

Speech

ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC

GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

ON THE OCCASION OF

ANZAC DAY COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONY

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL, CANBERRA

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At 4:30 precisely, the first line of the 8th Light Horse leapt from their trenches. As their helmets appeared above the parapet, an awful fire broke upon them. Many were shot, but a line started forward. It crumpled and vanished within five metres. One or two men on the flanks dashed to the enemy's parapet before being killed. The rest lay still in the open. The second line saw the fate of their friends...they waited two minutes, as ordered...They could hardly have doubted their fate. They knew they would die, and they determined to die bravely....

"Boys, you have ten minutes to live," their Commanding Officer told them. "And I'm going to lead you." Men shook hands with their mates, took position and, when the order came, charged into the open. The bullets of their expectant foe caught them as before, and tumbled them into the dust beside their comrades..... It was now a little after 5:15 am.

- Major General Clunies-Ross
- Prime Minister
- Excellencies
- Mr Rudd
- Air Chief Marshal Houston
- Admiral Yener Karahanoglu,
Commander Turkish Naval Force
- Distinguished guests
- Veterans
- Ladies and Gentlemen
- Boys and girls

It is an honour to be present with thousands of fellow Australians gathered here at our beautiful national War Memorial, and at war memorials around the country, to remember our fallen on this special day, as Bill Gammage recounted so vividly in his description of the Battle of the Nek, fought on the 7th of August, 1915 at Gallipoli.

British Commander-in-Chief General Sir Ian Hamilton summed it up later when he said: 'Before the war, who had ever heard of ANZAC? Hereafter who will ever forget it?'

And from that cauldron of hard, often hand to hand fighting and awful disease, was born an enduring mutual respect and admiration between two former foes who are now firm friends and allies.

It was a special honour to take the salute from those marching today representing as you do, the nation's later ANZACs who have fought, supported or are still serving our country.

For as you swung by I saw the stomachs pulled in, the chests swelling, the heads lifting, the pain of old wounds forgotten, the eyes gleaming, and the sound of your marching feet told its own story; of men and women who are so rightfully proud of what they have done in the ultimate service to their nation; the defence of its basic freedoms.

And what a group you are. The fighting crews of Her Majesty's Australian ships and submarines, fighter, bomber and transport squadrons of the RAAF, infantry battalions, the intelligence corps and engineers, the Reserves, Special Forces, Armoured and Cavalry Regiments and Signallers; the whole vast organisation of a cohesive fighting machine are represented

Land Army and wonderful to see, the smartness and discipline of our expanding cadet corps.

And present also are our Allies; our Kiwi brothers at ANZAC, along with our British, Polish, US, Greek and Vietnamese friends to name but some. Your combined presence brings to me and I am sure to all watching, a feeling of intense pride in every one of you and in all those who continue to serve in the Armed Forces today.

As we stand quietly and reverently overlooking our beautiful city and the National Parliament, perhaps thinking of men such as those of the 8th Light Horse and the hundreds of thousands who left these shores to go to war, of whom over 100,000 never returned, we are again reminded that the freedom to be here in the first place, with our families and friends, and our comrades in arms is such a precious thing.

For example, if 62 years ago we had lost the Second World War, that freedom, that fundamental right to go where we like; to speak without restriction our magnificent language; to live under the rule of law and to be governed in accordance with the wishes of the people, would have been taken from us.

That this did not happen, is due in large part to the indomitable spirit of our Australian fighting men and women and those who supported them from the home base. In WWII alone we lost 39,000 fine young men and women killed, some 23,000 wounded, and over 30,000 became prisoners of war, often being held in hell holes of POW camps under cruel captors.

And from that war we remember with pride the exploits of our middle east divisions; the 6th, 7th and 9th; in Syria, Tobruk and at El Alamein, and the magnificent fighter pilots of 1, 2 and 3 Sqns who supported them and our bomber crews in Europe; and the ships of our navy, the "scrap iron flotilla" sailing boldly to support the Tobruk garrison, through bitter and constant air and sea attack.

