

AVM Brent Espeland AM (Retd)



Brent assumed the National President position at pivotal stage in the Association's evolution. The transition from our World War II cohort had been completed, and a strategic plan had been framed.

Implementation, however, was frustrated and stalled. There was a vision for one Association, but we remained tribal and territorial. Some even feared that an effective national body would somehow diminish the role of the State Divisions

Brent proved to be the oil that smoothed our path and the glue that has held us to it. He believed that in addition to having the best-led, best-trained, best-equipped military in the world, Australia should have the best cared for, best-treated, best-respected veterans in the world.

He had a passionate belief that, though not Air Force, the Association is a creature of Air Force and an integral part of the Air Force family, and of the broader Defence community, and that it has a role to play in advancing and preserving the interests of serving and former Air Force and ADF members, and providing support not elsewhere available.

His ability to handle delicate situations, was demonstrated early in his presidency, when faced with a couple of issues he dealt with them in such a way that the protagonists were able to accept the outcome, even though it wasn't precisely what they had hoped for.

When it was proposed that DFWA, the Naval Association, RAR Corporation, the Special Air Service Association, and the Air Force Association form the Alliance of Defence Service Organizations (ADSO), Brent was determined that this attempt must succeed, where previous attempts at coalition had failed to last.

As a measure of the success to which his background efforts positively contributed, ADSO now comprises some 17 member organizations. An even more significant indicator of the progress that has been made is the joint response to the Federal Minister for Veterans Affairs, which Brent signed, two weeks ago, on behalf of ADSO, together with the National President of the RSL – the first such joint response I can recall in my thirteen years of involvement at the national level.

Brent had a real knack for focussing on the essential elements of a situation or debate. He could lead by the nose, if he had to, but he preferred to persuade, to nudge or cajole to achieve the desired outcome. The right outcome, was better than a fast outcome.

He had a tremendous capacity for work, and gave his all to every task he undertook, and to every position he accepted. Weeks after his operation in May, he travelled to Melbourne, after a medical procedure in the morning to chair a meeting of our National Council.

In August he joined our strategic planning session by Skype from his hospital room. His insightful contributions helped us to re-shape our plan and our vision for the future.

He may not have been large in stature, but he leaves big shoes to fill. Our lasting tribute to him will be to give substance to his vision.

*Peter Colliver,
National Secretary*