



**RAAF 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Service**  
**- Deputy Chief of Air Force: Air Vice Marshal Geoff Brown AO –**  
**Australian War Memorial**

Thursday 31 March 2011

*(Check with delivery)*

Men and women of the Royal Australian Air Force, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this evening's reception marking the RAAF's 90th Anniversary. On behalf of the Chief of Air Force please let me say how pleased we are that you could be here this evening.

This year the Air Force celebrates its 90th anniversary to the theme of Tradition, Innovation and Evolution. In essence, what we marking is the influence that over 300,000 men and women who have served in the RAAF have had on our heritage and the capability of our Air Force. This is an important distinction to draw. All of the Air Force's history and all of its achievements are the results of the superlative efforts of its members. All the aircraft we have flown, the major weapon systems we have operated, and the ability to sustain such capability is entirely due to the decisions and actions of the members of the Air Force. It has always been and continues to be about people – those who have determined what we bought, how we would operate it and how we should train our people in sustaining our capability through its life cycle. In operations, be it in peace or war, the members of the RAAF have served with dedication and with distinction. Our history, the heritage we are commemorating tonight, has been born from the service of people. Tonight is as much a celebration of human achievement as much as it is a celebration of an anniversary.

There is, however, something a little awkward in celebrating a 90th anniversary. For any organisation 90 years of operations is an important milestone, an achievement worthy of proper recognition. In the case of the world's air forces, only the RAF has properly reached the same age. Yet a 90th birthday, for all its significance, can be subtly eclipsed by a looming centennial celebration. While I recognise that possibility, I also see something of an opportunity for the Air Force of today.

Let us consider two periods of RAAF history.

First 1939 to 1945. In the early months of 1939, the RAAF numbered less than 3200 people, and we operated less than 210 aircraft, the vast majority of which were bi-planes. By war's end over 215 000 people had been enlisted, we operated over 6000 aircraft and had served in every theatre of the war. We had transformed from a small regional air force into a global air power, the fourth largest in the world. When we consider the rapidity of the RAAF's expansion, the pervasiveness of its modernisation and the magnificence of the RAAF's wartime service, an inescapable conclusion is that such accomplishments are only possible through the combined efforts of a large number of professional and dedicated people.

I would further add that aircrew were not solely responsible for the sustained tempo of Air Force operations. The global scope of the RAAF enterprise was the product of the combined talents of specialists from the logistics, administrative, medical, maintenance and airfield engineering branches. During WWII, the RAAF became a complex organisation, reliant on a matrix of units and specialisations to achieve its mission. We also came of age, turning 21 in 1942 with barely a pause in the RAAF's labours to mark the event.

The second period I would like to highlight falls between 1958 and 1973. During this time we replaced the majority of the RAAF's inventory of aircraft. In fifteen short years, we went from Sabres to Mirages, Lincolns to F-111s and Dakotas to C-130s with many other transformations in between. We re-established our global reach and became part of an international integrated air defence system. Most of this force development took place concurrent with a period of high operational tempo, with the RAAF involved in a series of counter insurgency operations and in several peacekeeping missions. Today we look back at the achievements of the RAAF during this period with understandable admiration and gratitude. During this time, it was the men and women of the RAAF that ushered the Air Force into the modern era that we are part of today.

It is worth noting that when celebrating the 50th anniversary of Air Force in 1971, then Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Collin Hannah noted two salient points. First, that it was

inevitable that the RAAF had been part of the shift to more technologically complex aircraft. Second, and more importantly, he noted that what had been accomplished, in war and in force development was the result of the unflagging efforts, dedication to duty and gallantry of a well trained, highly-skilled and well equipped professional service.

I am somewhat struck by the similarities between those periods of RAAF history and today. The Air Force is currently in the process of replacing a large portion of its weapon systems. Our ability to conduct control of the air, strike, maritime and ISR operations as well as global airlift is changing across the board — that change is happening now and will continue into the near future. Furthermore, this evolution is taking place while we are engaged in humanitarian, border protection, peacekeeping and counter insurgency operations. In the case of the Heron operations in Afghanistan, we are literally learning while fighting. By 2021 we will be a different air force. In much the same way as we look back at similar transformations tonight, at the centennial celebrations our successors will be looking back at what we have achieved.

Here then is the opportunity I see for the Air Force of today. Our traditions have been borne out of the actions of the Air Force men and women setting standards of service worthy of emulation. The innovations we have witnessed in the past were the product of the skills, dedication of our people striving to do better and refusing to accept second best. The force we have evolved into today is the gift presented to us by the Air Force of yesterday. For all the changes we have experienced the importance of people to the Air Force has remained unchanged these last 90 years and will remain so into the far distant future. This means that today every uniformed member of the RAAF has a mission to perform. Every Reservist, APS member and contractor who works in the RAAF's interests has a part in the Air Force story. What we do today will be weighed and measured in 2021.

When I travel around the Air Force meeting the men and women here in Australia and serving overseas I see a service that measures its success by its own very high standards. I see an organisation that not only embraces change, but also wrings every advantage it can from new and innovative solutions. Today the Air Force is a service

that is more than capable of writing a new chapter in Air Force history, one that will be found to be as worthy of recording as those achievements of the past.

In closing, on behalf of CAF and on my own part, thank you for joining in tonight's celebration. We may be the second oldest Air Force in the world, but I am sure we are still young enough at heart to ensure a good time tonight for all.

Cheers

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