

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

AIR VICE MARSHALL BRENT ESPELAND AM

From Woodville High School to Deputy Chief of Air Force and leader in the veterans' community

Brenton (Jack) Espeland was born in Hindmarsh, South Australia, on 21 January 1948. Growing up in West Croydon, he attended Woodville High School graduating in 1965 duxing his year. Wanting to fly, he was accepted into the Royal Australian Air Force as a Cadet on 24 January 1966. Completing a Bachelor of Science Degree at the Royal Australian Air Force Academy, Point Cook, he graduated on 11 December 1969 from No 19 RAAF Academy Course commissioned as a Flying Officer and awarded the Sword of Honour, the Academy's highest achievement award. He undertook pilot training completing No 75 Pilots Course in 1970.

Graduating as a pilot at the end of 1970, Espeland was posted to No 36 Squadron at RAAF Base Richmond where he completed C-130A Hercules Conversion Course before completing five years as a C-130 transport pilot. During this period, he flew C-130A Hercules aircraft in Vietnam and was a member of Detachment S, the RAAF's contingent for the evacuation of civilian refugees and Australian Nationals from Vietnam in April 1975. He was the captain of the last RAAF Hercules flight out of Saigon on 25 April 1975.



Official Portrait image of AVM Brent Espeland as Deputy Chief of Air Force in 1998.

In 1976, he was selected for flying instructor duties, completing the flying instructor's course before being posted to No 2 Flying Training School at RAAF Base Pearce flying the Macchi MB-326 trainer. This commenced a long and distinguished career in Air Force pilot training. After only a year at 2FTS, he was selected to be an instructor at Central Flying School, training flying instructors in 1977. Clearly an exceptional pilot, within four months after arriving at CFS, he was selected to be a member of the elite Air Force Roulette Aerobatic flying team. By 1980, he had completed four years at the unit being promoted to Squadron Leader, serving as a flight commander and then the Chief Flying Instructor and Roulette Team Leader. He was assessed by his Commanding Officer as exceptional and an A1 Grade Qualified Flying Instructor; a rare and prestigious accolade reflecting qualities of an exceptional officer, pilot and instructor.

He completed Canadian Forces Staff College from mid-1981 to mid-1982 before being selected to be the Military Secretary for the Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephen. Espeland was then appointed Commanding Officer, Central Flying School where he adeptly managed training delivery challenges caused by aircrew resignations across the Air Force and the unit's transition from the Macchi to the new

Pilatus PC-9 aircraft. In recognition of his outstanding service through this challenging period, he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1989.

In 1989, Espeland was selected to attend the prestigious United State Air Force Air War College at Maxwell Field, Alabama after which he was Director RAAF Air Power Studies Centre at RAAF Fairbairn, Canberra, from 1990 to 1991. In this capacity, he was responsible for RAAF air power doctrine, analysis and history. He was subsequently promoted to Air Commodore and appointed Commandant RAAF Staff College and Commander, RAAF Fairbairn, in 1992 followed by serving as Director of Studies, Australian College of Defence and Strategic Studies from 1994 to 1995.

Excelling at unit and formation command and reflecting his outstanding experience in the training world, Espeland was appointed Air Officer Commanding Training Command for two years, before being promoted to Air Vice-Marshal and appointed Deputy Chief of Air Force from 1998 to 1999. His final position in the Air Force was a secondment to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet where he was responsible for the coordination of security and intelligence for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

Retiring from the RAAF after 36 years of distinguished service, Espeland served for ten years in the Australian Sports Commission in senior leadership positions and in particular as the acting CEO from 2008 to 2009. He then retired to South Australia, where he devoted himself to veterans' support. He was the National President of the Royal Australian Air Force Association, the National and South Australian President of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia and the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Repat Foundation, a South Australian veterans' organisation. During 2017, he was appointed by the South Australian Government as the Chairman of the Veterans Advisory Council. Continuing his interest in air power and the Air Force, he was a member of the Air Force Heritage Advisory Committee, the National Council of the Australian Air Force Cadets and a Director of the Sir Richard Williams Foundation.



AVM (Ret'd) Brent Espeland at the National Commemorative Service for the Battle of Britain in Hobart in 2016.

Sadly, Air Vice-Marshal Espeland AM passed away on 29 September 2017, aged only 69, following a short battle from cancer. He was provided a military funeral in St Peters Cathedral, Adelaide, where he married his childhood sweetheart, Judy, in 1971. His funeral was attended by family, friends, dignitaries and military members, including His Excellency Hieu Van Le, Governor of South Australia, Martin Hamilton-Smith, the South Australian Minister for Veteran Affairs, and the Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Leo Davies. His ashes were later dropped into the waters off Semaphore; the beachside suburb he had retired to with his wife only several years earlier.

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