

**SPEECH BY
CHIEF OF AIR FORCE
AIR MARSHAL GEOFF BROWN, AO
FLIGHT TEST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA
AVALON, 27 FEBRUARY 2015**

I am honoured to be able to address the Society at this prestigious event for airmen and all who are interested in aviation. Being Patron of the Society is great honour. It is an honour that means even more when I consider that a very fine airman—Sir Angus Houston—held this position before me. I understand the Society has struggled a little in the last few years, but is looking to a brighter future in the context of the vibrant period that Australian aviation is entering now.

Of course the theme of this year's air show is Heroes of the Sky. In the Centenary of Anzac year, it is appropriate that we pay particular respect to the feats of those thousands of airmen and airwomen who have fought for this country, especially those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. And next year, 2016, will mark the 75th anniversary of Test Flying in the RAAF, with the Special Duties and Performance Flight being established at Laverton in 1941. That milestone will be of unique significance for the Society.

And the contribution of ARDU to the flight of the Bristol Boxkite replica for the Centenary of Military Aviation was greatly appreciated by Air Force and demonstrates your deep commitment to preserving and honouring our history.

I recognise that the Society comprises both military and civilian members. That is a source of great strength and provides an opportunity for us to learn from one another. Cross-fertilisation of skills from our flight test environments is likely to help all of us. As an indication that Air Force prizes the skills of your membership, I am pleased to point out that Air Force has had three recent test pilot members reaching two-star rank Blackburn, Skates and John Kindler.

This year has two presentations from UAS-specific manufacturers. This trend is likely to continue. How does this trend affect the future structure of flight test training and conduct? As capability manager, I am required to balance the cost of the capability and the outcomes provided by it. Maintaining an independent flight test capability is an expensive business. As an Air Force, we must ensure the cost of that capability provides a suitable return on investment. I understand that this return has been questioned for ADF units, particularly with the current trend to purchase Military-Off-the-Shelf systems such as the C-17 and F/A-18F Super Hornet.

I see the input provided by flight test to capability acquisition and introduction into service as being critical. But it also needs to be relevant. And this was articulated in the 2012 Senate Select Committee Review into Defence Acquisition. Australia has some of the best airspace in the world to support flight test (Woomera), so maybe we need to seek greater involvement from manufactures to use this resource. The 2011 Review into ADF Flight Test identified a number of structural issues with the way in which flight test was managed within the ADF.

This week I rolled out Plan JERICHO for Air Force. Jericho recognises the challenges we will face as we become a 5th generation – enabled force. No doubt all of you are eagerly anticipating the arrival of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. It is a remarkable aircraft. But Jericho recognizes that the F-35 is more than an aircraft. It possesses an extraordinary array of sensors and systems unprecedented in our inventory. As I have stated many times this week ‘JSF replaces *nothing*; but it changes *everything*’. If we employ it as a slightly improved version of Hornet then we will have failed as an Air Force. The F-35 is a transformative system that performs numerous roles simultaneously. It does not distinguish between strike and ISR missions. Moreover, it can acquire and disseminate information on a scale and at a speed which takes Air Force—indeed the entire ADF—into a new era.

We have been talking about the Information Age for a long time. But we have arrived at a point in the evolution of air warfare and air power’s contribution to joint operations across the land, sea and maritime domains where information represents the conclusive element in achieving decision superiority. In the final analysis, decision superiority will provide us with a winning edge that mass cannot. In an era of

shrinking defence budgets and government austerity measures, we simply cannot rely on mass or even on an overwhelming technological edge to win. Decision superiority offsets our potential deficits in those realms. We must integrate all elements of Air Force and the ADF to employ our systems and sensors to best effect. We already do this well, as our current operations in Iraq demonstrate. But we must do more than modernise—we must transform.

Transformation will entail achieving seamless, real-time exchanges of information between all our platforms and with our joint and allied partners. It will entail enhancing the speed of decisions in relation to upgrades of software and using our sustainment funds more aggressively to match the speed of technological innovation. And it will entail raising, training and sustaining a talented, adaptive Air Force built around entirely new skills and trades—some of which may come into existence in the near future as we integrate the F-35.

It is an exciting time to be in Australian aviation. I welcome your support to Air Force at this critical time.

I would be delighted to take questions in my remaining time.