



MORE OPTIONS MORE PLACES MORE OFTEN

THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE IN
THE NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY | 2026

PER ARDUA AD ASTRA

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"A Tier One air force maximises air power's flexibility, reach, and tempo. It is a potent and proven strategic advantage: one that makes potential opponents think again."

Air Marshal Stephen Chappell

DSC CSC OAM

Chief of Air Force



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1 A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OF AIR FORCE

Thank you for taking the time to read *More Options, More Places, More Often*. This document explains the vital role air power plays in Australian life and the Air Force's role as Australia's national air power institution. It tells the story of who we are, what we do, and why it matters.

Australia is an aviation nation. Flight has connected us across enormous distance and created opportunities for over a century. Today, a large and mostly civilian aviation system supports national life. The Air Force plays a unique role harnessing this enterprise in the national interest.

Since becoming Chief, I have described this more dangerous and unpredictable era as a strategic autumn. It is a time of growing uncertainty and competition, but our task is clear: to prevent autumn from becoming winter, while being ready if it does – as part of the integrated, focused force.

The Air Force is responding by building fighting depth. This is how we are playing our part as Australia faces a more dangerous world.

We build on outstanding foundations. I am proud to command one of the world's most capable small- to medium-sized air forces. I describe us as a Tier One air force because we can execute all air power tasks at a very high level in the most challenging conditions. Within the limits of our size, we operate on par with the very best air forces in the world.

This reflects decades of investment and hard work. It is the product of world-class technical capabilities that create possibilities, and the

highly trained people that turn possibilities into power. A Tier One air force maximises air power's flexibility, reach, and tempo. It is a potent and proven strategic advantage: one that makes potential opponents think again.

Ours is a technological Service, but the heart of our air power is our aviators. We are the custodians of traditions dating back to before the First World War. Our aviators are Australia's air-minded members of the profession of arms. They are innovative, resilient, and committed to serving something greater than themselves.

This is our story. It is a story of people, purpose, and preparedness. A story of how we will meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Per ardua ad astra.



Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Stephen Chappell DSC, CSC, OAM (left) and Warrant Officer of the Air Force, Warrant Officer - Air Force Ralph Clifton at the Last Post Ceremony held at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.



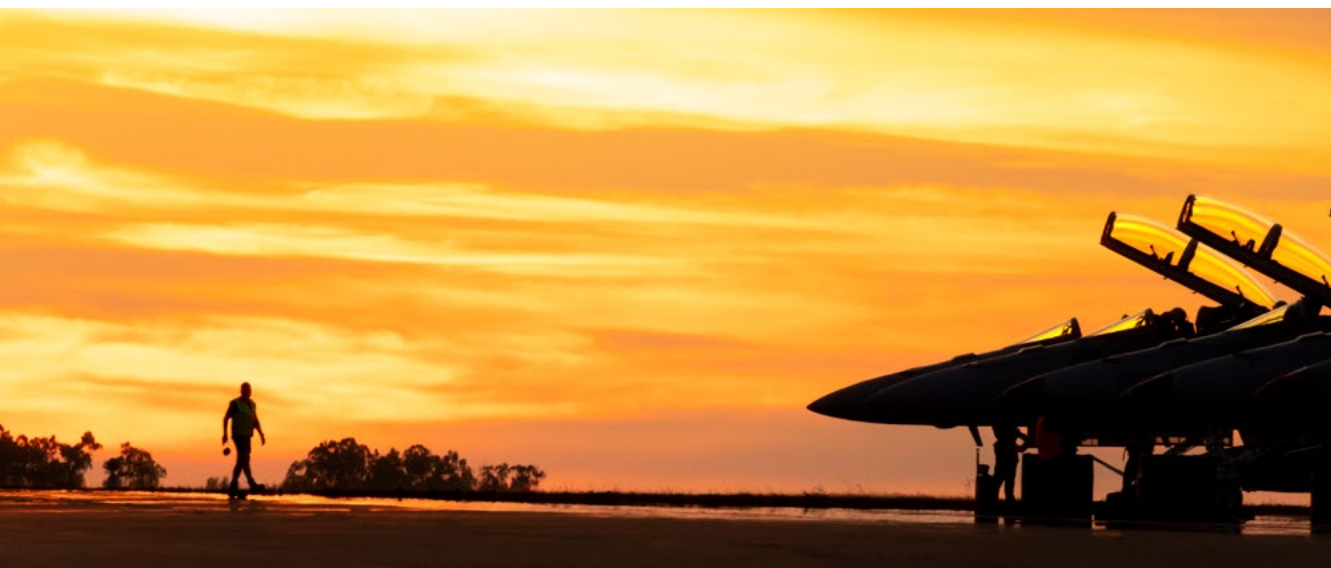
2 INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *More Options, More Places, More Often: The Royal Australian Air Force in the National Defence Strategy*. Australia depends on aviation more than almost any other country. Flight connects Australians across long distances and allows them to act sooner, move faster, and reach further. It helps Australia shape the flow of people, goods, information, and military power across our region. These connections underpin our security, prosperity, and way of life.

The Royal Australian Air Force is one of the world's oldest air forces because Australians embraced aviation early. This document explains who the Air Force is, how it contributes to the National Defence Strategy, why air power matters to Australia, and how the Air Force is responding to challenging times.

The inaugural National Defence Strategy in 2024 highlighted the most challenging strategic circumstances we have faced in generations. The 2026 update reinforces that the trends driving this deterioration have broadened and intensified, increasing the risks of military coercion and reducing Australia's warning time for conflict. The Australian Government has given us clear direction through the National Defence Strategy. We are the aviators in *National Defence*: the Australian Defence Force's expert in air warfare and the national air power integrator. We take pride in our mission to *generate and deliver highly effective air power as part of the integrated force in competition and conflict*.

Your aviators stand ready as ever to safeguard Australia's skies, deliver air power throughout our region, and protect the connections on which we depend.



3 OUR DIRECTION: THE NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY

The 2023 Defence Strategic Review and the 2024 National Defence Strategy identified that Australia's strategic environment was deteriorating. The 2026 National Defence Strategy confirms these trends have broadened and intensified. The international system is under greater strain than at any time since the end of the Cold War, with a trend away from rules towards the exercise of power. The net effect is that Australia will face elevated levels of geopolitical risk over the coming decade and our exposure to force projection and military coercion will reach levels not seen since the Second World War.

The 2024 National Defence Strategy identified that the deteriorating strategic environment was diminishing Australia's historical and geographical advantages, which demanded a renewed approach to defending Australia and its national interests. In response, the Government adopted the concept of *National Defence*.

