

**ADDRESS TO OPEN THE FEDERATION OF
AUSTRALIAN AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS FEDERAL
CONFERENCE 2008**

BY

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL ANGUS HOUSTON, AC, AFC

10-15 minutes

- Federal President: Mr David Stoba, Vice President: Marylou Badeaux; Immediate Past President: Bronwyn Halbisch; Secretary: John Langford; other participants of member divisions; Ladies and Gentlemen.
- It is my great pleasure to be here to officially open the Federation of Australian American Associations' 2008 Federal Conference.
- It has been said by many prominent Australian leaders in recent years that America has no greater friend than Australia.
- Our two nations share a strong alliance that is based on shared values, interests and strategic outlook.
- We have many important linkages in the areas such as commerce, finance, tourism, culture, science and technology and education.

- And we have a close security relationship. As well as a mutually beneficial approach to intelligence sharing, we are also working side by side today to defeat new threats and challenges.
- Therefore, the aim of the Australian American Association—to contribute to the maintenance and development of friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation between the peoples of Australia and the United States of America—is vitally important for Australia.
- We must continue to encourage community awareness about the importance of the links between Australia and the United States. We should celebrate days of national importance and we should commemorate events in which our relationship was tested and indeed strengthened.
- Most importantly, we should be welcoming of our American friends when they visit, settle or come to work in Australia.
- The work of the Australian American Associations in this regard is very important and I sure the issues you will discuss at this conference will mean you are better postured to achieve your important objectives in the coming year.
- This afternoon I would like to set the tone for this conference by sharing with you the deep and honourable bond between Australian and American Defence personnel.

- I firmly believe the common sacrifices we have shared on the battlefield—that now extend back almost a century—are the foundation on which our entire relationship is built.
- It is also on the battlefield today that we continue to strengthen our alliance through our mutual belief in fighting for the freedom and liberty of others.
- Today I will share with you just three examples—one Army, one Navy, one Air Force—of when we have joined together against a common enemy to protect our nations and our national interests.

Australia and United States

Army—Battle of Hamel: WWI

- The bond between Australian and American personnel began on the battlefields of France in WWI.
- In 1918, 1000 Americans were dispersed among Australian units just prior to the Battle of Hamel, which was a planned attack launched against German positions in the town of Hamel in western France.
- At the last minute, British headquarters ordered that the Americans be withdrawn.

- But Australian General John Monash, who was in charge of the offensive, successfully resisted on the grounds that the Americans and the Australians had already formed a close bond and would fight very well together.
- We did, and by Great War standards, the Battle of Hamel—fittingly fought on the American Independence Day of July 4—was a stunning success and became the tactical model for the offensive which subsequently knocked Germany out of the war.
- The battle was over in 92 minutes at a cost of 1400 casualties. Over 2000 Germans were killed or wounded and together, we captured 1600 prisoners and 177 machine-guns.
- In a book published that year, the Australian war correspondent, FM Cutlack, described the impression the Americans made: *“Their clean cut faces – solider built, many of them, but wearing the same expression of alert intelligence – look very like those of our own Australians. They swear as a general thing perhaps a little less!*
- *They salute gravely...They drink coffee rather than tea. But except for these points they might be our own fellows. They bear themselves with the same sturdy self-reliance.*
- *They spread themselves over country in the same fashion of men accustomed to vast spaces. They move with the same easy free-limbed carriage...Against these men...(and) against the men of the British Empire, the Germans have no chance.”*

- In his postwar memoir, *Australian Victories in France 1918*, General Sir John Monash recalled how, at the battle of Hamel, Australian and American soldiers had become ‘blood brothers’.
- Monash wrote: “*Among other aspects of this battle [Hamel] which was worthy of mention is the fact that it was the first occasion in the war that American troops fought in an offensive battle. The contingent ... [that] joined us acquitted themselves most gallantly and were ever after received by the Australians as blood brothers—a fraternity which operated to great mutual advantage.*”

Navy—Battle of Coral Sea: WWII

- Just over two decades later, in the South-West Pacific, this bond was renewed as American and Australian forces fought the Japanese—this time under the leadership of American General, General Douglas MacArthur.
- The Battle of the Coral Sea took place in May 1942 and was a major air and naval engagement of World War II.
- Together, we fought the Japanese and stopped their advance to the south towards Australia.
- This was a major turning point in the Pacific war.
- And it was also the first naval engagement in history in which two fleets clashed, but neither fleet saw each other—it was fought entirely with aircraft.

