

## Speech

ADDRESS BY

HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE QUENTIN BRYCE AC CVO

**GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**

ON THE OCCASION OF

### **ANZAC DAY COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE**

KANCHANABURI WAR CEMETERY, THAILAND

25 APRIL 2011

Friends, I am honoured to join you at the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery.

Here we commemorate the lives of those men who gave their today for our tomorrow<sup>1</sup>.

Our hearts break as we remember their courage, in the face of extreme torture.

Our brave heroes – many so young.

Their sacrifices enshrined in these graves; in this serene place that echoes with their suffering.

“Speedo! Speedo! Speedo!”<sup>2</sup>

Frenzied beatings followed barked orders.

They toiled in misery: drilling, blasting and digging through solid rock, in disease ridden and formidable terrain, shivering uncontrollably with malaria, dysentery, cholera, beriberi.

Ugly ulcers wept through filthy rag bandages<sup>3</sup>.

In the huts, bedridden patients languished three deep, head to foot on unforgiving bamboo slats.

There was no medical equipment.

No drugs, no bedpans, no soap, no disinfectants.

But wonderful dedicated care by Australian doctors, skilled and ingenious.

The best known was ‘Weary’ Dunlop.

“His simple, gentle, tenacious leadership still dominates my life today,”

Tom Uren told me yesterday.

Dr Mike Kelly, who sits in our Federal Parliament and whose grandfather, Gunner Joseph Kelly, was at Hellfire Pass, says: “All that kept them alive was the mutual support they gave each other...their enduring bonds of mateship<sup>4</sup>”; a smile, a laconic laugh, a gentle whisper. They clung to those special bonds of brotherly love.

Affection, that made the unbearable bearable.

They risked their lives: fleecing guard’s vehicles for tubing to use as cannulas, scrounging for scraps of cloth, leather, rubber, string, wire, nails, screws, tins, to build artificial limbs<sup>5</sup>.

By October 1943, more than 12,300 soldiers had died from illness, overwork, beatings or accidents.

I am privileged to have travelled with four of our countrymen: Mr Alexander Arthurson, Mr Cyril Gilbert, Mr William Schmitt, The Hon. Tom Uren.

And I know others who may also be here today.

All fine, courageous veterans who carry the physical and emotional scars of their own time on the railway.

They join us to honour the 1,362 Australians who rest in peace, in this place; to remember our British, Dutch and other allies, and the labourers from China, India, Malaya, Indonesia and Burma who suffered alongside them.

In the words of Pericles: The whole earth is the tomb of heroic men.

Neither is their name graven only in stone which covers their clay, but abideth everywhere wrought in the stuff of other men’s lives<sup>6</sup>.

For many who survived, their recollections are “so clear they almost frighten<sup>2</sup>” –

“It was a blur of continuous work, mates dying, guards bellowing, heavy loads carried, fever in tides of heat and cold, dysentery and hunger.”

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Pericles honouring the Athenian dead 430 BC

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