

Air Attaché History

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25 September 2007

Moderator: I think this is about our group for this morning. Good morning. I'm Jim Simpson, the Director of Membership Operations for the Air Force Association. On behalf of the Association, I would like to welcome you to our Air and Space Conference for 2007. Today, as you can see, the topic "Work of an Air Attaché" and we're pleased to have from the Royal Australian Air Force Air Commodore Graham Bentley to be our presenter. So he will talk for 35 minutes or so, he said, and try and leave room for questions. He'll take your questions. You have a yellow comment card. We'd appreciate any feedback, one way or the other, that you have, and give that back to us. Sir?

Commodore Bentley: Thank you very much. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here. I've been here in the United States this time for about two-and-a-half years. I only have about five months to go and stop enjoying my time here in the States before my Chief, who is down here to observe and make sure that I try and tell not too many lies, and I have to go back and start doing some real work he says.

Hopefully, I'll tell you why for the next 30 minutes or so exactly what I have been doing. I am going to try to keep it reasonably light, and most of what I'll show are pictures but I'll use those as illustrations of what we actually get up to. And I think the life of a military attaché, whether it be an Air Force, Navy, Army, or defense attaché, is similar throughout the world. We do a number of things. Where you are, what country you're in, and what the relationships between those two countries are will greatly affect how much you do one part of those roles and how much you do of another part. So, really, we all do very similar things, and some things are constant right away around the world.

One of the most important things, though, is that you are the representative not only of your government but of your country and of your service. And you are the direct link between your service chief and the service chief of the country that you're in. So you end up being in a very privileged position, and I have been very fortunate enough in the two-and-a-half years that I've been here to be able to get to know the Chief of the United States Air Force personally and to get to know most of the four-stars and three-stars in the United States Air Force.

So it is a very privileged and a very unusual situation to have that type of access, and our relationship between our two countries is very, very good. This truly makes life very easy for an attaché. I know that some don't quite have that type of access.

What I'm going to quickly do is talk about a bit of history about attachés, how long we've been around and where we come from, some of the roles and responsibilities, and then talk about some of the benefits. And, of course, the benefits are seeing different cultures and traveling.

Military attachés have been around for about a hundred and fifty years. Of course the British started, and they started it as a postscript to the Crimea War and started sending their attachés out looking at most of their commonwealth countries.

The U.S. started with attachés in about 1890. They steadily grew up through the 1900s, sort of at 1950-odd, when there were about 2,000-2,100 military people from the United States on attaché duty around the world; that was in about 60 or 70 countries. From that time on, they have been slowly diminishing and I think they are now down and around about the two- to three-hundred mark in around about 60 or 70 countries still, so they have diminished quite a lot.

For the relationship between Australia and the U.S., we've had attachés representing the Air Force and Navy and Army since about the middle of World War II. Up until that time, of course, the relationship between the two air forces didn't exist but we had air representatives over here. So it's only been a reasonably short period, and you can count the number of attachés with three years per duty at around 20-25, so a select band of people that have been representing each other's countries.

But overall it has been a very good relationship and a very close relationship. And that leads me on to the roles, and I mentioned that there are number of activities that you get up to, and each one of these for each of the attachés will vary. We have about a hundred and fifty people, Australian Air Force people, in the United States in various roles, so one of the things that we have to contend with is being a commander and an administrator and looking after all those people. Other people only have a representation of one or two people; they have very few exchange people and nobody here with military stars or representation. So the roles do vary quite greatly.

For Australia, the advice varies, from advice to the ambassador. We have a two-star head of station here in Washington and about seven one-stars in the embassy. Some of those are civilian, but a part of them are military. So there is a rather large military contingent representing Australia in the

U.S. The advice goes back to my Chief, and I sometimes am on the phone to him daily, sometimes sending e-mails weekly, and sometimes I try not to talk to him for a couple of weeks on end. [Laughter]. And sometimes I can't get him because he's overseas traveling, and I'll talk a little bit more about that later.

