



REMEMBRANCE DAY COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS

by

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Prime Minister, Chief Minister, Distinguished Guests, Veterans, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today we commemorate Remembrance Day and pay tribute to Australian soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen lost in the service of our country. Of course, today is not only an Australian day of commemoration. Today we join many other nations who are also paying tribute to sons and daughters who did not return.

But I feel this year is particularly significant for Australians. In April our nation came together, young and old, to mark the 90th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings. In August we celebrated the 60th anniversary of Victory in the Pacific and the end of the Second World War with commemorative events all over the country. Last month we marked the end of an era when we farewelled Lieutenant William Allen, a naval officer who was the last Australian to see active service in World War One. And, sadly, this year we lost 11 men and women of the Australian Defence Force while they were deployed on operations. Tragically, Warrant Officer David Nary, was killed earlier this week in the Middle East.

Today we gather, not to glorify war, but to commemorate, to remember, to honour and to give thanks to over 102,000 Australians who gave their lives in the service of our country. Today we demonstrate how much as Australians we appreciate life and how highly we appreciate those who were willing to lay down their lives for our nation, its people and its values.

World War One was a defining moment in our history. On the shores of the Gallipoli peninsula, our ANZAC legend was forged. World War One remains our most costly conflict, in terms of the numbers killed and wounded. From a population of fewer than five million, 300,000 Australians enlisted, of whom one in five were killed. In the trench warfare of the Western Front tens of thousands of Aussie Soldiers died during battles at Fromelles, Bullecourt, Messines, Passchendaele, Hamel, Amiens, Hindenberg Line. At Pozieres, in one six week period in July and August 1916, we suffered 23,000 casualties—almost the size of our entire regular Army today.

World War One was meant to be the war to end all wars, but less than 20 years later we once again found ourselves at war. World War Two was six years of tragedy, struggle and immense sacrifice in widely differing theatres of combat—from the skies over Europe, through the deserts of North Africa, to the islands of the Pacific, right to our own doorstep. During this time 39,000 Australian servicemen and women paid the ultimate price in defending Australia and preserving democracy.

Our Army again suffered heavy losses, especially in Malaya, North Africa, New Guinea and the islands of the Pacific.

The Royal Australian Navy lost many ships in waters all over the world. HMAS Yarra was lost in March 1942 after being attacked by three larger cruisers while it was escorting a convoy away from the Southeast Asian Archipelago. The Yarra engaged the enemy to buy time for the ships she was escorting. Most of the ship's company died when Yarra went down.

The Royal Australian Air Force also suffered great losses in all theatres of war. Australian airmen serving in Bomber Command in Europe sustained the highest rate of Australian casualties of the war. One Australian Squadron, 460 SQN, was lost five times over in three years.

Following World War Two Australians were called upon to participate in international operations in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam. In these conflicts over 77,000 Australians served with distinction and courage, and 910 were lost.

More recently the Australian Defence Force has worked to bring peace, disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and security to many areas around the world. Our commitment continues today with our presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Sudan and most recently, Pakistan. Our people are serving with great distinction in the fine tradition of those that went before.

The strong and spirited character of our nation rests firmly on the inheritance from each and every one of the more than 102,000 Australians lost serving their country. It is our privilege and our duty to ensure that their great sacrifice continues to be remembered and honoured.

This is a lasting debt we owe to all those that have served our country, but particularly to those who paid the ultimate price during their service: the men and women who for over 100 years have distinguished themselves with their courage, their resolve and their loyalty; the men and women who sacrificed their future for ours; the men and women to whom we will remain forever grateful.

Lest we forget.

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