We remember the trauma of Japanese raids on our homeland; Darwin bombed 63 times, and also Townsville, Broome and Derby. Of the sudden thrust of Japanese forces across the Kokoda Track, stopped almost in sight of Port Moresby by a gallant 39th Bn of militia soldiers and Arnold Pott's 21st brigade; of the hard slogging follow up by the 16th and 25th brigades; of Gona, Buna and Shaggy Ridge and the brilliant operations of the 7th and 18th Bdes under MAJGEN Cyril Clowes who inflicted the first crushing defeat of the war on the Japanese army at Milne Bay.

And of the Kittyhawk, Beaufort and other RAAF Sqns in close support; of the Dakotas dropping supplies to troops in jungle clad mountains in flying conditions of great severity and high danger.

And of our navy at the battle of the Coral Sea, where in support of the American fleet, the Japanese carrier force was reduced to such an extent that they lost the pivotal maritime Battle of the Pacific - the Battle of Midway - one month later.

We remember our service men and women and support organisations at home; the armoured and infantry divisions; the munition and factory workers and the women's land army.

We remember our doctors and our nursing sisters; wonderfully courageous and capable women, some of whom were brutally killed in cold blood at Banka Island.

We remember the wives and young families who struggled in remote areas, on the stations, and farms, and in cities, without husbands and fathers; and for the families who never saw their loved ones again.

And we remember our veterans of the little remembered Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, Borneo confrontation and Vietnam; our peacekeepers and peacemakers with the United Nations forces; our soldiers, sailors and airmen presently serving with distinction in the Middle East - including our recent casualties in Iraq, and our servicemen and women carrying out wonderful peacekeeping work in East Timor and the Solomons.

And we think of the trauma of war; perhaps foot rot, beriberi, hunger and thirst; of no sleep; of mud and heat and being permanently wet; of the crump and thump of mortar and artillery; of the crack of the rifle and the chattering burst of machine guns; of being hit, and the 8-30 day carry over the Kokoda track by Fuzzy Wuzzy angels before being properly treated. And of the stench of death, because war is not fun, nor is it pretty.

But then we think of mateship; that indescribable lifelong affinity between fighting men, gained from being totally dependent on one another for survival. Of humour; of rations, water and sentry duty shared; of being there together through thick and thin. Of the padre standing on a used ammunition box in the quiet of a jungle or desert morning and of young faces expectant, intent and in close communication with their God because there are few atheists in a fox hole!

We remember the other great qualities of our Australian servicemen; loyalty, personal and group discipline, initiative, physical and moral courage.

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15 Apr 2014 - 1 Apr 2018

There are crucial and enduring lessons from the sacrifices of our ANZACs and they are these:

First, the security of the nation is its primary responsibility. Capable defence forces can be run down in a year or so but take many years to rebuild, yet in the history of modern war, we have never received more than 6-12 months notice to fight.

The second is a need to get back to the fundamental philosophy of what a worthwhile life is all about, and what I suggest our ex-servicemen and women intrinsically believed in and fought for.

That is, a spirit of service before self; of being close communities again; in retaining an abiding sense of honesty and fair play in our dealings with others; a firm and practising belief in the essential spirituality of man; a sense of individual and group responsibility; a commitment to cohesive and loving families as the core of a just and caring society; and an absolute conviction that the basis of true democratic freedom has to be clearly understood, nurtured and protected, and when threatened, is worth fighting for, and if necessary, dying.

And I am confident given the fundamental characteristics of our people and the diversity and great wealth of our nation, that these hopes of those who paid the supreme sacrifice, have every prospect of coming to a full fruition and in so doing - if demonstrated collectively - will continue to show Australia as a generous, integrated and caring people and as a nation of excellence; a beacon of all that is good, strong and enduring within the global community.

So on this 2007 ANZAC Day – the anniversary of the mighty battles of Ypres, Menin Road and Polygon Wood – as we look to our future in a rapidly changing, exciting, yet challenging world, let us arm ourselves with the virtues displayed by our ANZAC forbears, and use them skilfully and unselfishly, to go forward as one nation in pride and confidence, to continue to build the kind of country they would want us to have, and for which over 100,000 of our servicemen and women paid the supreme sacrifice.

A thoughtful, inspiring and happy ANZAC day to you all.

Lest we forget.