You do have many bosses and many people interested in what you're doing and what's happening in the country. Sometimes that leads to conflicts but, as always, the guy that's immediately in front of you and batting you over the head, usually the ambassador or the head of the defense staff, is your immediate boss even though he's not your direct boss. The Chief has given me a directive, and he is the one that has direct command over me even though I work through a number of other people.

The prime role of most attachés is gathering information. The United States is a very, very large country. If you look at it, the mainland is about the same size as Australia. There are about 280 million more people in the U.S. than there are in Australia, but when you stretch it across Hawaii, up into Alaska and down into a couple of [other lines], it spreads right across a large part of the world.

One of the things that the U.S. government does for us is puts on tours. Now we go on about four tours a year, normally traveling in military aircraft but quite often on chartered aircraft as well. Some of the trips we get to take our wives. Some of the trips are more focused on military aspects and we go by ourselves. They vary between two or three days up to about a week, and we visit both U.S. Air Force establishments as well as U.S. Navy and sometimes Army and Marine establishments. We also look at some of the cultural things, and I'll show you some of the shots from some of our cultural activities later on.

The tours are designed to do two or three things. To give you a good overview of how the U.S. Air Force works, for an organization this size it is almost impossible for one person or for even half a dozen people to get across the organization, to fully understand it, and to fully understand how it functions and do that in a three-year tour, have a good working knowledge, and know where to go to find out the information that you need to find out so that we can operate together and we are in close alliance so that we need to know where things are going in the United States Air Force, what activities are happening, and where we can plug in, where we can get involved with the new doctrine, the new ways of teaching and the new ways of training. So lots of activities.

We also get to see a lot of the great sights and visit a lot of the bases, and I think I've been in about 45 states while I've been here. Probably 30 of those states have been a direct result

of going around on Air Force tours. So we do go to a lot of different places and see a lot of things.

We also get to see, as well as the new, some of the old things, so you do get a wide variety of activities thrown in.

That's an amazing place where you've got probably six times the number of airplanes parked there than we have in our Air Force. Quite amazing.

And of course you see some of the new technology and some of the people at work. Bombing an F-117, it was quite instructive on the way that the [inaudible] works. And you can very quickly see the differences and the similarities between the way the Air Force operates and watch them working hard but also having fun. This day they were actually having a competition between a couple of the loading crews to see how professional they were and how quickly they could get the task done. So quite illustrative of what goes on in the United States Air Force.

I was talking to a couple of guys here earlier about the gathering information and, really, it is gathering information. For us the word spy, for a military attaché, is a big to-do. You're not a spy. You're there to understand the people, understand the military, and understand the way of doing business in that country so that when we have to do business with that country we can provide the right context and the right direction to our senior staff that come over for visits, and I'll talk a little bit more about that.

We also get to do some amazing things in the air and see some amazing things.

Liaison is probably the next biggest activity. Where we go and, either as part of a tour or one-on-one with a lot of the staff, and that has probably been one of my biggest tasks over here is direct liaison between myself and a lot of the headquarters where we have exchanges. And I'll talk a little bit more about exchanges later.

All of the major commands.

And we do do some traveling bilaterally. Australia and the United States Air Force have yearly talks, and each year about, one year we do it in Australia, and the next year we do it here in the U.S.

I was fortunate to go home 12 months ago and take Lieutenant General Chandler and a bunch of the other guys, and we were able to do a little bit of sight seeing and provide a little bit of culture, and that's, of course, Ayre's Rock at sunset, and we got

to use one of our business jets and go and fly up there and see it.

The liaison work really is the core of what it's all about. We get to manage and update the exchange positions. I mentioned we have about 20-25 exchange positions. We about 10 or 15 liaisons. We have about another dozen or two dozen on loan to the U.S. Air Force. We are bringing a whole range of new capabilities into the Royal Australian Air Force; new tanker aircraft, new airborne early-warning aircraft, and we have people on loan to USAFE and learning how to use those capabilities so that when our aircraft arrives we can hit the ground running and operate those airplanes effectively right from day one.

