

Speech

ADDRESS BY

HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE QUENTIN BRYCE AC CVO

GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

ON THE OCCASION OF

DAWN SERVICE, BOMANA CEMETERY , PORT MORESBY

BOMANA COMMONWEALTH WAR CEMETERY, PORT MORESBY

25 APRIL 2013

Governor-General of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea

His Excellency Grand Chief Sir Michael Ogio

Prime Minister of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea

The Honourable Peter O'Neill

The High Commissioner for Australia

Her Excellency Ms Deborah Stokes

Members of the Diplomatic corps

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

My friends, in the shadowy awakening of this Anzac Day, we pause together in peace, and await the dawn to shed light on an earlier dark, deadly, war-riven time. A time marked by this Cross of Remembrance where we gather; the Memorial to the Missing at the peak of the rise; the Stone of Remembrance at its foot; and the gentle swell of proud headstones amidst. Those missing, those known, and those still not known. Australian military soldiers, merchant navy men, and airmen. Members of the Papua and New Guinea local forces. The men who died defending this territory and ours, who secured our futures, and who heartened the bonds of friendship and support between the Australian and Papua New Guinean nations.

In remembering these men, we remember the hundreds of thousands of Australian servicemen and women who, across centuries, have fought and fallen for the freedoms and rights that are the essence of civilised humanity. From the first Anzacs who waded through the shallows at Gallipoli to face unspeakable slaughter and loss, to their counterparts in Afghanistan, nearly one hundred years later, negotiating complex threats of modern terrorism and insurgency. The training and mentoring forces. The peacekeepers. The community builders.

We remember the loved ones who farewelled them, ached for them, welcomed them home, cradled their damaged souls, lost them. The loved ones who, like so many of us here, never got to see the fine grains of grit, courage and endurance, warmth, intelligence and humour in every living, dying, desperate daily scene. Yet we stand here today needing to know what it was like for them, needing to understand those precious fine grains. Kokoda. A name that evokes one of the most arduous battles of the second world war, in a place very close to our northern shores, yet a million miles from home.

The torrential rain. The raging rivers. The scorching, steaming days and the cold nights. The plummeting ravines and near vertical ascents. The blinding blackness. And the sucking, rotting floor of vine-strangled mud. This is where our men battled and scrambled; ate, slept and died.

As food supplies thinned, so did their weary, pack-laden bodies. Weeks of dysentery and malarial fever; lack of nourishment and sleep hollowed out their boyish faces. But rarely their morale, or their raw courage and will. The ill, the wounded, the tormented kept going, one foot after another.

For some, even the loss of lower limbs would not persuade them to be carried; they preferred to slide or crawl in the wake of their more able-bodied mates. And then there were the native Papuan porters – the cherished Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels whose careful, patient, kindly conveyance of the wounded along the track earned them their divine title.

*Many a mother in Australia
when the busy day is done
Sends a prayer to the Almighty
for the keeping of her son
Asking that an angel guide him*

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And by their offerings of biscuits, chocolate, cigarettes and a decent cup of tea – truly manna from heaven – the Salvation Army revived many a soldier from languishing on the track.

It is beyond extraordinary what these men – many of them barely adults – were able to endure and accomplish in the most relentlessly debilitating conditions. A young Private's valour worthy of the highest honour. Resisting an enemy army against overwhelming odds. Surviving on *so little for so long* with *so little complaint*. The quiet, poignant moments of brothers writing home, singing by the fire in the mist, farewelling one another in death, and the padre's final ministrations. To those men, we salute you. On this Anzac Day and hereafter, we shall remember you.

Lest we forget.

[i] (Sapper) Baros, Bert. "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels". 1942
