



Royal Australian Air Force Air Power Conference

Closing Address

- Deputy Chief of Air Force: Air Vice-Marshal Leo Davies, CSC -

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About ten years ago, at this very venue, a previous DCAF, AVM Roxley McClennan, stood up to provide some closing observations on the 2004 Air Power Conference—that one was on Network Centric Warfare. The Royal Australian Air Force in Rox's time was somewhat different to the one which we find ourselves in now. Back then, as he spoke, Boeing 707s and Caribous—aircraft designed in the 1950s and 60s, were committing airlift and receiving noise complaints throughout Australia and the globe. Our last HS748s had only recently been retired, and C130Hs were just finishing operations in the Middle East, with the C130Js just commencing their first deployment. The Operation Slipper C2 diagram could still fit on one page. The delivery of first Wedgetail was still five years away. All RAAF aircraft were manned.

The RAAF's strategic reach was embodied in the F111 force at Amberley—where it still is now, but now in the form of the C17s, KC30As and Super Hornets that are parked there today. Some things have not changed however—particularly if you ask Sanu, Sandra and Keith Brent hiding there in the wings just like they did in 2004, hoping the conference that they organised and sweated over so much would be successful.

Back in 2004, Rox's closing point was not about hardware, however—his key observation on Network Centric Warfare was that the main challenge really was human, one of training, culture and removing tribalism. I would like to pick up where Rox left off a decade ago—I would like to talk about generational change in the Air Force in the next ten years.

We have had a great opportunity here to listen to some world-class speakers at this conference commemorating a century of military aviation. Mr Sebastian Cox, Dr Rich Muller, as well as our own Professor John McCarthy and Geoffrey Blainey started off by providing us with some insightful views on air power up to the end of the second world war. They were followed by some excellent papers from Professor Robert O'Neill, Dr Mark Clodfelter, Dr Peter Gray and Dr Ben Lambeth, who took us through the key air campaigns in the second half of this century of military aviation. We also heard some thoughtful reflections on the air campaign by Colonel John Warden, on irregular warfare by Dr Christina Goulter, and Soviet and Russian Air Power by Dr Sanu Kainikara. We were then privileged to hear some invaluable and welcome perspectives from our closest allies in the US and UK with presentations from the 2003 Gulf War from General Moseley, Air Chief Marshal Torpy and Air Vice-Marshal Hupfeld, perspectives on partnerships from Air Chief Marshal Pulford before finishing with some more insightful views from our partners in industry and strategic thinking with Mr Tim Norgart and Mr Peter Jennings. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those speakers for their contribution to what I believe has been a truly outstanding conference.

One thing highlighted over the last couple of days is that even the most far-sighted observers could not have predicted, or comprehended, the amount of generational change that would occur over the first hundred years of military aviation. The last hundred years has seen flimsy contraptions of fabric and wire evolve into some of the most sophisticated machines on the planet; harnessing speed, reach, perspective and precision to generate effects from the tactical to strategic level. This evolution of technology, however, has not always been matched with an evolution of doctrine, training and culture—those critical inputs that allow the technology to fully realise its potential.

The changes in the Royal Australian Air Force I mentioned in the last decade are nothing compared to what we will experience in the next ten years. We are still building up our capability and experience levels with the introduction of the Wedgetail, C17, KC30A and Super Hornet, and soon the government will entrust us with some of the most impressive air power capabilities on the planet. The Growler, P-8, Joint Strike Fighter and

Triton will give us technology unsurpassed by any small or medium air force. However, we will never realise the full capability of these systems if we—the people in the Air Force—do not undergo a generational change, equivalent to the generational change in the technology we operate.

The new platforms will require us to update our core processes and structures, such as the recent changes to our security forces and the planned changes to our command structure and intelligence organisation. These will require new operating concepts and doctrine to meet not only the demands of the new technology, but the demands of the modern world—from rapid responses to humanitarian crises, to meeting the exacting domestic and global expectations regarding casualties and collateral damage in full spectrum operations. Air Force will need to be able to anticipate, comprehend and respond to these demands to maximise our future.

The new technology will also require a generational change in training, education and culture. The New Horizon program is only one initiative to shed some of the artifacts of the past and to prepare Air Force for the demands of the future. Air Force needs to be able to fully harness its human resources if it is to operate the new technologies to their fullest, and as such, must take steps to continue to attract, educate and retain suitably qualified and experienced personnel.

Additionally, the Air Force culture must be able to anticipate future changes in technology, the environment, as well as changes in both our allies and adversaries – the last two days has been full of examples where failure to do so has resulted in suboptimal outcomes to air forces and air power.

Finally, Rox's last point ten years ago was as pertinent today as it was when he was speaking on Network Centric Warfare—the challenge is to shed our tribalism to utilise the full capabilities of our new technology as a joint force. The Growler is a good example—the platform needs to be seen not only as just an air force platform for producing effects in the air environment, but a joint asset that can assert dominance of the electromagnetic spectrum over any joint battlespace, from an irregular war to an amphibious task force. The Air Force—and ADF—must be able to understand the potential, and just as importantly the limitations, of the new capabilities to best employ them in the modern environment. This will require education, leadership and a good deal of joint collaboration, including both virtual and real world exercising so Air Force can truly generate air power effects that contribute to the achievement of the joint force commanders' objectives. It is only in the achievement of these joint objectives that a small force such as the ADF can achieve the strategic outcomes that the government will demand of us.

We are not, however, going about this journey alone. We specifically invited our friends, partners and allies, both at the podium and in the audience, to this conference to share their experiences and perspectives of not only the last decade, but also the next. We can learn from those that are further along in the capability journey than us, and work together with partners that are at the same level. We must also be aware that others will be watching us so as to learn from our successes or failures. I am pleased to see that the Air Power doctrine released this week has elevated International Engagement to an Enabling Mission of Air Power—a fundamental lesson from the last century of military aviation is that the Air Force will be asked to operate at short notice far away from our shores, in a coalition that may include allies, partners, and in some cases, previous adversaries. This is but one of many lessons that we need to heed in reflecting on this conference—the commemoration of one hundred years of military aviation in Australia.

Thank you for your attendance and contribution.