

**THE 90<sup>TH</sup> RAAF BIRTHDAY COMMEMORATION**  
**ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE J J SPIGELMAN AC**  
**LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES**  
**CENOTAPH, SYDNEY, 31 MARCH 2011**

On 31 March 1921 when the Australian Air Force was formed, approval to use the “Royal” prefix being granted in August of that year, the Force comprised 21 officers, 128 airmen and 153 aircraft. It was probably the only time in the RAAF’s distinguished 90 year history that it had more aircraft than people.

Only three years before on 1 April 1918, the Royal Air Force was created, being the first Air Force to become institutionally independent of Army or Navy control. The United States Air Force did not become a separate military service until 18 September 1947. This 90<sup>th</sup> year anniversary, which we mark today, highlights the fact that the RAAF is the second oldest air force in the world.

Many of the original RAAF personnel served in its predecessor organisation, the Australian Flying Corps, which was a branch of the army. This was the origin of a proud tradition.

During World War I, AFC squadrons served in the Middle East and on the Western Front, other airmen served in Iraq and with the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. Some 460 Australian pilots served in Europe and the Middle East between 1915 and 1918.

The first, and for many years the only, base of the AFC and of the RAAF was at Point Cook, which has appropriately been described as the RAAF's spiritual home. It is one of the world's oldest airfields in continuous use.

When World War II broke out Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand entered into an agreement to train aircrew for service with the Royal Air Force. During that war almost 16,000 RAAF pilots and airmen served in British squadrons and almost 12,000 served in Australian based squadrons. They participated in virtually every major campaign of the war to save Western civilisation including the Battle of France, the Battle of Britain, the Battle of the Atlantic, in the Middle East, over Germany, the defence of Malta, the liberation of Italy, the Battles of the Coral and Bismarck Seas, the Defence of Australia and in India, Burma,

China, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific.

When the Armistice with Japan was signed on 15 August 1945, the RAAF in the Pacific had a total strength of more than 130,000 personnel with over 3,000 front line aircraft. The contribution the RAAF made to the protection of our national sovereignty and the preservation of our way of life in this titanic struggle cannot be, and is not, forgotten.

In the years since World War II, when Australia's territorial integrity was not subject to any direct threat, our RAAF continued to serve the national interest at the direction of successive governments. It was called into service to promote world peace, protect our friends and cement our alliances. This included participation in the occupation force in Japan until 1950; participation in the Berlin Airlift of 1949; involvement as part of the United Nations Force during the Korean War; conduct of anti-guerrilla operations in Malaya during the 1950's; the provision of an essential element of the national security of the new nation of Malaysia from Butterworth airbase from 1957 for some 30 years; a broad-based involvement in the Australian participation in the

Vietnam War between 1964 and 1971; participation in the multi-national force after the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990, including delivery of humanitarian aid to Kurds living in the UN declared exclusion zone in Northern Iraq; support for the Australian combat forces in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001; support for the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands after 2003; participation in numerous humanitarian operations in Australia and overseas, including after the two terrorist bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2005, natural disaster relief after the Pakistan earthquake of 2005, the Iran earthquake of 2003, the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, Cyclone Larry in 2006 and the Victorian bushfires of 2009 and, this year, the Queensland floods and cyclone. For many years the Force has flown almost daily surveillance flights over waters surrounding Australia, to detect people and drug smuggling, illegal fishing and marine pollution.

The skill, dedication and patriotism with which the Force has performed all of these essential roles in the national interest has attracted the admiration and thanks of generations of Australians over the entire 90 year period of its history. On behalf of the people of this State, I thank you for your service, in the firm

expectation that it will continue to be delivered in accordance with the high standards of duty and personal sacrifice that the RAAF has always manifested.

In the customary, poignantly appropriate, felicitation, I wish the RAAF many happy returns.