

Air Vice-Marshal Brent Espeland AM

1948-2017

Brent Espeland was born in January 1948 in Hindmarsh and lived in West Croydon; he was educated at Woodville High School, graduating as dux in 1965. His passion to fly led him to the Royal Australian Air Force Academy at Point Cook in 1966 and in 1969 he graduated as the Sword of Honour recipient - the highest award for achievement at the Academy.

After the Academy he underwent pilot training on 69 Pilots Course and on graduation was posted to C130A conversion. After his conversion course in June 1971 he married Judy – his childhood sweetheart in the very Cathedral he was farewelled. Judy was always a significant part of his RAAF career which spanned some 36 years and his subsequent career and retirement.

Brent's first flying post at 36 Squadron included operational service flying C130A Hercules in Vietnam - he was the captain of the last Australian C130 out of Saigon in 1975. After C130s he trained as a flying instructor commencing a long involvement with the training world which began by instructing advanced student pilots on the MB326H Macchi jet trainer at 2FTS in RAAF Pearce, WA. In 1977 he was posted to Central Flying School at RAAF East Sale in Victoria where he not only taught flying instructors, but became a member of the Roulettes aerobatic team. He was promoted into the Chief Flying Instructor position and was the Team Leader of the Roulettes in 1980 and 1981.

In 1981-82 Brent was selected to attend the Canadian Forces Command and Staff College in Toronto, Canada. On return to Australia in 1983 he was promoted to Wing Commander and took up the post as Military Secretary and Comptroller to Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephen. His responsibilities included military secretarial duties and the smooth running of the House. Sir Ninian is reported to have said to AIRMSHL Jake Newham (Retd), the outgoing CAS, "Jake, before we begin this conversation, I want to talk to you about this young Espeland. He has done a wonderful job; I haven't had to worry about the running of the House, while he has been here. I just want you

to know what a magnificent job he has done".

Following his time at Government House, Brent returned to CFS in 1986 as the Commanding Officer. During his time as CO, he was instrumental in the transition of the Pilatus PC9 turbo-prop trainer into service as a replacement for the Macchi jet trainer – reputed to have been a task akin to fitting a square peg into a round hole. However, Brent thrived on difficult challenges and the result has produced some of the best military pilots in the world over the past quarter of a century.

In 1989 he was selected to attend the USAF Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama. On return in 1990 he was appointed as the Director of the Air Power Studies Centre at RAAF Fairbairn in the ACT and the following year he was promoted to Group Captain and became the Commander of that Base and Commandant of the RAAF Staff College. A posting as the Director of Studies at the Australian College of Defence & Strategic Studies followed and in 1995 he was promoted to Air Commodore and posted to be Air Officer Commanding Training Command at RAAF Laverton, Victoria, responsible for all training functions in the Air Force, initial and ongoing professional military education and training.

He was promoted to AVM in 1998 and was appointed Deputy Chief of Air Force until he was specially seconded to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet with the immense responsibility for the coordination of security and intelligence at the national level for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

Following his retirement from the Air Force in 2001, he joined the Australian Sports Commission in Canberra where he spent 10 years in senior sports administration with a focus on the governance of national sporting organisations, sports science and medicine and the fight against drugs in sport.

Brent retired from the Australian Sports Commission in 2012 and returned to Adelaide where he worked tirelessly in support of many worthwhile causes. He was National President of the Australian Flying Corps and Royal



Australian Air Force Association and both National and South Australian President of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia, a Director of the Sir Richard Williams Foundation, a member of the Department of Veterans' Affairs Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT), Chairman of The Board of Governors of The Repat Foundation, a board member of The Hospital Research Foundation, a member of the Air Force Heritage Advisory Committee and was especially pleased to serve as a member of the National Council of the Australian Air Force Cadets.

Brent most recently was Chair of the Veterans' Advisory Council in South Australia, a Ministerial appointment approved by Cabinet. In this capacity, he pursued a forward looking agenda that included a focus on better employment opportunities for younger veterans, resulting in the development of an employment framework that will be released later this month. Martin served alongside Brent both in uniform and in other pursuits following their service and remarked that he was proud to have served with someone with the professionalism and integrity of Air Vice Marshal Espeland.

It's amazing how some people can influence your life with the simplest of actions. As leaders, we never know how far our support and encouragement of our staff can go. Personally I received great mentoring from Brent on many occasions but I'd like to pass on just

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one final story from Brent's cousin, Dr Mark Bateup who is the Deputy Program Lead, of the High Speed Weapons Program at the Defence Science & Technology Group out at Edinburgh. In Mark's words:

"When I was about 10 years old, Brent was a SQNLDR in the RAAF Roulettes and he brought me on-base and I got to sit in the Aermacchi MB 326 aircraft. That, and many similar incidents, helped steer me towards Aero Engineering and the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. In my early career (during the HyShot days) he was DCAF and explicitly called for me to brief him when he visited DSTO out at Edinburgh. It made the Chief of Weapons Systems Division, sit up and take notice of "hypersonics", because DCAF was seeking briefings from a young scientist. That briefing helped get internal support for DSTO's involvement in HyShot - at the time the Chief Defence Scientist was "hyper-cautious about hypersonics"- which also led to me getting sponsorship for doing a PhD at University of Queensland – prior to that, I did not have official support to do it, even though I had already chosen to enrol ... the rest, as they say, is history ! I owe gratitude to my cousin for my participation in the HyShot Program, which formed the major part of my career, and the DST support for my PhD."

Brent's Obituary on the ANZAC Centenary SA website captures the essence of the man, "Brent was a man who believed there were better days ahead. His graciousness, smile, reassuring tone, and sense of humour were all qualities that helped him wear so effortlessly the burdens of expectation throughout his life and career."

Brent's approach to life was never more evident than during the last few months dealing with his illness while continuing to work tirelessly on the things that were important to him. His positive outlook, mental strength, and resilience were a study in courage that was, in short, inspirational. A man of service who persevered because he believed his efforts would deliver a better life for those who followed, Air Vice Marshal Espeland is part of an unbroken chain of those who have served with honour through the life of our nation."

**AIRCDRE Christopher
(Noddy) Sawade**
