

Address by the Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Leo Davies, AO, CSC

Battle of Britain Commemorative Dinner 'In Moving to a Preferred Future' Hobart, 17 September 2016

You Excellency's, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very grateful to be here tonight and wish to thank the organising committee for the invitation to say a few words as part of tonight's events.

The Battle of Britain was without doubt one of the greatest and seminal air campaigns of all time. The victorious battle which some thought could not be won by the RAF [Royal Air force] has mesmerized, inspired and captivated air power theorists, historians and practitioners alike for generations. I suspect it will do so forever.

History is a great teacher, and while we should never look to fight our next war just like we fought our last, it is a wise mind that looks to the past to discern the enduring lessons from which we may profit in the future. Currently Air Force is being reshaped through the outcomes envisaged by Plan *Jericho*, so it is not without some interest that I glance back at what history might tell me about the efficacy of the changes we are working to introduce into today's Air Force. When I consider the lessons which might be gleaned by a study of Fighter Command in the summer of 1940, I feel somewhat reassured that we are on the right path to our own preferred future.

Allow me to elaborate. Few commanders ever get to fight the battle they prepared for. Hugh Dowding and Keith Park are rare exceptions in the annals of military history. When the Battle of Britain started in July 1940, Dowding, as the head of the RAF's Fighter Command, and his trusted commander of No 11 Group, Keith Park, had the small luxury of knowing that not only did they have some of the finest aircraft and airman available to them, but they were also fighting the very air campaign their force was designed for.

I do not use the term 'force design' by accident. Fighter Command from its very inception had a clear mission and was designed from the ground up to complete that mission. Clear of purpose and with determined intent, Fighter Command was built around an unambiguous set of design requirements which left no-one uncertain in terms of the effects they were expected to generate for the United Kingdom. This is not poetic licence. The very motivating factor which drove the creation of the RAF in 1918 was the need to defend London and the east coast from the attacks by German Zeppelins and fixed-wing bombers which had become routine from 1915. For the next 22 years the integrated air defence network that was Fighter Command in 1940 was refined, trained, sustained and exercised.

As older aircraft became obsolete, they were replaced by new, cutting edge aircraft. Importantly, these new aircraft were developed around specifications driven by emerging threats and advanced technologies. In turn, as the new technologies demanded new skills, Fighter Command, and indeed the entire RAF, reshaped its work force in response to these new demands. Technologies we take for granted today, such as retractable undercarriages and stressed skin semi-monocoque fuselages required a workforce with new skills to maintain

them. Similarly, as the improved performance of aircraft placed more demands on the aircrew who operated them, by extension, new and greater demands were placed on the training systems responsible for delivering the next generation.

I would add that the evolution of Fighter Command was not limited to aircraft, aircrew and the maintainers. Through a close relationship with the science community, the RAF was intrinsically involved in the development of radar through the late 1930s. As you might be aware, the construction of the Chain Home and the Chain Low radar systems were a critical factor in determining the final outcome of the Battle of Britain. One of the great leaps forward in the establishment of the RAF's radar system came when it was appreciated that it was just as important to evolve the way information from the radar system was processed, communicated and exploited by the people in the information loop as it was to detect the incoming aircraft in the first place.

So in short, as radar found its way into service, so too did a new generation of RAF personnel who had been prepared specifically to ensure that the wider air defence network's concept of operations achieved the step change in capability afforded by the new technology. It was not just about bringing in new technology and new people. Fighter Command was also benefiting from an older generation of officers who had been matured as masters of air power. It was this generation who were providing the leadership needed to translate the mission and vision into capability and performance. For example, the genesis of the RAF and of Fighter Command was shaped by two individuals who somewhat intriguingly had previously fought on opposite sides during the Boer War. I refer of course to Field Marshal Jan Smuts and Lieutenant General Sir David Henderson.

It was Jan Smuts who in 1917 was responsible for the influential reports which resulted in the establishment of the UK's first truly integrated air defence network and the formation of the RAF. While David Henderson, an expert in what today we would call ISR [Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance], was a founding member of the Royal Flying Corps [RFC] and the RAF. He was to be highly influential in guiding Smuts in the drafting of his reports and in the establishment of the formation of what was to become Fighter Command.

By 1940, the baton of leadership had been passed on to a new generation. Fighter Command was by then led by veteran aircrew of World War I, people who had served and been educated in the application of air power in the inter-war colonial conflicts and in the higher command colleges of the British Military. Hugh Dowding for example, was in action with the RFC within six weeks of World War I being declared. While Keith Parks was in fact an ANZAC who had landed on the beaches of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 and who eventually transferred to the RFC and fought in the skies above the World War I trenches. Both men were to have key operational and staff appointments during World War I and in the inter-war years afterwards. Both were educated in the finest colleges available to RAF officers and both were given career-broadening postings.

As much as I am engaged by the story of Fighter Command's epic four month battle, and as much as I admire the courage demonstrated by the aircrews who fought day after gruelling day. I find the professional airman in me is equally inspired by the manner in which Fighter Command developed into the force that in 1940 proved to be such an effective instrument of National defence. In its design, its clarity of vision and in the generational influences which combined to drive Fighter Command's constant evolution I see validation in the changes envisioned in today's RAAF by Plan *Jericho*; changes which are already having a positive effect on how we generate and employ air power in defence of Australia's national interests.

In short, there is a methodology we can apply to force design that has stood the test of time. The principles of which transcend differences in context, conflicts and technologies. The officers and airmen of today's Air Force are veterans of deployments to East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Afghanistan and Iraq. They have all been educated as professional air power practitioners through our single service and Joint schools and colleges. To the best of our ability, we have also given them the best career enhancing postings we can.

As we look to up skilling the existing work force we are also looking to the next generation who will provide the Air Force with the skills, knowledge and ability to operate the 21st century technologies which are providing us with the same step change in capability which radar provided the RAF in 1940.

Ladies and gentlemen, I close my address tonight with one final observation. While the epic air campaign of 1940 provides us with an eminently sound case study in force design, it nevertheless also resulted in the deaths of some 537 Allied aircrew. This sobering thought should always remain with us as the final lesson in force design as leaders, as planners and as those who enjoy the freedoms bought and paid for by those 537 young men. War is never without cost and those costs are more than just physical and affect not only the individual but also family, friends and community.

To those who fought, endured and suffered during the Battle of Britain it is your courage and sacrifice that provides us with the greatest example of all.

Lest we forget.

Thank you.