



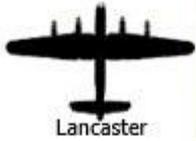
BOMBER COMMAND COMMEMORATIVE ASSOCIATION (VIC.) INC.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY AIR COMMODORE GEOFF HARLAND 2016 BOMBER COMMAND COMMEMORATIVE DAY CEREMONY SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE, MELBOURNE SUNDAY 5 JUNE 2016



Mosquito

Bomber Command veterans and their families,
The Hon. Danny Pearson, The State Member for Essendon & representing State Minister for Veterans,



Lancaster

Mr. Gareth Hoar, Consul General – British Consulate-General,
Dr & Mrs. George Luk, Honorary Consul General Consulate-General of the Republic of Poland,
Mr. David Cunningham, Director Operational Support representing Mr. John Geary, Deputy Commissioner; Dept. Veterans Affairs,
WGCDR Peter Isaacson AM, DFC, AFC, DFM, Our Patron,
Representatives of ex-Service organisations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.



Halifax

I'm Air Commodore Geoff Harland the Commander of Air Force Training Group and it's an honour and a privilege to address you here today.



Stirling

I would like to start my address with the poignant words written in a poem by John M Milne (57 Sqdn):

BOMBER COMMAND

A long cold night, a star filled sky,
A blacked out world below.
The grim faced crew on faith rely
They'll live to see tomorrow.
The searchlights sweep, the hell sent flak,
A thousand shards of steel.
But on they press their bold attack
And hide the fear they feel
For near six years, night after night
Squadron after Squadron
Shattered the dream of Nazi might,
Its power a sham illusion
They shared a duty, fate and fear
That forged uncommon pride
And paid a price in lives so dear,
More than fifty thousand died.



Hampden



Wellington



Blenheim



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Ladies and gentleman, it is important to realise that the Royal Australian Air Force's commitment to Bomber Command in the skies over Europe constituted just 5% of Australia's total fighting forces in that war. Of this courageous 5% came 20% of Australia's battle deaths (across all three services) between 1939 to 1945. In a sobering expression of the chances of survival, Bomber Command aircrew had a mere 1 in 4 chance of finishing a tour of duty. About half would die and another quarter would be taken prisoner of war. These gallant aircrew went up regardless, night after night, into the foreboding skies over Europe despite the statistics which were sobering and horrifying by any measure.

During the course of the war, 125,000 aircrew of Bomber Command carried out a total of 366,514 sorties. During these sustained operations, 55,573 aircrew were killed. The dead included 38,462 Britons, 9,980 Canadians, 4,050 Australians, 1,703 New Zealanders, and some 1300 from Poland, Free France, the USA, Norway, and India. A total of 1,479 Bomber Command ground crew lost their lives in the War. Ninety-one members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force also died while on duty with Bomber Command. 10,999 members were taken prisoner of war; as many as a thousand evaded capture after being shot down, most making their way back to Britain to fly and fight again.

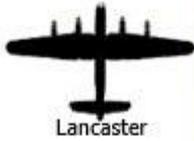
It is crucial that we remember the sacrifice these numbers represent, the extreme commitment to a noble cause so that we can be thankful that we enjoy our current way of life. But in doing so it is so hard to understand the epic dimensions of the Bomber Command effort in the skies over Europe. I simply cannot fathom the losses endured and enormous sacrifice made by these air and ground crews in our name and for our future.

As a modern aviator I marvel at the bravery of these young men who, only some seven decades ago strapped into the metal, wood and canvas of their Lancaster, Wellington, Blenheim, Halifax (*added post speech after it was brought to my attention by a gentleman Halifax pilot*) and Mosquito bombers full of fuel, laden with weapons, night after night. The example they set for us in terms of commitment, valour and sacrifice is instructive to us all and, I would argue, sets an unmovable foundation for the values we hold so dear in our modern Air Force.

To forget is not an option. We must take pause to remember the collective sacrifice of this group, we must remember those who perished and cherish those who survived and those who are still with us and say 'thankyou' and know that that will never be enough.



Mosquito



Lancaster



Halifax



Stirling



Hampden



Wellington



Blenheim



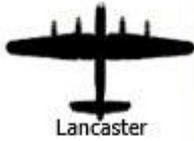
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Mosquito

Ladies and gentlemen, looking to the current Air Force I see the heritage of Bomber Command and I would like to think that our modern Air Force has inherited the hallmarks of the great men and women who served in Bomber Command during World War 2.



Lancaster

Like Bomber Command, our modern Air Force is equipped with the latest aircraft, operated by young, talented, and focused combat aircrew. Our hard working and often under-appreciated maintenance personnel keep these aircraft running. Our administrators and logisticians keep us working like clockwork. We, as Bomber Command was, are an organisation built on the foundation of our families, who in World War 2 waited and suffered while their loved-ones are away.



Halifax

These linkages are obvious but at a deeper level, but I suggest that the respect and esteem in which we hold you, the people of Bomber Command, and if I may be so bold, a shared sense of purpose and character actually bind us together and make us feel as though we are in familiar company, the company of our older wiser and battle weary selves.



Stirling

I would like to close by simply quoting the Bomber Command Motto: "Strike Hard Strike Sure."

That they surely did.



Hampden

To the members of Bomber Command, their families, their friends, *thank you* for your sacrifice, *thank you* for your legacy and *thank you* for taking the time to keep in touch with today's Air Force and today's community. You inspire us to be the best we can be.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, thank you.



Wellington

Air Commodore Geoff Harland
Commander Air Force Training Group
Royal Australian Air Force



Blenheim