**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File Title: RAAFA dinner speech by GLC in Brisbane

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Start of Transcription

00:01: Geoffrey Leonard Cheshire: Mr Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I do have to thank you with all my heart for... the kindness and the privilege that you've given me in inviting me here, and my daughter Gigi, as your guests.

00:24 You know that there was an Air Forces Dinner in Melbourne on Friday, the first time I've had the great pleasure of being the guest of the Air Forces Association, and I was tremendously impressed by that evening.

00:46 It's marked itself...on my memory, in a way that it will always remain. And likewise, tonight... there is something about the ... reunions that you and Australia hold, which set them apart and above ... almost all those that I have ever experienced elsewhere. I'm ever so happy and grateful to be with you tonight. I would …

1:20 to 1:26: *applause*

1:27: GLC: I know that an evening like this, doesn't come about without an enormous amount of hard work. And I'm pretty certain that most of the work on this particular occasion, has been done by... my old friend, Jo Desi.

1:47 to 1:53: *applause, and cheering in the background*

1:54: GLC: I pass over the fact that, when we served together in the same squadron, when I was the C.O., and he wasn't.

2:01 to 2:07: *laughter*

2:08: GLC: He had a habit, and so did quite a lot of Australians, of saying “Yes, Sir” in a way that definitely put you down 3 or 4 notches...

2:16 to 2:22: *renewed laughter*

2:23: GLC: Tonight, if you would allow me, I would like to look back at the days that we served together during the War. And... make 1 or 2 reflections, but, in a way that relates those memories to today; perhaps, without being presumptuous, I could call it A *Reflection on War and on Peace*.But, before I start that, I'd just like to make one small digression, and although it may seem irrelevant to you at the moment, talk about promotion in the war-time air force, slightly different I believe, from promotion in the peace-time air force.

3:24 Some people were very keen on promotion, others didn't mind. There was a certain officer, who shall remain anonymous, whose one sole thought was promotion! And most of his efforts were devoted in getting it promoted. And it happened that he was posted to Gibraltar, given an old Hurricane, and put in charge of the aerial defense of that bastion of the British Empire, the Rock of Gibraltar.

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4:05 There was a three-tier warning system; in force, when the first siren went off, you left out of bed - all this, flying officers did - got into your clothes, sat on the edge of your bed. When the second siren went, you dashed out of flights, put on your flying jacket, got into the Hurricane and settled itself down. When the third siren went, you opened up and took off.

4:39 Well, our flying-officer friend discovered that whilst sirens 1 and 2 very frequently went off in the middle of the night, siren 3 never did!

4:53 to 4:55: *some laughter*

4: 56: GLC: So, being extremely resourceful, he managed to train one of the Rock Monkeys...

5:04 to 5:06:  *laughter*

5:06: GLC: ...to perform functions 1 and 2!

5:10 to 5:11: *more laughter*

5:10: GLC: While he remained comfortably warm in bed! But, one night, unfortunately, siren 3 went off. But he wasted no time in getting into his clothes, dashed out to flights, just in time to see the Hurricane trembling down the runway.

5:30 to 5:34: *laughter*

5:35: GLC: And that finally put an end to all hopes of his promotion!

5:41 to 5:43: *laughter*

5:43: GLC: But what made it worse was that the Rock Monkey succeeded in getting the Hurricane back onto the runway and ended up the War a Group Captain!

5:55 to 6:10: *laughter / clapping / cheering echoing*

6:10: GLC: I mark your assurance, Air Commodore, that things have changed.

6:16 to 6:24: *laughter, in acquiescence*

6:24: GLC: Looking back to the War, and the memories I have of it today, I think perhaps the first of those memories is the way the RAF, and obviously all the armed forces, taught us the need to be professional. I wouldn't like, in front of my daughter Gigi, to suggest that when I was at university I didn't throw myself all heartily into my job of studying; but when I arrived at my first RAF station, I realized as all of you did, very quickly, that we had a serious job and that we were not going to succeed unless we became totally professional.

7:30 I admit that luck, sometimes, came into it. For instance, at EFTS, while I was on Ansons, the instructor had an annoying habit, every now and then, of taking you up and pulling down what he called “the hood” - if you remember the hood - it blanked out the windscreen so you could see nothing except the instruments.

