



**2011 RAAF Ball – Washington DC**  
**- Deputy Chief of Air Force: Air Vice Marshal Geoff Brown AO –**  
**Deeper Capability and the Global Air Force**  
Friday 18 March 2011

*(Check with delivery)*

**DCAF ACKNOWLEDGES VIPS & Invited Guests**

Good evening and welcome to the ***Royal Australian Air Force's Washington Ball***, it gives me great pleasure to be here with you tonight. Events like this are a welcome opportunity to renew old friendships, make new ones and to continue the relationship between our two countries that has endured for many, many years. As most of you will know, the 31st of this month marks the 90th anniversary of the formation of the Royal Australian Air Force, so being able to celebrate such a significant anniversary with our close friends makes this evening's gathering even more special. Thank you so much for being here tonight and I look forward to speaking with many of you throughout the course of the evening.

One of the inevitable and perhaps more valuable activities of marking significant anniversaries is that we tend to take a distinct look at our past, take stock of our present, and place an increased focus on what our future may hold. It should come as no surprise then that as we mark 90 years of service to Australia, the Air Force has adopted a theme of **Tradition, Innovation and Evolution** as the central pillars of our celebrations.

This evening we are celebrating one facet of the Air Force story that sits across all three pillars. I refer of course to the close relationship between Australian and American servicemen and women, and in particular the relationship that has helped develop our air forces into highly respected organisations. A look at the start of our shared history and common experiences illustrates my point in this regard. The first time American

servicemen encountered Australian air power was during the Battle of Hamel in France on 4 July 1918.

For the eight companies of American troops taking part in the battle it was their first time in action. They were treated not only to a perfectly planned set piece battle, but also witnessed innovative use of the Australian Flying Corps' aircraft. As the Allied tanks moved to their attack positions, their noise was deliberately masked by low flying Australian aircraft. Later, as the troops consolidated their hold on captured ground, for the first time in the war they were resupplied with ammunition from the air. The parachutes and delivery systems were the innovation of Captain Lawrence Wackett, an Australian pilot who went on to establish Australia's aircraft manufacturing capability during WWII. AFC aircraft were also used to ensure the advancing troops were always covered by artillery.

For one of the first times in WWI, perfect harmony was achieved between armour, artillery, aircraft, infantry and coalition partners. It was achieved through innovative planning and joint training. The Allied victories in the later half of 1918 illustrated how much our respective forces had evolved from the war's beginning and in many ways Hamel established a tradition of Australians and Americans working together to achieve the best possible results for our respective countries, a tradition we have carried on through World War 2, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

And while a shared history is important - we also share how we portray the service and sacrifice of our veterans. The similarity between our respective national memorials to World War I veterans is but one example. The Liberty Memorial in Kansas City and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra both reveal in remarkably similar ways how our countries commemorate the respect and the esteem in which we hold our veterans. Perhaps the only real difference between these two memorials is that the Australian War Memorial commemorates our service in all of Australia's wars.

In fact we have two rather significant audio visual displays in the War Memorial that are dedicated to the Australian airmen of WWI and WWII. The first, directed by Peter Jackson, depicts the horrors of the aerial dog fights of WW1 while the second, entitled

'Striking by Night', shows the realities of the Allied night time bomber offensive over Germany in WWII. Both illustrate the great sacrifice by our aircrew. Yet an Air Force is about much more than just the people who fly the aircraft and we often do ourselves a disservice when we present our history solely in terms of heroic young men dog fighting at close range or stoically pressing on to the target.

We often overlook that one of an air forces' greatest strengths is found in the people that don't fly the aeroplanes. At its heart, a successful air force is a complex engineering and logistics organisation that is totally reliant on the quality of the support of its non-flying personnel. The professionalism and skills of this deeper level of capability ultimately determines the effectiveness of any air force. It is really quite basic when you think about it—there is no more useless implement of war than an aircraft that can't fly whether it's a C17 or a Super Hornet. I think one of the things we often overlook is the dedication of those men and women supporting our operations.

A personal example of what I am referring to occurred when I was CO 3SQN. We were hosting a visit from 450 Squadron Association. I was explaining one of the activities of the unit to a veteran maintainer of WWII, when I realised how enduring some of the characteristics were. The ground crew at 3SQN were always obsessed with making sure their aircrew had the best possible aircraft. Occasionally we swapped aircraft between squadrons to even out aircraft usage. On this particular occasion, the jet had come from 75 Squadron. The ground crew were always keen to know how well the pilots thought the aircraft were performing, and noted that the majority of squadron pilots had commented that they thought that this jet had particularly good radar. Just before it was to go back to the other squadron, I noticed on the jet's documentation that a number of the radar components had been removed for ground checking and replaced with components with different serial numbers. I became a little more curious and found that every radar component on the jet had been replaced with one from one of our lower performing aircraft.