National Defence is a coordinated, whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approach to meet the strategic challenges Australia faces, including the threat of conflict and the prospect of coercion. It harnesses all arms of Australia's national power to establish a holistic, integrated, and focused approach to protect our security and advance our interests.

In light of our more dangerous strategic environment, the Government is determined to ensure that Australia becomes more self-reliant, more resilient, and takes greater responsibility for our own security. The 2026 National Defence Strategy builds on the 2024 National Defence

Strategy direction that Australia should become more self-reliant and take greater responsibility for its own security.

Defence continues to play a unique and vital role in *National Defence* as the only arm of the Government that generates and employs military power. The Government will continue to transform the Australian Defence Force from a balanced force designed to respond to a range of contingencies to an integrated, focused force designed to address the nation's most significant strategic risks

DEFENCE STRATEGY

In the context of a more dangerous and unpredictable era – and in concert with Australia's other tools of statecraft – Australia's defence strategy seeks to deter any actions that could lead to conflict, military coercion or direct action against Australia or our interests. The 2024 National Defence Strategy set out an effective response to Australia's circumstances by adopting the concept of *National Defence* and the Strategy of Denial and by investing in a more agile and potent integrated, focused force.

The Government's Strategy of Denial aims to deter any conflict before it begins, prevent any potential adversary from succeeding in coercing Australia through force, support regional security and prosperity, and uphold a favourable regional strategic balance. It requires demonstrating the Australian Defence Force's credible capability, capacity, and resolve to hold a potential adversary's forces at risk and degrade their willingness and confidence to employ force or military coercion against us.



The *National Defence Strategy* sets deterrence as Australia's primary strategic defence objective. Deterrence is the use of military and other elements of national power to discourage or restrain a potential adversary from taking unwanted actions. It involves having measures and responses in place that change a potential adversary's risk assessment and therefore decision-making calculus.

The defence of Australia's interests lies in the protection of our economic connection to the world and the maintenance of a favourable regional balance of power. Accordingly, the Australian Defence Force must maintain the capacity to:

- 1 Defend Australia and our immediate region.**
- 2 Deter through denial any potential adversary's attempts to project power against Australia through our northern approaches.**
- 3 Protect Australia's economic connections to our region and the world.**
- 4 Contribute with our partners to the collective security of the Indo-Pacific.**
- 5 Contribute with our partners to protecting and upholding global rules and norms.**



**THE NATIONAL DEFENCE
STRATEGY DIRECTION FOR THE
ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE**

The National Defence Strategy outlines the Government’s continuing investment to enable an Air Force with long-range intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and an enhanced strike capability. This investment will strengthen the Air Force’s contribution to the following Australian Defence Force capability priorities:



- **Targeting and long-range strike** to provide a greater capacity, at longer ranges, to deter any attempts to project power against Australia.
- Capabilities to enable the Australian Defence Force to conduct **littoral manoeuvre**, control strategic land positions, and to undertake rapid stabilisation and **humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations**.
- Capabilities for **sea denial and localised sea control** to deny the use of an area of the sea when needed and provide the Australian Defence Force with freedom of action.
- **Expeditionary air operations to project force** into Australia’s primary area of military interest to deter attempts to project power against Australia or target Australian interests and maintain persistent situational awareness.
- **Missile defence** to protect critical Defence infrastructure, Defence facilities and the Australian Defence Force from long-range and high-speed missiles.
- **Theatre logistics** to support the Australian Defence Force’s ability to concentrate forces and sustain protracted operations during conflict.
- **Theatre command and control** that enables integrated Australian Defence Force forces to plan and act at speed during a conflict and remain resilient during disruptions to networks.
- **Northern airbases** to ensure the Australian Defence Force can project deployed forces and continue to operate through disruption.



4 OUR SETTING: AN AVIATION NATION

“As a nation, Australia is uniquely reliant on aviation to provide us with critical links to each other and the world.”²