So there is a lot of work involved in making sure we've got the right people in the right jobs, so that we can get the most effective exchange capability from our limited number of people, and I mentioned the size comparison. We're an Air Force of about 30-and-a-half thousand people so in comparison to an Air Force of -- depending on whether you count the Active or Guard and Reserve -- anywhere up to 700,00 people. It makes a huge difference in comparison. When you come from an Air Force of 30-and-a-half thousand people and you sit in a conference like this or at the Airlift Tanker Association Conference that I attended where there were a four-and-a-half thousand people in that ballroom, it's an amazing difference in size.

Some of the bases you're on, you're on a base where there's 25,000 people, which is basically twice the size of our Air Force, so the disparity between the two can be quite daunting at times.

We get involved in lots of other things. Like some of the projects we get involved; negotiating MOUs, just doing the day-to-day staff work that happens between two air forces that have a close relationship. A lot of the time is spent doing staff work, working in the embassy; probably 30 percent of the time there and probably another 30 percent of the time out knocking on doors, and I'll talk a little bit more about that as well.

Training: I've been very fortunate enough to undertake a bunch of training over here, including on the space side up at one of the universities and down with the Capstone Course. We were very fortunate enough to fit into the Capstone Ops Modules of those courses.

So good fun. You get to know the people really well. You get to learn and understand the way that the systems work. We also have probably about 40 or 50 people on various training courses straight from university. At Purdue University, we have people. We have people at [AFSET]. We have people just about everywhere around the states where there is an available air war

college, [SAS], you name it, and if it's an important course we'll have a person there. It's a great way to be able to fit into a country and learn about it.

The three areas, and in most countries you will have set areas that you have to work through. Protocol, and that is done through CBII in Headquarters USAFE. Our Secretary of the Air Force International Affairs, Mr. Bruce Lemkin, and his staff work directly and have desk officers dedicated to Australia, and we work directly with them, making sure of the relationship, making sure of military sales, and making sure access to various areas happens the way we'd like it to happen, and that relationship and that conversation, again, happens almost every day of the week.

The other one which is unusual for us. The Australian Air Force has a lot of naval airplanes, and we tend to be more like the Marines, if you like, but we're a lot more, because of our size, we have to be a lot more integrated in the way that we do business. So our P-3s are in the Air Force, not in the Navy as with the U.S. Navy. And in fact I was very fortunate to have a three-year exchange in Hawaii with the U.S. Navy flying P-3s, so I have had some time here in another guise as well.

We also fly F-18s so again, we have a very close relationship with the U.S. Navy and Marines in flying those aircraft, and we have to work with the Navy International Programs Office as well, and a lot of the Navy and Naval Air Systems Command, and a lot of other areas as well. So we get to see both sides and see how the relationship between us and the two different services is worked as well as the relationship between the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy and see how well that works.

So life can be very interesting in certain times, especially when you're buying things like F-18s or Super Hornets when the Air Force would like for you to be buying F-16s or F-15s. So you can have some sticky moments, but you usually work around it.

One of the other major and most exciting things that's happened while I've been over here is we have a government that has been spending well on defense. We have been increasing our defense budget by about three percent real growth over the last five or six years, and the government and the opposition has guaranteed that for about the next ten years as well.

So it has been an exciting time in the last three years. I've managed to put my signature on a couple of contracts, each in excess of a couple of billion dollars. One of them, which I'll talk a little bit more, was the C-17 and what was so amazing about that program is that in December of 2005 the government first decided that it wanted to buy into C-17s. By June of 2006, the first airplane was just about complete and by November of

2006 we had the first airplane in Australia. So to see an acquisition process, to see two countries work together and this is where the relationship worked amazingly well. The United States Air Force came to the pile with training and came to the pile with providing us an access to one of its airplanes, and because they changed the delivery date, to be able to watch as we took that capability onboard inside 12 months of the day the decision was made to the day that the aircraft was delivered was a truly amazing thing. And I've worked with people that have started on projects and ten years later they still haven't seen anything delivered, so that was amazing.

We are, of course, part of the JSF, and that's where our future lies and with [inaudible] aircraft. The Super Hornet; we had the government direction just recently to buy a few of those. We got involved in that.