(8:04) And towards the end of that particular course, he would say “I'm going to pull down the hood for 20 minutes, I'm going to give you some courses and times to fly, and when I'll pull the hood up you will tell me where we are!” Very nicely. On this occasion, he pulled the hood up, and as he did that, I lifted my map to look at it, squinted out of the window, just in time to see my favourite pub, The Half Moon, appearing under the starboard wing, which he couldn't see! So I said, we are 3 miles North North West of the village of Kington Langley.

8:48 to 8:53: *laughter and indistinct comments*

8:54: GLC: The first time I have ever known an instructor, silenced, temporarily. And the first time, I ever got an above average rating for instrument flying!

9:06 to 9:11: *consistent* *laughter*

9:12: GLC: When I arrived in June 1940 at my first operational station, Grayfield, I had the great good fortune to have an outstanding captain, he was a New Zealander, 6 foot 4 tall, and his name was Long.

9:34 to 9:35: *brief outburst*

9:36: GLC: So we called him...What?

9:37 to 9:39: *audience is trying to guess*

9:39: GLC: Em-yeah, we called him “Lofty”. He was a peacetime trained pilot, but already won a DFC, you couldn't but admire him, but he gave me no peace. If ever I sat down to drink a cup of coffee, or to play a game of cards, he got me up by the scruff of the neck, out to your Whitley, blindfold yourself, and spend 20 minutes walking up and down it, feeling round the carpet till you know where everything is ... I don't know that I particularly liked it, I saw the point of it, and it wasn't long before ...I realized the benefits of it.

10:32 If you look at any ... of those who achieve something particular, particularly outstanding in the War, and if you knew them, I think you'll find that they all devoted themselves totally to mastering their particular … trade. I don't believe that in any walk of life, one can get to the top without becoming absolutely master of your particular profession. But a pilot, an operational pilot, I would argue that you need to become so familiar with your aircraft that no part of your mind is on the business of flying, only on what you've got to achieve.

11:39 And I think that is something I learned from those in 617, and for being there many months before I came to join them. That same complete professionalism...

12:03 The other thing, that sticks in my mind, is the realization that came upon us during the War, that we all stood together, that we all dependent one upon another. I know that there appears to be such a thing as individual achievement in war, but I don't really believe that that is so. Some individuals are picked out and given particular honour or limelight, but they know only too well in their hearts, that whatever was achieved was the achievement of the team of which they formed a part.

13:00 And I mean not just the crew in the aircraft, not just your own ground crew who looked after your aircraft, but everybody on the entire station, down to the person doing the most lowly job of all. We all depended on each other.

13:23 And if we didn't make those who were doing very routine and humdrum jobs, realize that what they were doing was completely utterly essential, as much as the work of the bomb-aimerwho press the button at the crucial moment. He was going to find his job more difficult to do ...I would say that that unity went even further than that, right back into the country as a whole, to those who made and built our equipment, who kept the nation going.

14:03 In today's context - certainly beginning with WWII - if, sadly, there is a major war, it is not the armed forces who fight, it's the nation. We all stand together.

And I do think that, that lesson - which I'm sure we all learnt - it's very humbling, but also very uplifting.

14:37 Perhaps I shouldn't give too exaggerated a picture, because there were exceptions..., inside our own aircraft. I mean, we were a crew, an aircrew, we were in the same aircraft, we were facing the same danger; and you would suppose that we would all be working together, helping each other as much as possible. But that kind of thinking, somehow, never seemed to penetrate the navigator's thinking.

15:16 to 15:24: *audience reacts, indistinctly*

15:24: GLC: Instead of getting on with his work of writing on his map chart, in between coffee break, ...

15:28 to 15:30: *brief laughter*

15:31: GLC: And letting the rest of the crew getting on with his job, he was always interrupting with such comments as “Are we supposed to fly in a 180 or in a 185?” ... I hope the pilots in the room will support me ...

15:47 to 15:56: *audience reacts, some laughter and indistinct comments in the distance*

15:59: GLC: As to the War... itself, there is certainly one thing that has to be said. We are here tonight because of a fact that we ... joined in the struggle to overcome aggression. The bonds that you have formed between yourselves are based upon that fact, but they are also based upon the ... debt that we owe to those who were not fortunate like ourselves, and didn't come through. You may know that WWII cost over 50 million lives, counting all nations who participated.

16:57 Out of those, 20,000 were put to death in the concentration camps, and that was nothing to do with the war at all. The first concentration camp was built in 1933, and that is an indication of what would have happened, had WWII not been won by the Allies.