Australian Government Aviation
White Paper: *Towards 2050*, August 2024

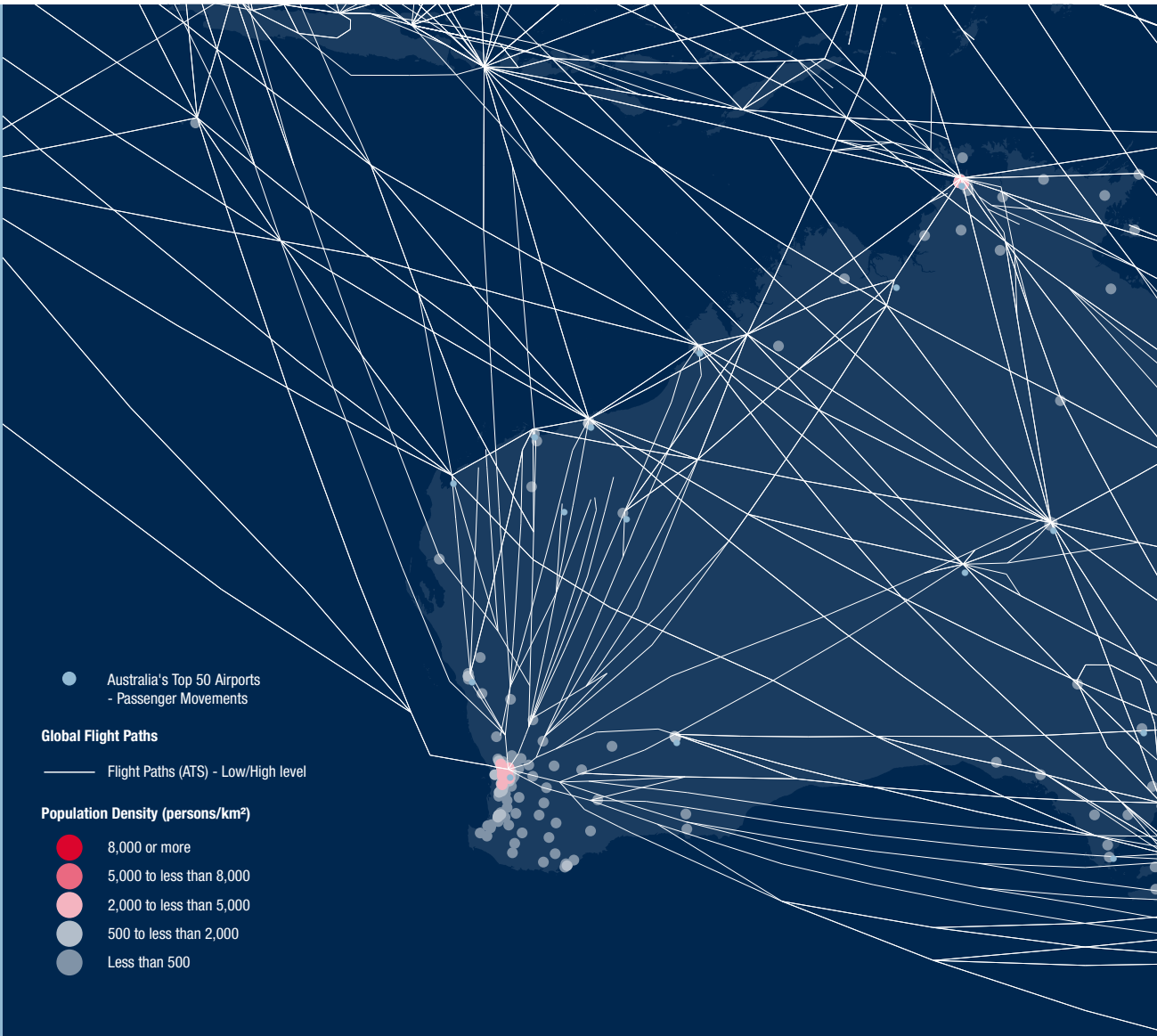


Australia is an aviation nation because flight connects Australians across vast distances and creates opportunities. These links complement and reinforce our broader connections as a maritime trading nation.

Aviation is vital because in many ways Australia functions more like an archipelago than a single continent or island.¹ Nearly 70% of Australians live in eight cities but our population, economic activity, and 8,222 islands are dispersed across almost 10 million square kilometres of the Earth’s surface. Australians have embraced technology to connect this archipelago of communities, industry, and infrastructure so Australia can function, prosper, and defend itself.

Aviation is central to every one of those connections and its importance is expected to grow as emerging technologies make flight more accessible. Aircraft, airports, and air routes connect us directly in hours rather than days. Aviation also supports the land, sea, and communications networks on which national life depends.

Australia’s reliance on aviation strengthens and shapes our security by helping us monitor vast approaches, respond to crises, and project power. But it also creates vulnerabilities that must be protected.



Australian life depends on aviation in many ways, particularly for moving time sensitive or valuable cargo. Our aviation system is large and sophisticated as a result.

Figure 1 An aviation nation



This graphic is based on a map produced by the Australian Geospatial-Intelligence Organisation using data provided by the Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and DAIFIT™, a product of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

AN AVIATION NATION

- In 2025, **\$126 billion worth of imports came to Australia by air. This is 26% of total imports by value despite being just 0.42% of imports by volume.** Major items include machinery and spare parts, delicate electronics, chemicals, medicines, and consumer goods.
- Australia has over **2,200 airstrips** – more than 80 for every million people living in the country.
- In 2024, more than **100 million passengers** travelled Australia's international and domestic air routes.
- The Royal Flying Doctor Service flies the equivalent of **34 trips to the Moon and back** each year so that nearly 160,000 Australians in remote locations can see a medical professional in person.
- More than **16,000 civil aircraft** are registered in Australia and there are over **30,000 active licensed aircraft pilots**.
- Nearly **60,000 people** worked in Australia's air transport or aircraft manufacturing and repair sectors in 2024-25.³

WHAT IS AIR POWER?

Air power is the use of aviation to achieve economic, military, political, and diplomatic goals in the national interest.

Air power is a distinct form of national power. It is a combination of air, cyber, land, sea, and space systems. Air power spans civil and military sectors, and public and private

organisations. Most of Australia's air power is civilian and privately owned. Military air power is a subset of a nation's air power and military power. Australian Governments routinely harness civil and military air power for common purposes, like helping Australians during unrest and disasters or monitoring Australia's economic interests.

The Australian Defence Force views air power as:

'The total strength of a nation's capability to conduct and influence activities in, through and from the air to achieve its objectives.'⁴



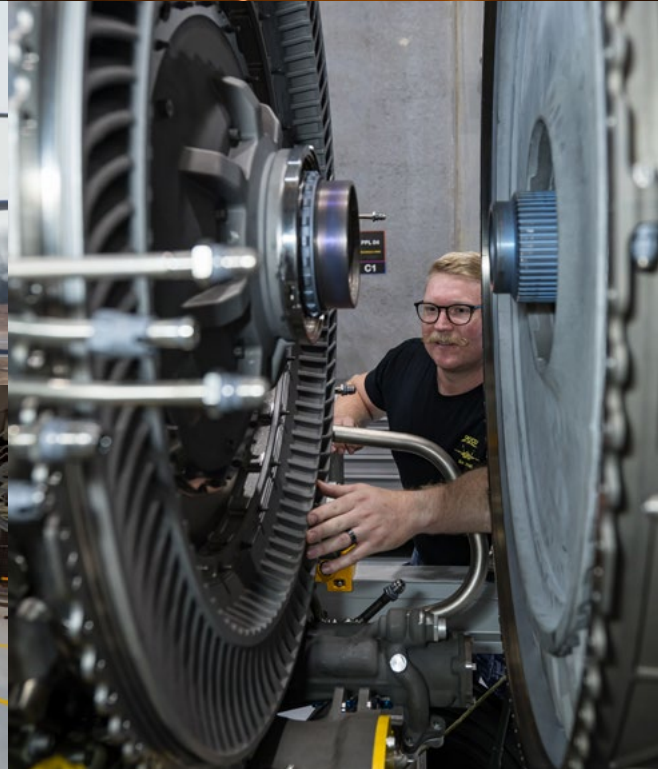


THE NATIONAL AIR POWER ENTERPRISE

Australia's air power is derived from a national air power enterprise. This enterprise includes everything and everyone involved in the design, development, and delivery of aviation and air power. It comprises civil air operators, government aviation, industry, academia, regulators and policy agencies, training, and

many others. The air power in operation today is only a fraction of the enterprise's potential. Understanding the whole helps Australia harness its potential to strengthen self-reliance, resilience, and *National Defence*.⁵

The Air Force is one part of this enterprise, but it plays a critical role as Australia's national air power institution.



5 OUR IDENTITY: THE AVIATORS IN NATIONAL DEFENCE

Australia's decision to form one of the world's first separate air forces in 1921 reflects our national reliance on aviation and the value of air power to our defence. Since then, the Royal Australian Air Force has served Australia and safeguarded the skies. More than 350,000 Australians have worn our uniform, including over 120,000 living today. 11,204 aviators have given their lives in service; 3,142 have no known grave.

OUR AVIATORS

Our Air Force people – we call ourselves aviators – are the heart of the Royal Australian Air Force. Air power depends on highly skilled people operating advanced technology in demanding circumstances. Aviators come from many backgrounds and join for many reasons, but we all share a commitment to our country, our teammates, and our profession.

