



Anzac Day Commemorative Address

Max McGregor
President Air Force Association, Victoria
25 April 2021

The Honourable James Merlino, Acting Premier of Victoria,

Dr Robert Webster, President, RSL Victoria,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Veterans.

We gather here today at this sacred place - The Shrine of Remembrance - to remember all of those who served to defend Australia. Anzac Day is a national day of remembrance in Australia and New Zealand. It broadly commemorates all Australians and New Zealanders "who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations". Anzac Day gives us as a nation the opportunity to salute the courage and the strength of all those servicemen and women of the past, as well as today's Army, Navy and Air Force, for their service to Australia.

Today I would like to acknowledge an additional aspect of this Anzac Day - a special anniversary - the Centenary of the formation of the Australian Air Force. As an Air Force veteran, I am honoured and privileged to give this Address, and I wish to thank the Australian Air Force for the 100 years of dedicated service and selflessness that it has given to the people of Australia.

In 1909, Giulio Douhet (*pronunciation Julio Duet*), a great Italian air power visionary, pronounced: "the Army and the Navy must recognise in the Air Force the birth of a third brother - younger, but nonetheless important in the great military family!".

In 1912 the Australian Government made the decision to form a separate branch of the Australian Army with responsibility for operating aircraft. It was to be known as the Australian Flying Corps. The first flight occurred at Point Cook on the 1st of March 1914. Point Cook airfield has its own place in history - it is the oldest, continuously operating military airfield in the world!

The Australian Flying Corps subsequently provided four squadrons to the Middle East and the Western Front. The British Commander in the Middle East, General Allenby, considered the Australian No1 Squadron to be his best Squadron, and stated, "You gained for us absolute supremacy of the air, thereby enabling my cavalry, artillery and infantry to carry out their work on the ground, practically unmolested by hostile aircraft".

No's 2, 3 and 4 Squadrons served on the Western front, and our two fighter Squadrons, 2 and 4, downed a total of 384 enemy aircraft. The innovative Lawrence Wackett developed and employed a parachute system to deliver ammunition to Australian troops on the battlefield.

There is no doubt that the disruptive new air capability fielded by Australia was greatly assisted by the genius of the Australian Corps Commander, General John Monash. He was particularly successful in developing and perfecting the integration of air power in all its roles into his combined arms approach and tactics.

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When the Australian Air Force was formed on the 31st of March 1921 as a separate fighting service, it was able to build on the experience and traditions of the Australian Flying Corps. The Australian Air Force became the Royal Australian Air Force after King George V gave his assent in August 1921. Since then, the Air Force has been engaged in every conflict in which Australia has been involved, including the Korean War - a forgotten conflict that shaped the modern world. Our Air Force has always performed admirably, despite horrific loss of life in many great air battles. Over 11,400 Air Force and Australian Flying Corps personnel have lost their lives in operational service. May we remember them all.

Today's Air Force is a formidable, world-class force - something of which we can all be proud! Our Air Force is deployed across the world, the most concentrated deployment being in the Middle East. When our service men and women return home later this year, Australia's longest military engagement - Afghanistan - will finally be concluded.

While the Air Force is primarily a fighting force, its humanitarian role is also significant: the Air Force has provided flood, drought, bushfire and cyclone relief in Australia, and humanitarian relief to many of our Pacific Island neighbours. The motto for the Air Force Centenary Commemorative year is: "Then - Now - Always" - a fitting description and commitment.

I served in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969 with No 2 Squadron flying Canberra bombers from Phan Rang, an extremely large United States Air Force base. We were 300 Australians and 8 ageing Canberra bombers among approximately 10,000 American personnel - ours was a very small component of the strike force flying out of Phan Rang. However, the results obtained by 2 Squadron showed what a force of well-trained professionals can do. While we flew only 6% of the strike sorties from Phan Rang, we achieved great success.

On my right breast I am wearing two ribbons - unit citations awarded by the foreign governments of the Republic of Vietnam and the United States of America. I am incredibly proud of our squadron's achievements that led to these unit citations being awarded, for they reflect a "whole of squadron effort". The aircraft and crew conducted the bombing sorties, but without all of the squadron working together, our results would have been significantly less. May we never forget our engineers who worked day and night to provide serviceable aircraft, our armourers who toiled in all conditions to make up the bombs and load them onto the aircraft, our admin. staff, communications group, transport drivers and cooks who ensured the squadron performed as required - as did our 30 aerodrome defence guards who patrolled outside the base perimeter and prevented several attacks on the base. A great team effort!

Equally, our grateful thanks go to the crews and Squadron members of the Caribou's of No 35 Squadron for their magnificent effort transporting people and cargo. They were affectionately known throughout Vietnam as "Wallaby Airlines". Also, we will never forget the outstanding, multi purpose roles the Iroquois helicopter crews of 9 Squadron provided to the Australian Task force. The Hueys will always be remembered for their distinctive noise as they approached. All Australians in Vietnam were supported by the regular Hercules flights between Australia and Vietnam.

Whenever I come to the Shrine of Remembrance, or visit any War Graves overseas - three words come to mind - Remembrance, Respect and Hope.

I REMEMBER all those who lost their lives in service to Australia, and I remember all those injured, both physically and mentally. I remember the families devastated by the loss of loved ones, and the families who carried on with their lives as best they could while supporting their injured loved ones.

I RESPECT all those who carried out their assigned duty while knowing that the odds of their survival were incredibly low. I acknowledge and respect those Australians flying in the Royal Air Force Bomber Command during WW2, when - night after night - they continued to fly - knowing the horrific losses that were expected for each and every raid that they conducted.

I sincerely HOPE that no further generation of Australians will have to defend our country from attack, nor be involved in overseas military action. My hope is just that - a hope! However, I know that if called upon, the members of the Australian Defence Force will acquit themselves with great courage and commitment - as they have always done in the past.

The original Anzacs left us a legacy of Duty and Service that we honour today. It has continued to grow and has been strengthened by those who followed them - Army, Navy and Air Force! We do not glorify war, but we celebrate the spirit of Anzac. Anzac Day is a day for the people - a day to remember, respect and honour those who have served, and to acknowledge our combined armed forces of today. We salute their unique qualities of courage, self-sacrifice and fellowship.

From Gallipoli through to Afghanistan.

Lest We Forget.

Max McGregor
President
AFA Victoria

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