- The American contribution consisted of two aircraft carriers—the USS Lexington (commanded by Rear-Admiral Fitch) and the USS Yorktown (commanded by Rear-Admiral Fletcher)—together with protective cruisers and destroyers. Our contribution included two Australian ships—the heavy cruiser HMAS Australia and the light cruiser HMAS Hobart, commanded by the Australian Rear-Admiral Crace.
- But our success—the first strategic defeat of the Japanese Imperial Navy—came at great cost.
- One of the American carriers was destroyed. One damaged. One oiler and one destroyer both sank. 66 aircraft were lost. And 543 Americans were killed or wounded.
- Mervyn Johnston, an Australian crewman aboard HMAS Australia said of the battle, “*We could hear . . . the comments of various pilots . . . [who] in some cases were running out of fuel or could not land on the ‘Lexington’ or the ‘Yorktown’ as they were either damaged or on fire. Many messages were goodbyes to friends or loved ones.*”
- Ed Znosko, a crewman on the USS Chicago said “*I scrambled through the escape hatch to man my battle station as a stretcher-bearer in the after-battle dressing station . . . the 5-inch anti-aircraft guns could be heard in rapid fire, and the ship was shaking and vibrating from the full speed on our four large propellers and frequently changing course to dodge Japanese torpedoes.*”

- To this day Australians remain very grateful to the United States for their part in this battle, and to the support they gave Australia during World War II.
- And in fact, the Battle of the Coral Sea Ball, organized by the Canberra Division of the Australian American Association, is an important event that commemorates this terrible engagement.
- It is something I make a point to attend each year as we should never forget the importance of this battle Australians and Americans fought together.

Air Force—current contribution in the Middle East

- Of course, we are again working alongside one another in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- And we use one another's air power to get our jobs done.
- During operations in Afghanistan in 2002, our Army Special Forces elements provided targeting information to American incoming strike aircraft, which subsequently attacked the targets. We also had a United States Air Force Sergeant embedded with our Special Forces to facilitate this.
- Our FA-18s were also very active in the liberation of Iraq, and our C-130 Hercules detachments continue to transport troops and supplies, and provide aero-medical evacuations of wounded personnel.

- Our last RAAF Hercules detachment—who were in Iraq for 10 months—flew over 445 missions, carried 3.1 million kilograms of cargo and transported just over 20,000 passengers—a remarkable achievement.

Alliance

- I think these three examples illustrate that the notion of partnership has been a key feature of our approach to security: we have always defended our common interests in unison.
- And whilst we have fought alongside each other in every major conflict in the last century, the relationship we have today is built on the founding principles of the 1951 Australia-New Zealand-United States Treaty—otherwise known as ANZUS.
- While it was drafted in the context of the Cold War, the commitment to come to each others aid in the event of attack has retained meaning over the decades.
- Its relevance was clearly demonstrated with the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, after which Australia invoked the Treaty for the first time.
- It is underpinned by common values and interests and continues to adapt to meet new security challenges—as security partners we have never been closer.
- And this means our overall alliance is in good shape.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, I firmly believe that whatever the challenges Australia and the United States will face in the future, the common values that underpin our relationship will mean that we will always be close friends.
- And the work of the Australian American Association in ensuring this close relationship remains one that we as Australians respect, value and honour is vitally important.
- I wish you an engaging and successful conference.
- It is my great pleasure to declare the 2008 Federation of Australian American Associations' Federal Conference, officially open.

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