Our aviators are air-minded members of the profession of arms. We share this profession with Australia's sailors and soldiers. We are bonded by a willingness to face danger and death, a responsibility to lawfully use lethal force when necessary, and a commitment to service before self. The Defence values we share with our Australian Defence Force, Australian Public Service, and contractor teammates embody our common ethos.

In times and places of need, our aviators are often the Australians first in and last out. It is these aviators who live our motto every day: *per ardua ad astra* – *through adversity to the stars*.

THE NATIONAL AIR POWER INSTITUTION

The Royal Australian Air Force is Australia's national air power institution. There are many aviation organisations in Australia, but the Air Force is the only one responsible for using all aspects of air power to serve the nation.

Our aviators develop, operate, and manage Australia's widest range of air power capabilities and activities. Our air bases and ground systems are the foundations of our air power. Our aircraft fleet is Australia's most diverse and includes the Australian Defence Force's largest, fastest, and longest-ranged systems. Every day we work with partners to conduct operations that meet a wide range of needs. These occur around the globe in all circumstances, often at short notice. As Australia's national air power institution, we play a key role in harnessing all aspects of air power in the national interest.

A PARTNER EVERYWHERE

The Royal Australian Air Force is a partner everywhere because we operate in and through the air at large scale, high speed, and long range. We can reach any point on Earth's surface, up into space, and into the cyber environment. We can do so quickly and with real impact. This means the Air Force adds strength and new possibilities to the Australian Defence Force wherever it is and whatever it is doing.

This value also comes from the trust and relationships our aviators build. Working with others – from the Australian Defence Force, government agencies, local communities, industry, or international partners – is part of everyday life for aviators. Our partners often change from one mission to the next, so we value our relationships and shared success.



THE PEOPLE OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

AIR FORCE PEOPLE

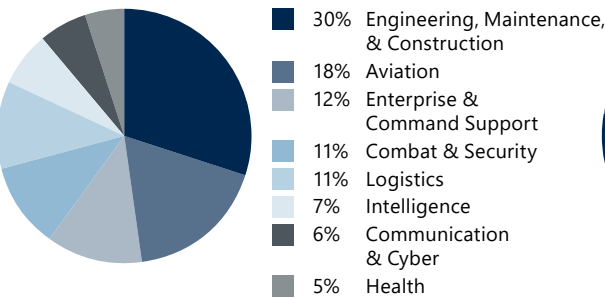
24,750 Total

FULL-TIME
71% (17,692)

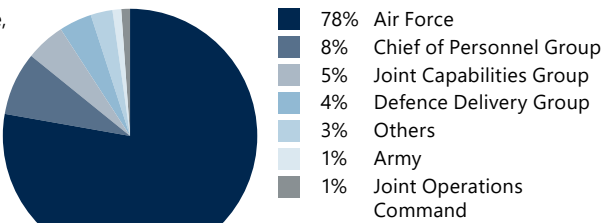
PART-TIME
26% (6,373) APS
3% (685)

