossible for Bomber Command to sustain its operations. Today, we think the same way. Standing shoulder to shoulder

with like minded nations we can work together as coalitions on common security goals, pooling our resources in such a way that the collective whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

The second lesson learned was the imperative of a close relationship with industry and technology organisations. When the war broke out the RAF's bomber force consisted mainly of Wellington, Hampton and Whitley aircraft. None had any form of radar, none were capable of lifting much more than 4 000 pounds of ordnance, and all were slow and limited in range. These aircraft were glaringly deficient in sophisticated bomb sights and in the navigation equipment needed for long range bombing operations.

By war's end, the force had been transformed through the combined efforts of Bomber Command, industry and technology organisations. Large four engine bombers with bomb loads of up to 22 000 pounds were able to reach out across Europe guided by sophisticated navigation aids and terrain imaging radars. While aircraft like the De Havilland Mosquito were both fast and almost impossible to detect on radar, they could range the German night skies as strike platforms as well as nightfighters.

Without a sound knowledge base, manufacturing capacity and a close working relationship between Bomber Command, industry and the research labs, few of these improvements would have been available in time to make a real difference to the outcome of the war. With this lesson firmly in mind Air Force today maintains close links with technological organisations, centres of research and with the members of the Defence Industry community. It is these relationships that make the capability of the new Wedgetail AEW&C aircraft and the Joint Strike Fighter possible.

The third lesson and a lesson that has become central to all air power doctrine is the imperative to first gain then maintain control of the air. The appalling losses suffered by Bomber Command of aircrews and aircraft through World War II were almost unsustainable. It was only through the indomitable will of the aircrew that operations could be sustained. Despite my own experiences of military flying, I can only imagine how the stress and tension must have worn on the Bomber Command crews in having to face the perils of the German air defences mission after mission. Tracked by hostile radars, bracketed by searchlights and peppered by anti-aircraft fire, and all the while stalked by heavily armed night fighters—the crews faced it all, time and time

again. It speaks volumes of the moral fibre of the aircrews that they continued the air campaign despite the constant dangers.

As the war progressed, the equation did start to change, as more efforts were made in gaining some measure of air control over the target areas. The introduction of countermeasures such as 'window' and the radar spoofing systems carried into hostile airspace by Australia's No 462 Squadron were world first capabilities designed to protect the bomber force from detection and therefore from attack. That these measures increased the complexity and the planning needed to mount each operation was clear, the lives they saved made the new capabilities invaluable and a permanent part of all future operations. The introduction of the new E/A-18 'Growlers' into the Air Force in 2018 is an illustration of the importance we still place in electronic countermeasures as part of the modern air campaign.

Similarly, the introduction of the Mosquito fighter, meant that the German nightfighters went from the 'hunter' to being the 'hunted'. The mission of the Mosquito crews was directed at aggressively taking control of the airspace through which the bombers would pass. We follow that example to this day. First, take control of the air, then expand your air campaign across conflict space—be it in independent or in Joint missions. In the future, the stealthy, agile Joint Strike Fighter will be performing that mission for us, in much the same manner the Mosquitos were in 1944.

The last, most enduring and important lesson from the Bomber Command example is the importance of teamwork and of people. As I've already touched on, the complexities of planning and execution of a single bombing mission grew as the war progressed. From single squadron attacks, missions grew to encompass over 1 000 aircraft from bases throughout the UK. While most were bombers, many were the Pathfinders sent out to mark the targets ahead of the bomber stream, while others were weather reconnaissance or interdiction aircraft. Regardless of their intended mission, every aircraft had to be armed and maintained by skilled personnel willing to work around the clock in order to make every aircraft available. Thousands of pieces of ordinance had to be prepared and loaded. Hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel had to be delivered to airfields throughout the UK. While planners, intelligence and senior aircrews planned each mission meticulously. In short, every

man and women worked with a single purpose and common aims in order to get the aircraft up and the bombs on target.

When I tour the air bases around Australia and overseas, I still see that same teamwork, I still see a people centric organisation, all working with the aim of keeping the Air Force on mission and meeting any task required of them. I cannot tell you how much comfort it gives me knowing that regardless of the mission, my people can and will respond with whatever is needed, wherever it is needed. Be it a security threat, natural disaster or search and rescue mission—the Air Force team are up to the task.

As I mentioned earlier, at the heart of the Air Force in meeting every challenge is a driving spirit and a sense of responsibility inherited from the pioneers of Australian military aviation. To you the airmen of Bomber Command, you have my gratitude for the part you have played shaping and influencing an Air Force that is respected and admired around the world.

Your contribution has been enduring, and it will never be forgotten.

Thank You