

Speech

Address By

Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

On the occasion of

2010 Remembrance Day Ceremony

Australian War Memorial, Canberra
11 November 2010

Friends, it is a good feeling to be here with you today at our treasured War Memorial.

Our nation's war grave

its stone, skilfully crafted

its plot, lovingly tendered

its solid, grounded, familiar presence

a buffer, to the human sacrifice and frailty

a bolster, to the courage and distinction

that it enshrines.

On this Remembrance Day, it is a privilege and a weighty task for me

to sense your cares

and try to speak to them.

As it is always –

to understand the bits we acknowledge as shared, and be their voice

and to leave the rest respectfully unspoken.

This year – every year – there have been moments just like this one.

At Gallipoli, and Lone Pine, on Anzac Day, the 95th anniversary of the launch of the Allied campaign on Turkish shores.

At the Turkish International service on the same day, held overlooking Anzac Cove.

Here, at the 68th anniversary memorial service of the Battle of the Coral Sea.

At the National Reserve Forces Day Parade in Sydney's Domain.

At Fromelles, France, on the burial of the 250th unnamed soldier slaughtered in 1916 on the battlefield there.

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And with the relatives of those Australian and British men who were lost nearly a century ago, then found.

At Sabah on Sandakan Day.

In the Investiture Room at Government House, Canberra, presenting

the Medal of Gallantry to former Major Geoff Kendall,

and the Distinguished Service Medal to the widow of former Flight Lieutenant Clifford Dohle

for their actions in the Battle of Long Tan 44 years ago.

At Lismore for the dedication of the Sandakan Death Marches Memorial.

Here again, for the unveiling of the National Service Memorial.

And so often in the hushed exchanges that occur at the edges of ceremony and formality.

Each time, I am reminded, reassured by our remembering.

We are good at it, and that's why it is good to be here.

We seem to know what we ought to hold onto, and what is best let go.

In holding on, we remember the people and their lessons to us.

In letting go, we free ourselves to walk in their shoes and learn from them.

At the 11th hour, on the 11th day, of the 11th month 92 years ago, the First War's firing ceased.

Over the past century and a quarter, 102,000 Australian servicemen and women have lost their lives in conflict – their names, carved into the bones of this cenotaph.

Many hundreds of thousands more survived, but the conflict raged on in troubled thoughts, lost limbs and broken lives.

For some, it's still raging.

For others – and their families – peace, pride and equilibrium have been restored.

In us wells an awe and thankfulness for what they did

for bravely turning up

for making the most of what they had

for seeing and enduring the best and worst of humankind

for doing what their country asked of them

and doing for one another what they'd never have asked for themselves

and if all that meant giving up everything and everyone they cared about,

they did, and they still do.

Through:

the Colonial period

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the First World War

the Second World War

the occupation of Japan

the Korean War

the Malayan Emergency

the Indonesian Confrontation

the Vietnam War

the First Gulf War

and the former and current peacekeeping, mentoring and reconstruction operations in:

Bougainville

East Timor

Southern Rhodesia

Rwanda

the Solomon Islands

the Sudan

Egypt

the Middle East

Iraq

and Afghanistan.

Over a million Australians, and millions more throughout the world

on whose behalf we gather today

together and apart

in our own remembering

expressed in countless, deeply human ways

so precious that

I sometimes hold it half a sin

To put in words the grief I feel:

For words, like Nature, half reveal

And half conceal the soul within.

And so, when words can do no more for us, we take up silence to shine light upon the soul.

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In silence, we can, without apology or regret, climb into ourselves and run away with our remembering
the joy and grief
the anger and relief
the devastation and loss
and the fresh possibilities, if we allow them.

This morning, the Memorial opens its Roll of Honour once more to the names of ten courageous, outstanding Australian soldiers who have died over the last year on active service in Afghanistan:

Sapper Jacob Moerland

Sapper Darren Smith

Private Timothy Aplin

Private Benjamin Chuck

Private Scott Palmer

Private Nathan Bewes

Trooper Jason Brown

Private Tomas Dale

Private Grant Kirby

Lance Corporal Jared Mackinney

These fine young men live on in the faces and hearts, photographs, diaries and dreams of their loved ones.

For us, their countrymen and women, they live on in our nation's memory, and symbolise the values and freedoms that we will always strive to protect.

In remembering them, we hope for something better – for their loved ones and for our nation and our world.

To remember is to hope.

Hope is the thing with feathers –

That perches in the soul –

And sings the tunes without the words

And never stops – at all – ...

Australians, as I lay a wreath for these men and all those who've fallen before them, I snatch two poppies winking in our midst behind my ear, I stick one through one blood red poppy I give to you.

Australians, today I ask you to remember and to hope, lest we forget.