1% (321) FULL TIME RESERVISTS
1% (320) GAP YEAR
1% (139) FOREIGN PERSONNEL ON EXCHANGE

AVIATORS PERFORM MANY ROLES

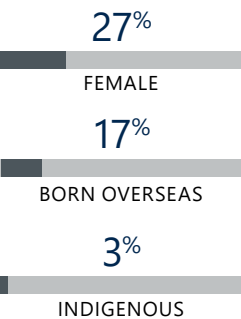


AVIATORS WORK ACROSS DEFENCE

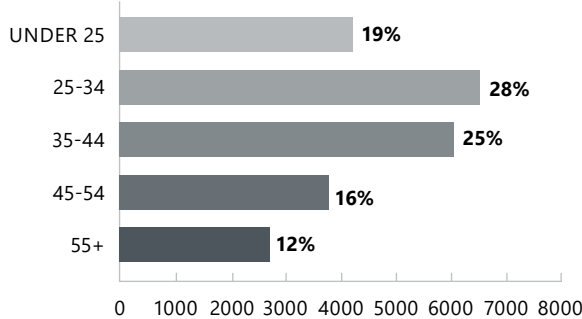


AVIATORS ARE A DIVERSE GROUP

Diversity



Age



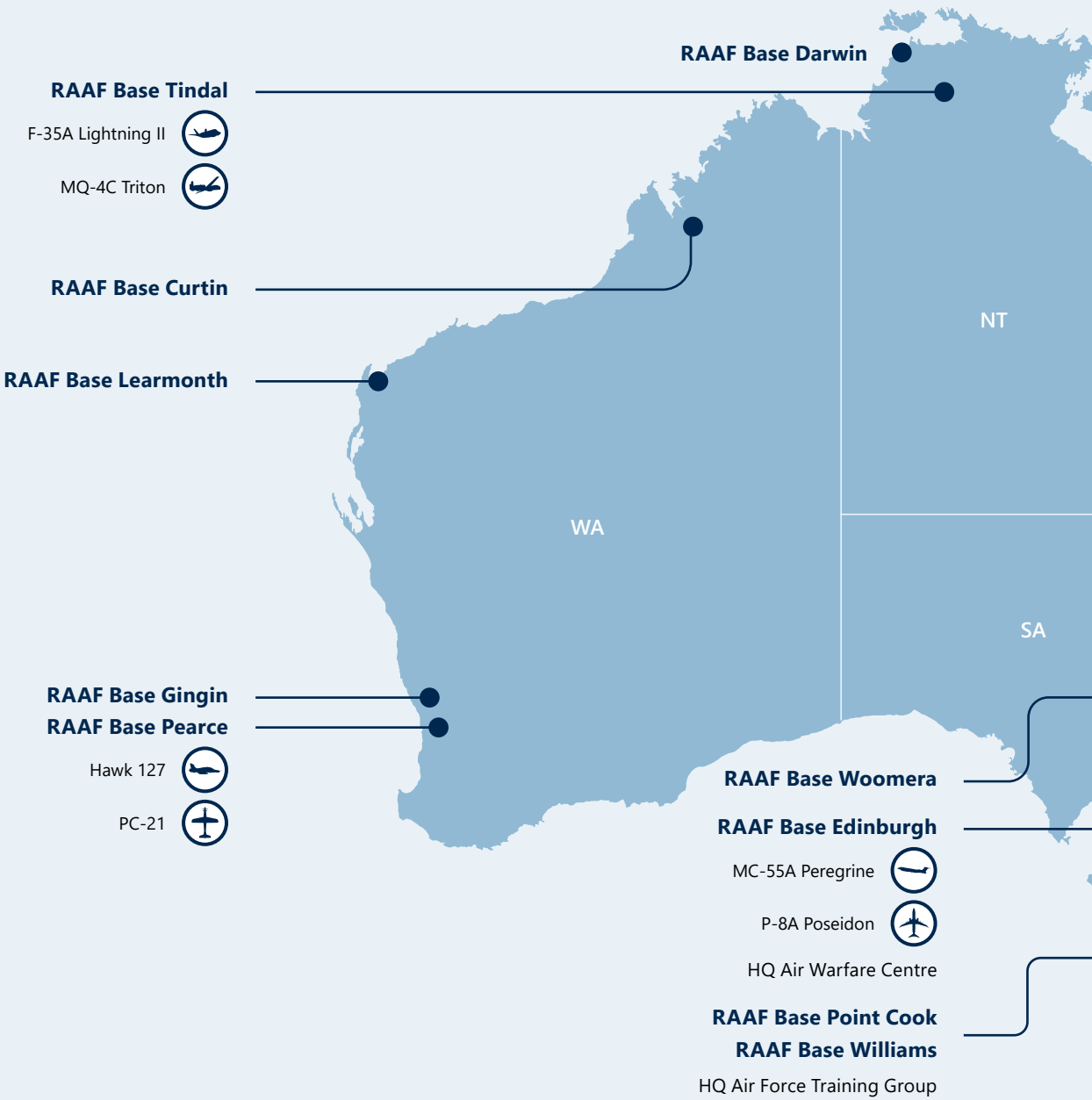
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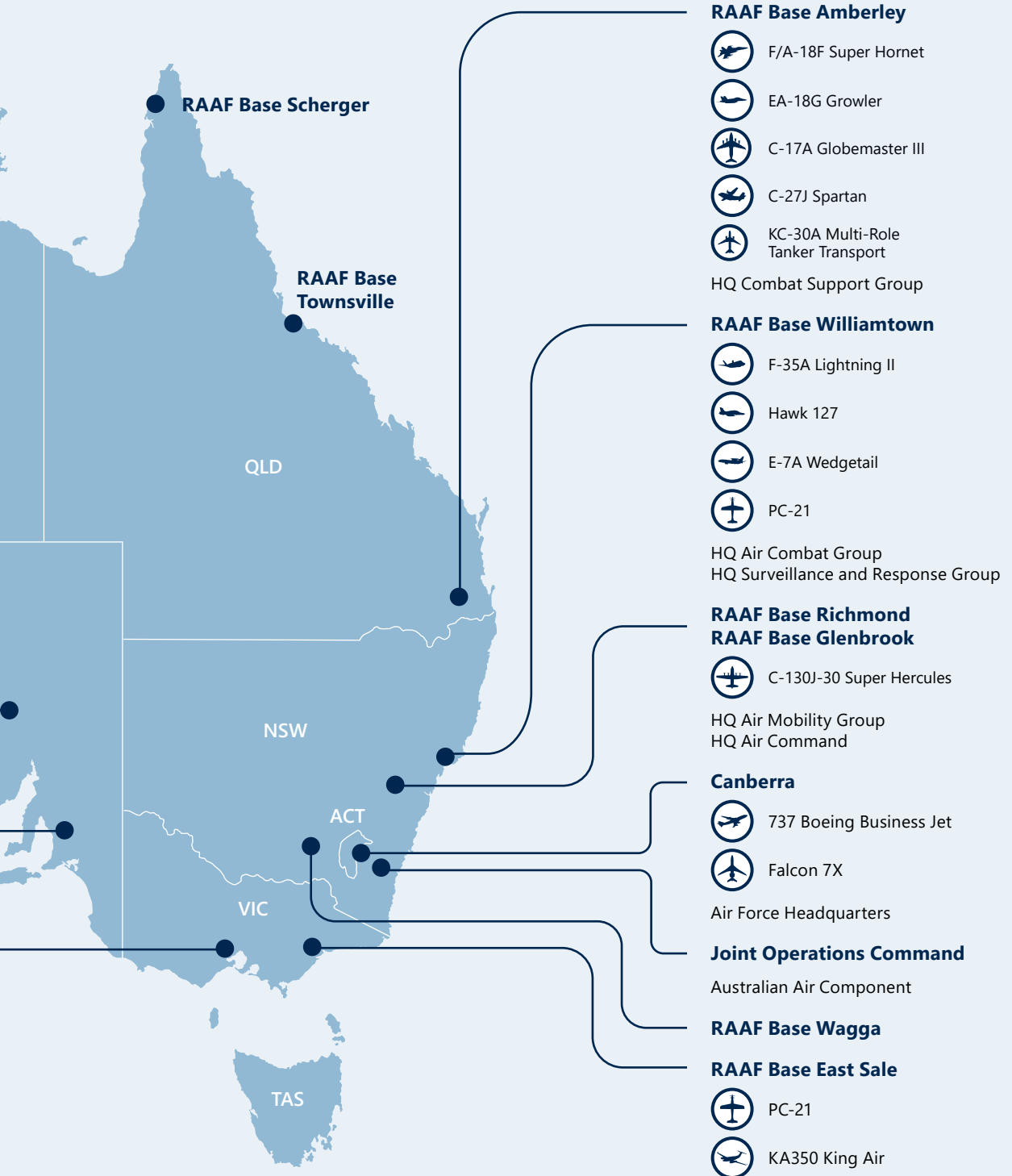
AVERAGE AGE

23

MOST COMMON AGE

THE PLACES OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE





THE HOME OF AIRMINDEDNESS

The Royal Australian Air Force is the Australian home to a mindset known as air-mindedness. Air-mindedness is an individual and collective outlook that helps us understand air power and what it can do.⁶ It is shaped by what we do, where we do it, and how we work.

We think higher, faster, and further.

This perspective comes from operating advanced technology at high speeds, long ranges, and free from the obstacles of the Earth's surface. This shapes how we view time and space. For the air-minded, long distance and limited time are opportunities not problems.

Air-mindedness is one of our most important assets in unlocking air power's potential.





We value expertise. Our lives and work rely on our expertise. Aviation depends on people, machines, information, and the environment interacting reliably and precisely under pressure. This spans all our teams and systems: from aircraft in flight to airbases and everything between and beyond. Our aviators must be experts for us to succeed under stress. It is why we often appoint our most proficient people to lead tasks regardless of rank.

We find ways over, not through. Air-minded people look for new ways to solve problems through innovation and technology. This reflects our heritage harnessing flight to bypass obstacles, connect distant places, and create new opportunities. The first air-minded thinkers emerged at the dawn of aviation but it is the innovative mindset that has carried forward.



