

**ADDRESS BY CHIEF OF AIR FORCE
AIR MARSHAL GEOFF BROWN, AO
BIRTHDAY OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE
31 MARCH 2015**

Birthdays—whether of an individual or of an institution—provide an occasion to celebrate as well as a time for reflection. Today we mark the birthday of a truly great Australian institution—the Royal Australian Air Force. We have much to celebrate and we shall. But it is also a time to pause in solemn remembrance as well because over time many who have worn that uniform of which you and I are so proud have died in the service of this country.

Since its foundation as a fledgling force in 1921, our Air Force has earned an enviable reputation as formidable fighting force. We are one of the oldest air forces in the world enjoying continuous existence since 1921. That is a rare achievement. For a long time, we struggled to earn respect and relevance. Over those intervening years, our forebears have fought and died far away from home as well in the skies directly over our vast continent. Their bravery and sacrifice ought to inspire us and remind us always of our obligations to our Air Force and our country.

Of course, this birthday is especially significant. It falls just before the Centenary of the Anzac landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The memory of Anzac is central to our national identity but it also sets the standard against which every member of the modern Australian Defence Force benchmarks their behaviour. For good reason Anzac has become synonymous with the Australian Army. But as airmen and airwomen, we should never forget that our predecessors of the Australian Flying Corps had already deployed to Mesopotamia, which is modern day Iraq, and later came of age on the Western Front in Europe.

Moreover, Gallipoli established the foundations of the Australian approach to grand strategy which has continued to this day. All of our military commitments have followed the pattern set in 1915. We commit our air, sea and land forces to coalitions of like-minded nations all over the world. We do this to secure our nation and its interests through joining with our allies to uphold a decent global order.

Whether fighting in the air and sea approaches to Australia, against direct attack in 1941 and 1942 or fighting Nazism in Europe, Communism in Korea, Malaya and Vietnam, Australian airmen have answered the call in a manner of which their forebears would have been proud. Indeed in the Second World War, air power came into its own with strategic bombing critical to the defeat of both the Axis powers. And casualties among our aircrew were the highest among any Australian forces.

In addition to the Centenary of Anzac, our birthday this year is even more poignant because we have so many airmen and women deployed on current warlike operations. They are flying sorties over Iraq—the very birthplace of Australian military aviation operations. It is demanding work against a truly monstrous enemy. And it comes in the wake of sustained operations against Islamic extremism since 2001. Many of you marched in the welcome home parade for Operation SLIPPER only a week or so ago. You have written your own chapter of Air Force history.

Today as we celebrate our pride in the Air Force and the enormous satisfaction we derive from being part of the Air Force family, let us not forget our mates on operations and their families back home. They are adding another rich chapter to the history of the Royal Australian Air Force. But that always entails sacrifice and risk.

Today the Air Force is poised to enter the 5th generation of air power technology. It is an exciting time to be a part of this wonderful organisation. And I have recently described the vector Air Force will navigate to our own Centenary in 2021.

As we have demonstrated over the past year, we are an agile, adaptive, responsive force with a perfect balance of capabilities. In the past year, we have delivered humanitarian aid to distressed populations in permissive and contested environments. We have deployed a potent, balanced Air Task Group to the Middle East to conduct full spectrum operations against Daesh or ISIL. We have led and coordinated the largest maritime search in history for MH370 and repatriated the bodies of Australians citizens killed when MH17 was shot down over the Ukraine. In all of these operations you, your friends and colleagues have lived up to the best traditions of our Air Force.

Our future looks exciting. It is also in very safe hands. Our original airmen in their tiny biplanes would be proud of you. I am proud of you. Be proud of yourselves. You deserve to be.

Happy Birthday to you all.