And, of course, you do get some hands-on experience, get out there and start building airplanes. I'm told that each one of those rivets that I put in there was later pulled out and redone. [Laughter]. I also did some others on some wings of some USAFE airplanes, which I'm told were left in. [Laughter].

It is truly an amazing experience to be able to get around and see industry at work, and I've visited the C-17 plant at Long Beach and the F-18 plant at Saint Louis, and a number of other factories, Northrop to see UAVs and GA to see UAVs as well.

So it is quite amazing to get in and see that side of the aspect, and that, with the defense military sales, is probably one of the other biggest aspects of your life, is getting the contacts, getting the knowledge, getting the understanding of the people to talk to, both in the military and in the commercial world. So that if we go and decide to buy a piece of equipment, we've got the best understanding for our government to make a decision on which is the best way to go, whether to go through foreign military sales or whether to go direct commercial sales. So it is having those contacts, it's having that understanding, and it's having the insight to the way that industry works which is very important for the governments on both sides.

And of course, one of the big ones is representation; doing jobs like this, speaking at dinners, speaking at universities, speaking at West Point, speaking at a number of places around. Going out representing the country, talking to a bunch of people and getting them a better understanding of what Australia is all about, how good a country it is, how that everybody should come and visit us because we are such good people, and it's a great place to live and to visit. And really, it's not that far away. [Laughter]. I've mentioned dinners, people, and [inaudible]. It really is -- [... tape skip ...] -- not only with the host country, but also with the other countries.

My good friend [Yarp] is here. Denny [Vanderven] who I will feature here in a little bit, was the Dean of the Attachés prior to me, from Belgium, and we have a very close working relationship with all of the other attachés, and you make some very long-lasting friends right the way through your life, and it's great fun.

The Air Attaché Association over here. We have about a hundred-odd members. There are about a hundred and ten countries with air force representation in the U.S. So I can understand how hard [CVAI] and SAF/IA work in trying to manage those relationships. It is not an easy task to put something together like the Global Air Chiefs Conference, where you have all those conflicting [recombats] of each of those countries, with everybody wanting their C-17 tomorrow, everybody wanting their C-130 the day after. It's hard juggling all of those [inaudible].

But the international relationship and the relationship between the association and with the Air Force Association, our Air Attachés Association has a great bond, and the Air Force Association provides membership to each of the attachés for the first year they're here. And that's why you'll see so many attachés around here.

The other thing about Air Force Association conferences; it also provides access to a lot of those countries that don't necessarily get the access that they would on a day-to-day basis. Having all of the leadership here, listening to the leadership, and meeting a lot of the other people is a great way to get around and understand what's going on.

I mentioned I was Dean. I guess I'm one of the oldest and been around here the longest. I don't think there are any other criteria for being Dean. There are some perks, and I'll show you one of those in a second.

The other thing that you get to do while you're here are visits. And there are visits both for senior people from Australia to America, and for senior Americans to Australia. And I've done a couple both ways.

This is our Deputy Chief of Air Force visiting our new airborne early-warning aircraft that's being built by Boeing in Seattle. We had just come back from a hard week in Alaska and, unfortunately, the boss was left on his own at home with most of the senior staff at the Air Force over here having a week of hard work with our U.S. counterparts discussing where we're going with our relationship. The boss hasn't missed out too much. He has been over here a couple of times, two or three times. We're very fortunate that we got to do a ceremony at Arlington Cemetery, where the boss got to lay a wreath. So again, the sights and the

access that we get and the things that we get to do are quite amazing.

That was a rather brisk January morning. And, of course, our operational commanders get over here as well, and General [Potts], who is now CVA, was Vice at the Space Command when we visited him last year. So lots of senior people. I've just come back from visiting Australia with Dr. [Seeger] who managed to come over there just before he got out and, hopefully, we'll have some other senior visitors prior to me going home.

We do have some party time and, of course, the boss is not known for not enjoying a good red wine, so it's a good way to meet people.