6 OUR ROLES: THE NATIONAL AIR POWER INTEGRATOR AND THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE'S EXPERT IN AIR WARFARE

The Air Force performs two roles in support of the National Defence Strategy. We serve as the national air power integrator and the Australian Defence Force's expert in air warfare. The first role helps Australia harness its aviation strengths for *National Defence*. The second maximises the value of air power as part of the Australian Defence Force. These complementary roles are central to *National Defence* and the execution of the Strategy of Denial.

WE SUPPORT NATIONAL DEFENCE AS THE NATIONAL AIR POWER INTEGRATOR

The national air power integrator role involves helping the Australian Government understand, coordinate, and strengthen the aviation systems and capabilities on which Australia depends. We do this by working with partners across civil, commercial, government, and military aviation in Australia and overseas.

We are well placed for this role because of our responsibilities and capabilities. For example, we can draw on civilian air traffic systems and military surveillance assets to build an accurate picture of what is happening in the air.

We can help identify aviation priorities and vulnerabilities in *National Defence*, such as air routes and airbases critical to movement across Australia and the region. We will also work with partners to better understand how the national air power enterprise can contribute to crises or war, like using civil airfields for military aircraft or drawing on industry expertise. Together, these efforts expand our fighting depth to strengthen deterrence, resilience, and self-reliance.

WE STRENGTHEN THE STRATEGY OF DENIAL AS THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE'S EXPERT IN AIR WARFARE

The Air Force is the Australian Defence Force's expert in air warfare. We do this through our air-minded perspective and performing five interdependent air power tasks. Together, these enduring tasks shape who and what can use the air, and help the Australian Defence Force to create awareness, reach, and impact across our region. They contribute distinctive air power options for *National Defence* and the Strategy of Denial and increase the freedom with which the Australian Defence Force and our other partners operate. This strengthens deterrence by complicating potential adversaries' decisions and making it harder for them to succeed.

Our primary task: control of the air

Control of the air determines who and what can and cannot use the skies. It is not an end in itself: it is about what can be done in the air and on the surface below. We play a leading role in this national effort because of our capabilities, responsibilities, and relationships as Australia's national air power institution.

We view control of the air as our primary task because it underpins Australia's use of aviation.

Control of the air is a condition to be achieved. It is always limited in time and space and requires constant effort and renewal.⁷ Control of the air can involve fighting but also depends on many activities that enable safe and reliable aviation in different conditions. Managing airspace, securing airbases, protecting



Our air power tasks:

**OUR PRIMARY TASK:
CONTROL OF THE AIR.
WE FIGHT IN THE AIR.
WE MOVE SWIFTLY IN
STRENGTH. WE SEE FAR
AND FAST. WE STRIKE
WITH POWER AND
PRECISION.**



communications and supply networks, and ensuring aircraft can move where and when needed are all part of controlling the air.

Control of the air requires a deliberate and focused whole-of-nation campaign. Every part of the Air Force works towards it instinctively, but many others contribute. We will work with partners across Australia and overseas to anticipate vulnerabilities and requirements, build resilience, and consider how requirements can be achieved in competition and conflict.

Decades of secure skies have shaped Australia's reliance on aviation. The last air raid on Australia was on 12 November 1943. No Australian soldier has been killed by air attack since 25 October 1943, and the last air attack on an Australian warship was on 9 January 1945. This has fostered expectations of uncontested access to the air. In the strategic environment outlined in the National Defence Strategy, control of the air cannot be assumed and will require sustained effort.



We fight in the air to control access and movement

We fight in the air so Australia and its partners can move and our adversaries cannot. This is central to the Strategy of Denial because it imposes risk and uncertainty on potential adversaries while boosting our partners' freedom of action. This can be done across broad areas for long periods or in precise times and places to create or deny access for specific reasons. Fighting in the air enhances deterrence by increasing national resilience and the Australian Defence Force's range and lethality.

We fight in the air by detecting, identifying, and engaging targets in the air like missiles and aircraft. We do so from the surface or the air using sensors and weapons carried on aircraft, vehicles, or ships including those operated by partners. The weapons may be physical like missiles or electronic such as jamming. Our aircraft are uniquely able to cover large areas and fight at very long ranges.



We move swiftly in strength to project force and build partnerships

Our ability to move swiftly in strength allows Australia and the Australian Defence Force to move people, equipment, and combat power rapidly across our region and the globe. Air mobility strengthens the Strategy of Denial by creating uncertainty in the minds of potential adversaries about where and when we might appear. It boosts friendly resilience through dispersal, movement, and rapid response. Air mobility bolsters regional security and collective deterrence by enhancing partnerships and support for neighbours.

Air mobility can take many forms: from routine flights to medical evacuation, secure dignitary transport, and airborne insertion of land and sea forces. It can extend the reach of other aircraft by refuelling them in the air or at forward airfields, where they may also rearm. Our large aircraft can carry heavy payloads, from sensitive weapons and equipment to people requiring continuous medical care. They can reach places most aircraft cannot.

Airbases are the essential access points for air power and the foundation of our operations. We can swiftly establish, open, and operate airbases across Australia and the region, including in unfamiliar locations and under threat.



We see far and fast to decide sooner

The Air Force's ability to see far and fast gives the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Government more time, space, and information to make decisions. Understanding movement is often the first step in shaping and deterring events.

Seeing far and fast is a key asset for a Strategy of Denial because we can demonstrate we know where potential adversaries are and what they are doing. Our air- and ground-based sensing capabilities can observe huge areas of the Indo-Pacific and into space.

Information can be interpreted rapidly and passed to decision makers or directly to forces in combat, giving them more time to understand and act.

We strike with power and precision to deter and deny

We strike with power and precision at very long ranges to deter and deny hostile actions. Our long-range strike forces compel potential adversaries to defend more locations, disperse forces, and act more cautiously. They can disrupt, delay, or deny hostile movement before it threatens Australia's interests.



Our air strike forces underpin the Strategy of Denial by holding potential targets at risk over great distances and for long periods of time. We can attack targets close to Australian assets or before they approach, giving friendly forces depth in time and space when needed most. Aircraft can rebase and reload to repeatedly strike the same or different targets across a wide area.

From the air, we can deliver physical and non-physical attacks on cyber, land, sea, and space targets using sophisticated long-range weapons or low-cost short-range options. Our ability to deliver concentrated firepower swiftly, precisely, and repeatedly – including Australia's most powerful weapons – is a potent and proven part of our deterrent.