Perhaps it is unfortunate that we tend to celebrate one aspect of the origins of an Air Force — the emergence of aircrew — while failing to recognise the equally important achievements of the support arms. Maybe, instead of only celebrating the great dogfights of World War I, we should also think about the early engineers who struggled to produce better engines, airframes, wings and weapons. We tend to remember Frenchman Roland Garros as the first airman to successfully shoot down an enemy aircraft using a machine gun firing through his propeller arc, but forget that it was his mechanic Jules Hue who turned a design idea into an actual modification on an aircraft.

We also tend to underplay the contribution of the unknown men who have worked hard to repair the damaged aircraft. One of the leading Australian Aces, Robert Little, used to get so close while engaging his opponents that he would often bump into them. Being one of Robert Little's maintainers would have presented some persistent problems.

These are simple examples. Yet when we look at the more complex challenges of projecting air power globally we see how an aggregation of the many simple facets of deeper capability enables far greater effects to be generated. Consider the Battle of Milne Bay, the first defeat on land suffered by Japan in WWII. A key component of the joint force that won the day was the Kittyhawk fighters of the RAAF's No 75 and 76 squadrons, aircraft supplied by the USA and reliant on a steady flow of spares from across the Pacific Ocean. While the aircrew performed heroically and in the best traditions of the RAAF, without the constant round-the-clock maintenance and engineering effort by the Australian ground crew little would have been achieved. The air defence of Milne Bay was further enhanced by a radar station and a fighter control unit. The Defence scientists, engineers and operators who developed and fielded those units are largely unknown, but they helped win the battle as surely as the pilots in the cockpit and the troops on the ground. The logistics personnel that kept the aircraft spares going into theatre, kept the radars working and the fuel flowing were operating as part of a global enterprise – they too helped win the battle. I should also mention that not only did an American Airfield Construction Unit of the 43rd US Engineer Regiment prove vital in keeping the Milne Bay airfields operational, but this unit along with the American 709th Anti-Aircraft Battery also actively fought in perimeter defence of one of the threatened airfields. The victory at Milne Bay was achieved through the efforts of not one, but two

countries who had invested in their people, and who saw their flying forces as more than a collection of pilots and aircraft.

This is not dissimilar to my own experience in 2003 when I had the enormous privilege of commanding the RAAF's F/A-18 and C-130 deployments during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. I was able to witness first hand how deeper air force capability was able to project air power globally, mount and then sustain a complex air campaign in support of ground operations. Importantly, the training that Australia and the US had conducted together in activities such as the TALISMAN SABRE series of exercises and at RED FLAG ensured that the RAAF contingent was seamlessly incorporated into the wider Coalition Air Component.

I am sure there are many such examples in both of our Air Force's rich histories. I hope that tonight I have illustrated that there is a constant thread that connects the veterans of both world wars and the subsequent conflicts with those of us who wear the blue uniform today. The expectations and requirements placed on the airmen who slugged it out "over the front" in 1918 and on the ground personnel who helped keep them flying were the same then as are demanded of us today:

- dedication to the task at hand;
- devotion to the cause and the team;
- professional mastery in the air and support domains; and
- courage and strength in adversity.

Though the gulf of time, developments and refinements may separate us from the forms and notions of air war as it was practiced in WWI, WWII and today, but there is every reason to feel pride in what it means to be a member of an air force that can project air power globally. It is not simply a matter of acknowledging and paying tribute to our forefathers. We must learn from their experience and their example in order to continually challenge ourselves in our day-to-day efforts to maintain an Air Force relevant to our countries' defence and security needs. This is a task that everyone in this

hall can undertake as we continue to forge a proud record of achievement in the service of our respective nations.

In closing I'd just like to note that as we speak, our young men and women are operating together again in conflicts far from home. Tonight, let's keep them in our thoughts.

Thanks again for coming this evening to celebrate our 90th Birthday. While we may be the second oldest Air Force in the world, I'm sure we are still young enough at heart to enjoy a good night of celebration. I wish you all a happy and joyous evening.

Cheers.