I mentioned we have a lot of people over here. They're doing an amazing amount of things. One of the responsibilities I also head for is to keep my eye on Air Force people in Canada. And we had some navigators being trained up there last year, and we'll have some pilots being trained up there this year. So we keep an over-watch of Air Exchange and Training people up there.

We also, because we operate together and have people on operations and some of those guys do an outstanding job and get recognized by the United States Air Force, so there are some of the great things that I get to participate in.

And, of course, guys at Air War College and other places. Occasionally you do get to go flying. We had some of our Hornets going through an upgrade process out at China Lake, major avionics, major computers and other things, so great fun as well as doing the hard work.

And of course some of the intelligence agencies where we get to have people on course as well.

Our C-17 guys; we had around about 60 or 70 people over here being trained and, for me this is a special bonus. My son was over here; he's an avionics technician on C-17s. He also got promoted while he was over here, so I got the privilege of promoting him while he was over here last year for about four or five months.

Now the benefits of being an attaché; if you haven't seen what fun I've had over the last couple of years understanding the culture and [... tape skip ...]. Take some time. We all speak English, but I'm sure my accent and word usage will have thrown a few of you here today.

When I introduce myself I'm normally known as Brian because the way that we produce "A's" sounds very much like "I's" to the American ear. So quite often when I say, "in a while", they'll

want to know where the whale is, and why I'm thinking about going swimming near the beach. There are classic examples of lots of things that you can get up to and cause confusion.

The travel, I've mentioned, in 40 or 50 states has been truly wonderful and, of course, the people. We get to do things while there is snow in Australia. There is nowhere near as much snow as there is over here, so we get to do things like skiing. We get to go and see some of the cultural highlights of the United States. Some of the memorials. And, of course, we get to go and watch the Red Sox lose, just like everybody else does. [Laughter].

And, of course, one of the highlights for my predecessor was another part of the American culture, is basketball and, of course, cheerleaders. And my predecessor and the Brit air attaché got to go and meet all these lovely young ladies and have their photo taken. I, fortunately, was not on that because I was hard at work back here.

You meet some amazing people and make good friends and have a good time. You go and do some silly things with some senior people and, of course, you go and do meet all of the senior people and have a great time.

The last two-and-a-half years has been truly an amazing experience, and I don't think anybody that was thinking about a job as an attaché should worry about not having a good time and not seeing and enjoying a different part of the world. You'll come back a truly enhanced and more intelligent and more knowledgeable person.

And with that, I'll open up to any questions.

Qq: I was wondering [inaudible].

Commodore Bentley: We've probably got representation in, I think, in around about 40 countries. We would have an attaché in most of those; probably the major strategic partners are across the U.S. They're the most important, that's why it's headed up with a two-star. Indonesia is headed up with a one-star, and we have a major representation there, our nearest neighbor. The UK, of course, because of the longstanding tradition, another one-star. And then a number of the Southeast Asian countries and a number of the European countries. We are doing more and more work with NATO, so the alignment there, working in ISAF in Afghanistan, the alignment there is very important to us.

Qq: [Inaudible].

Commodore Bentley: My counterpart in Australia, A.J., is right here, and he does exactly the same type of thing. We

arrange to try and meet each other before we go both ways and, for A.J.'s predecessor before I came over here, I met with him and discussed how we were going to work together, how we were going to make sure that each other keeps the information flowing between us, because a lot of times things can go down stovepipes. One side will know about it, the other side doesn't, and the embassies tend to do a lot of coordination between the two countries. And if you're not aware of what's going on, sometimes things can get a little bit crazy. But I think we have worked very, very well and there hasn't been a problem.

As far as getting together, we probably through our yearly service-to-service talks where both the attachés come along, and a lot of the senior staff usually at the two- or three-star level. That's where we do a lot of the bulk catch-up on what's happening and what the state of play is, but there are people in constant contact, e-mailing backwards and forwards, calling backwards and forwards. I would be amazed if there is not somebody in Australia talking to America or vice versa probably half a dozen times a day, from both headquarters and from around the various squadrons where the contacts and ongoing relationships between exercises, and we do exercise a hell of lot together.

Thank you very much.

[Applause].

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