7 OUR RESPONSE: BUILDING FIGHTING DEPTH

The Air Force performs these roles and tasks every day. However, the National Defence Strategy highlights that we must adapt for a more challenging environment. We can no longer assume our airspace, airbases, and supply routes are safe. Long-range weapons, drones, cyber, and the growing competition in the region mean we must be more prepared to prevent disruption or recover from it.

We are building fighting depth in response. This is about strengthening the Air Force's advantages so we can generate power and influence movement while under pressure. Building fighting depth contributes to the Strategy of Denial by boosting the Australian Defence Force's credibility, capability, capacity, and resolve.

The Australian Defence Force's Air Domain Concept identifies this depth in posture, space, and time as 'air power's principal contribution to an integrated force in support of a Strategy of Denial.'⁸

Depth in posture. We are working to make ourselves more self-reliant, harder to disrupt, and better able to recover to increase flexibility. More supplies and better access to resources help us scale and sustain our operations despite shocks. Investing in new technologies like autonomous systems and strengthening partnerships makes us more adaptable and resilient. More depth in posture strengthens our flexibility so we can create more options.





Depth in space. We are increasing our access to operating locations, range, and presence across the region to expand our reach. We are upgrading and hardening our bases and introducing longer-ranged weapons and aircraft. More importantly, we are building relationships with new and old partners in Australia and across the Indo-Pacific. Greater depth in space extends our reach to operate from more locations and influence more places.

Depth in time. We are finding ways to see sooner, act faster, and operate for longer to speed up and sustain our tempo. More demanding and shorter-notice exercises are increasing our readiness. Working with new partners is helping us adapt faster.

Our awareness of what is happening in our region is improving through stronger relationships, better connections, and new sensing capabilities. Greater depth in time accelerates and maintains our tempo so we can create effects more often.

Building fighting depth is about growing what we can do, how much we can do, and when we can do it. We are exploring new ideas and doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. Through this we are reinforcing air power's flexibility, reach, and tempo to create the additional depth we need to provide more options in more places more often under pressure.



8 OUR PAYOFF: MORE OPTIONS, MORE PLACES, MORE OFTEN

The Air Force seeks to maximise air power's advantages of flexibility, reach, and tempo. These interact with our national characteristics to turn distance into depth. This depth helps the Australian Government and the Australian Defence Force act sooner, move faster, and reach further. These abilities generate our strategic payoff: more options in more places more often.

OUR FLEXIBILITY INCREASES DEPTH IN POSTURE TO CREATE MORE OPTIONS

The Air Force gives the Australian Government flexibility in shaping events and movement. Our aircraft and payloads provide choice because missions can be changed up to the very last moment – often without others knowing we were there. They can be launched far into the Indo-Pacific from Australian territory without disturbing regional relationships. We can also work with neighbours to extend our reach with minimal presence in their territory. We can use the same aircraft to perform multiple roles in a single flight or over several days.

OUR REACH EXTENDS DEPTH IN SPACE TO ACCESS MORE PLACES

The Air Force's reach gives Australia the ability to influence events across the Indo-Pacific from Australian territory. Our aircraft, weapons, and airbases mean we can deliver cargo, people, data, firepower, or simply a presence – anywhere from the Southwest Pacific through Southeast Asia to the Northeast Indian Ocean in hours. From dispersed locations we can cover huge areas, concentrate powerfully, and overcome obstacles to reach places others cannot.



OUR TEMPO EXPANDS DEPTH IN TIME TO ACT MORE OFTEN

The Air Force allows Australia to act earlier and impose a high rate of change on potential adversaries. Fast, reliable long-range aircraft operating from airbases can sustain operations day after day after day. We can respond rapidly to events, create persistence in key locations, or range widely. When combined with our reach, our tempo offers ways for Australia to keep opponents off balance about where and when we will appear while assuring them we will.



A HIGH-PAYOFF NATIONAL INVESTMENT

Australia's investment in the Air Force and broader national air power enterprise generates disproportionate value. A relatively small number of aviators – roughly the population of Gympie or Goulburn – generate powerful effects across millions of square kilometres in hours rather than days.

Our reach means we can cover wide areas or concentrate effects without massing forces. Our tempo means we can act quickly, day after day, to build persistence, presence, and pressure. Our versatility offers flexibility by performing many different tasks and giving Australia more choice in how it responds.

Our payoff is amplified because we build on – and contribute to – a sophisticated national air power enterprise that develops and sustains the aviation industry, infrastructure, and skills needed to connect Australians to each other and the world.

Our advantages combine to create distinctive high-payoff air power options and strengthen every part of the Australian Defence Force. Together, we operate more swiftly, safely, and effectively to give Australia more options in more places more often.

9 OUR PAST: AIR POWER AND MARITIME MOVEMENT, 1939-45

Air power helped Allied forces control movement across enormous distances during the Second World War, particularly in maritime environments. It formed and protected friendly connections while disrupting hostile ones. The Allies, including Australia, built air forces that executed the full range of tasks. This investment paid off as the air forces constantly disrupted enemy production, movement, and operations over huge areas.¹⁰

It allowed Allied commanders to fight when, where, and how they wanted: using machinery, movement, and firepower to overcome weakened opponents while minimising casualties. These benefits proved especially important in littoral operations and sea control, which are both *National Defence Strategy* priorities.





"If you want to go anywhere in modern war,
in the air, on the sea, on the land,
you must have command of the air."

Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey, United States Navy⁹



AIR POWER AND LITTORAL OPERATIONS: THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, 1942-44

Few campaigns better demonstrate the value of air power in Australia's archipelagic region than the war in the Southwest Pacific from 1942-44. Control of movement across sea, land, and air shaped the course of the war in New Guinea and the surrounding islands. Much of the fighting took place in littoral areas – along coastlines where land, sea, and air intersect.

Japan's advances through Southeast Asia and the Pacific threatened Australia's northern approaches and its connections to the United States. After blunting Japanese attacks around Port Moresby, Allied forces counterattacked to isolate Japanese forces in New Guinea from their major base at Rabaul before bypassing and neutralising Rabaul itself.

Control of the air was the driving factor for both sides because it determined who and what could move and fight. Japan's early successes relied on superior aircraft, numbers, and pilot training. The tide turned over Port Moresby

from March 1942 as Australian and American air power grew stronger. Airfields became the critical foundations for operations because each newly built or captured airfield extended Allied air power's reach.

Allied forces had a crucial advantage in their ability to rapidly build and repair airfields and fly over difficult mountains, jungle, and contested seas. In mid-1943, Allied aircraft landed troops behind enemy lines at Tsili Tsili, where they swiftly transformed a grass airstrip into an operational airbase that extended Allied reach over key areas.