17:24 But the tragedy of the war, to me, is not quite so much the fact ... that so many people died – though that is, of course, its tragedy - is the fact that it never heaved to taking place at all; had Britain and France had the political and military will to stand up to Hitler while he was still weak.

17:56 to 18:05: *the audience reacts: indistinct comments and clapping*

18:04: GLC: Even in 1938 at Munich, he was military outnumbered, his generals told him he had no hope, from a military point of view. He said, “Don't worry, they won't fight”. And so, we gave away Czechoslovakia, the key to the military balance in Europe....

18:31 I say that...because it does have a relevance to today. In the 1930s, still in the ... distant shadows of WWI, none of us wanted another war. And that meant, that our nations, Britain and France, adopted a policy of appeasement, it was well meant, but it was not realistic.

19:10 An aggressor, like a criminal on the domestic scene, only marches when he thinks he can get away with it. He does not march if the odds are against him. Today, certainly in Europe, there is a very strong disarmament lobby. I consider that those of us who’ve been through a war, who have this bond that unites us, symbolized by this meeting, this reunion

tonight;

19:54 have a duty to continue the struggle for Peace. We should be able to meet the person who argues in favour of disarmament… we should be able to meet him with a reasoned, kinder argument, and show him that his way is not the way to Peace.

Too often, in the debate, the man who argues in favour of armed defense, appears to the third person listening to be arguing in favour of war, whilst the other appears to be arguing in favour of peace.

20:43 It is very important that at the out-set of the debate, we make it clear that we are above everything else men of peace, that what we want is peace not war; that if we argue in favour of reasonable armed capability of self-defense, it is because we know, from our own experience, that that is the way to ensure peace, to prevent war.

21:20 We also have to be very careful to show that we respect the sincerity of the other man’s view, we both want the same thing, but we have different views about the means to it.

21:38 It is a very complicated, a very difficult subject, but I would like to ask you whether you, each of you, feel that if you were in a such a debate, you would be able to ... meet the different arguments, which are contrary arguments, which are orchestrated, which have been thought at by the disarmament lobby, whereas we, I feel, don’t think out an argument.

22:12 I feel that we owe it to those who lay down their lives in the cause of Peace, to continue the struggle in today’s context. But that is only half the story, if you would like the negative side of the story, important though it is. The other side, is the positive side, in which we have to show in the truest sense, that we are still concerned in the struggle to win peace.

22:51 The problem is we talk about peace, but do we sit back and ask ourselves, “What is it?” Peace is not the absence of armed confrontation, in other words, the absence of war. Neither it is living under a dictatorial regime. Those who lived in Uganda a year or 2 years ago, under Amin, were not at war, but neither were they living in peace. Peace pre-supposes justice and freedom, and respect of the dignity of the individual. You cannot work directly for peace. It’s something intangible, the road to peace lies through justice, above everything else.

23:50 And if we want to work for Peace, we must work to improve the quality of justice, throughout the world, in our own community, and above all in those parts of the world where there is not justice, but injustice. And I would say, that the greatest injustice, today, and therefore the greatest threat, to the future peace and security of our human family, is the gap between those very poor parts of the world, and the better-off, the North-South dialogue if you like.

24:36 We may think that this is not our concern, but it is. Principally, because we are members of one human family; our unity is not an arbitrary unity; it’s an organic one. It’s not a unity like, for instance, the beautiful flowers in this bowl; it’s the unity like that of a tree. If one part of it is … disabled, all of it is disabled, all of it suffers. And I hold that if we are going to be true to the memory of those who so young in their lifetime, at such a young age, laid down their lives, for us, we must go out as best we can, each according to our circumstances, and, tackle this great problem of a gap between the poor and the rich.

25:46 Indeed, work against injustice in any form, wherever we find it. I would say that war is easier than peace. In war, you know what you’re doing, the nation is united with a common goal, and a common knowledge that you have to win, if you don’t win you go under. But in peace, the threat is not visible, the goal is undefined, we don’t know. Yet there is a threat, there is a goal.

26:24 And I think that we, as all other communities in their different ways, we, who’ve known what it is to be thrown into a world war, have to try and make it clear to the rest of the country that there is still work to be done.

26:44 I would like to thank you will all my heart for having invited me to be your guest, for the happiness of this evening, and also for the pleasure that I look forward to, in a moment, of meeting you all personally. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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27:00 to 27:06: *general applause*

27:06: End of recording

End of Transcription

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