The Battle of the Bismarck Sea in March 1943 showcased how air power could find, track, and destroy hostile forces. Allied aircraft tracked a Japanese reinforcement convoy from Rabaul despite poor weather and enemy interference. Almost 100 Allied aircraft then overwhelmed the convoy in a concentrated attack. Repeated strikes saw 12 of 16 ships in the convoy sunk and the Japanese connection between New Guinea and Rabaul cut.



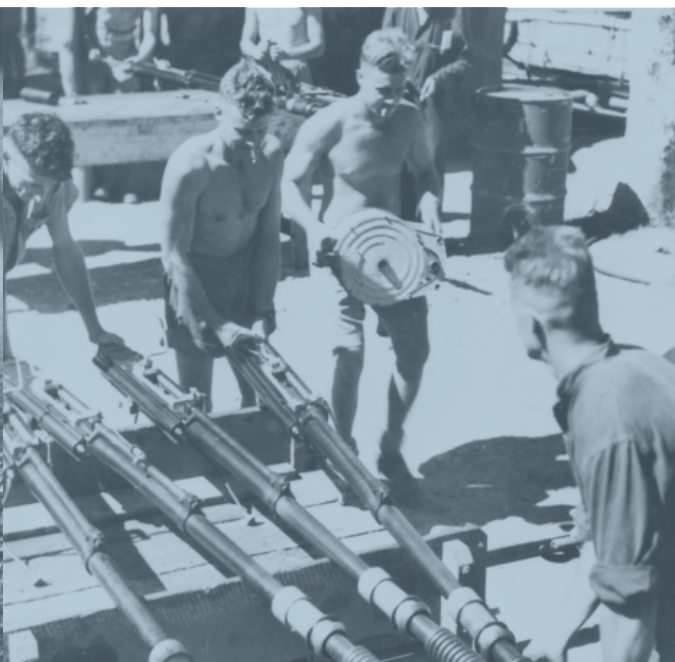


After Bismarck Sea isolated Japanese forces in New Guinea, the Allies launched Operation Cartwheel to neutralise Rabaul. Coordinated air, sea, and land operations used superior awareness, mobility, supplies, and firepower to bypass and isolate Japanese strongpoints across the archipelago. Allied forces seized airfields, denied enemy movement, and disrupted supply lines to effectively neutralise more than 100,000 Japanese troops at Rabaul without a direct ground assault.

The campaign demonstrated how air power shapes movement in an archipelagic region. It connected dispersed forces across enormous distances, enabled friendly mobility while denying enemy movement, and gave Allied commanders the freedom to choose where, when, and how to fight across air, land, and sea.

“No amphibious force can be successful without control of the sea lanes and the air over those lanes in its avenue of advance.”

General of the Army
Douglas MacArthur,
United States Army¹¹





AIR POWER AND SEA CONTROL: THE ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC OCEANS, 1939-45

Maritime connections were lifelines for Britain and Japan during the Second World War. Air power was critical in protecting and cutting those connections. It transformed warfare at sea by making the oceans more transparent and contested, allowing friendly forces to find, track, and attack or avoid hostile ships or submarines across enormous distances.

In the Atlantic, air power shaped the contest for Britain's shipping lifelines. Aircraft monitored sea lanes, laid mines, directed anti-submarine forces, and attacked submarines and their ports across huge areas. Very-long-range aircraft prevented German submarines from operating freely anywhere along the Atlantic routes. Aircraft were directly involved in

sinking almost half of German submarines lost to Allied action.¹³ Their greatest contributions, however, were making merchant ships safer and multiplying the impact of Allied anti-submarine efforts. By detecting and disrupting submarines and forcing them underwater, air power rendered submarines slower, less aware, and less dangerous. This helped naval forces hunt submarines and made it easier for convoys to avoid them.

In the Pacific, air power and submarines worked together to sever Japan's maritime connections. Allied aircraft attacked ports and ships, laid mines, and tracked shipping. Aircraft were directly involved in sinking over half of the warship tonnage and more than 36% of merchant shipping lost by Japan during the war.



They made Allied submarines more dangerous by finding targets, attacking warships, and forcing shipping onto more predictable routes. Allied submarines, aided by air power, devastated Japanese merchant shipping – sinking over 55% of tonnage lost.¹⁴ Together, aircraft and submarines paralysed Japan's sea lanes and isolated Japanese forces across the Pacific.

The Atlantic and Pacific shipping wars showed how air power underpins sea control across vast distances. Air power protected vital connections and strengthened Allied forces by giving them greater awareness, mobility, persistence, and firepower. At the same time, it restricted the enemy's freedom and exposed their vulnerabilities.

"They never believed air power could outfight sea power and now they will not risk ships uncovered by air support."

Prime Minister John Curtin¹²

10 OUR AIR FORCE FOR OUR AVIATION NATION

Australia is an aviation nation because our geography is enormous, our interests are wide, and our people dispersed across an archipelago. Flight connects us to each other and the world quickly and efficiently so we can act sooner, move faster, and reach further. It helps form and sustain land, sea, and communications networks. Australia's security, prosperity, and way of life depend on all these connections. They must be maintained in the face of challenge and competition.

The Royal Australian Air Force is Australia's national air power institution. We play a vital role in harnessing Australia's national air power and bringing that power to bear as part of *National Defence*. Our air-minded aviators are the heart and soul of everything we do. They have secured our skies, protected our connections, and delivered air power across our region for more than a century. They stand ready to do so again.





We are building fighting depth to play our part in the National Defence Strategy. Our aviators are finding ways to maximise air power's flexibility, reach, and tempo so that Australia's investment in the Air Force pays off: through disproportionate effects over huge areas, in hours, not days – over and over again. We contribute distinctive air power options and strengthen every part of the Australian Defence Force. Through this, we help Australia defend itself and its vital connections with more options in more places more often.



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OUR VALUES

SERVICE
COURAGE
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
EXCELLENCE

SERVICE: The selflessness of character to place the security and interests of our nation and its people ahead of my own.

COURAGE: The strength of character to say and do the right thing, always, especially in the face of adversity.

RESPECT: The humanity of character to value others and treat them with dignity.

INTEGRITY: The consistency of character to align my thoughts, words and actions to do what is right.

EXCELLENCE: The willingness of character to strive each day to be the best I can be, both professionally and personally.



THE AVIATOR'S CODE

I am an Australian Aviator
I inherit a proud tradition
I follow in the footsteps of many fine Australians
Their Legacy is my future

I am an Australian Aviator
The air is our domain
I strive for excellence in all that I do
To protect our skies, our country, the land I love

I am an Australian Aviator
I live for my family, work with my mates,
Support my community and fight for my nation
I am a valued member of the Air Force team
I do what is right

I am an Australian Aviator





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