

**ANZAC DAY ADDRESS 2010 BY
THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART - SUNDAY 25TH APRIL 2010**

We have gathered here, as we always do on the 25th day of April in every year, just as others in towns and cities all over Australia and New Zealand have gathered together in groups on this day – Anzac Day.

In a sense it is a day of contradictions. Although we are here to revere the 25th April, as the anniversary of the day on which it is said that Australia became a nation, and the day on which we honour those who gave their lives so that we might live in freedom, it is not the anniversary of a great Australian military victory nor the anniversary of the day on which lasting peace was achieved, but the anniversary of the start of the most appalling and disastrous military and naval engagement in which so many of our soldiers and sailors died or were wounded and the survivors defeated, all largely due to what was rightly described as “an ill-conceived and bungled campaign.”¹

It is also a day of contradictions for on the one hand we silently remember and mourn, yet on the other hand we celebrate and take pride in our national psyche labelled “the Anzac Spirit.” Those that

¹ AAP News.com.au, 31 October 2008, “Paul Keating is absolutely wrong about Gallipoli Anzac legend.”

we remember and mourn are the Australians who died or were injured in the two World Wars, in the Korean and Vietnam Wars and in the other more recent conflicts in which our country has been involved since then, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Those that we remember and mourn include the peacekeepers who were killed or wounded whilst doing their best to maintain peace in places far removed from their home. The emotions engendered by this aspect of Anzac Day are often enlivened by appalling stories from World War I such as this account by two Australian nurses on a hospital ship taking wounded soldiers off Gallipoli:²

“Every night there are two or three deaths, sometimes five or six; ...each night is a nightmare, the patients’ faces all look so pale with the flickering ship’s lights.

I shall never forget the feeling of hopelessness on night duty. It was dreadful. I shall not describe their wounds, they were too awful. One loses sight of all the honour and the glory in the work we are doing.”

60,000 Australians and 18,000 New Zealanders died during World War I, all of whom, together with those who gave their lives in later conflicts, we are here to mourn.

But as I say, as well as remembering and mourning we celebrate the Anzac spirit – a spirit that “stood, and still stands, for reckless

² Cited <http://stspyridon.nsw.edu.au/content/pdfs/ANZAC%20Day%20Speech.pdf>

valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance that will never own defeat.”³ Official Anzac historian Charles Bean wrote these words with respect to the Anzac spirit and those who fought and died in that terrible war between 1914 and 1918. “With their lives they purchased a tradition beyond all human power to appraise, and set for all time the standard of conduct for the Australian and New Zealander soldier.” Over the last 90 plus years that spirit has spread from Gallipoli to Australia and has infiltrated the national soul of our country to become a significant part of our culture and so it is that, paradoxically, we celebrate that part of our culture at the same time as we remember and mourn our dead.

A Governor of West Australia⁴ once put it this way:

“Through our fraternity on Anzac Day we are united in grief and sorrow with those who have lost loved ones. But we are also triumphant in the spirit in which those sacrifices were made. The spirit of the young Anzacs rises up and marches with us. It flows out of our communities, binding us together in the spirit of mateship and compassion, of duty and honour.”⁵

³ <http://www.anzacday.org.au/spirit/spirit2.html>

⁴ Lieutenant General John Sanderson AC

⁵ “Ride the Whirlpool, Selected speeches of Lieutenant General John Sanderson AC, Governor of Western Australia 2000 – 2005”, University of Western Australia Press 2005, at page 130.

A day of contradictions it might be, but Australians understand those contradictions very well as on this day they express their gratitude and honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice to keep our country free. We admire their acts of bravery and are ready to emulate them if called upon to do so. Yet at the same time we recoil from the horror of war and eschew those who would glorify force and conflict. So, as we think of war on this day we also think of peace. But there is nothing contradictory about thinking of war and of peace on this day because the sacrifices that were made in war were made so that we could live in peace.

The epitaph engraved upon the tombstone of Lance Corporal S T Borman, 24th Australian Infantry, who was killed at Lone Pine, Gallipoli Peninsula on the 29th November 1915, aged 23 is, "To die for his country was so dear but his Young Life was Dearer."⁶ On this special day that is something that we must never forget; "to die for his country is so dear but his young life is dearer." Whilst we honour the lives given and the heroism of those who have fought in Australia's conflicts, let us ensure that the emotional pride that swells in us as a result of that heroism, that "Anzac Spirit", does not obscure our rational judgment. Always remember that although to die for one's country is dear, young life is dearer. Let us never forget that we owe it to those who died fighting for us to do everything we can to seek peaceful solutions to conflict and avoid violence, for I am

⁶ "What's wrong with Anzac"? Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds University of New South Wales Press 2010 at p110.

confident that that would be the dearest wish of those whom we honour today.

Although the causes of war are many and varied, there can be no doubt that poverty, oppression, and lack of education all provide fertile ground in which the seeds of conflict will flourish. Living in an affluent country as we do, each of us can do something, no matter how small, to help eradicate the poverty, the oppression and the ignorance of people who are not as fortunate as us. Also, let us honour our dead by taking a little time and trouble to learn something about the cultures and religions of those societies that are different from ours, for that knowledge will lead to greater understanding, and greater understanding will lead to tolerance of those whose systems of government, whose religious beliefs and whose cultural values are different from ours. And tolerance always promotes peaceful solutions to differences.

If, after you leave here this morning, someone asks you, "What did you do on Anzac day"? Let your answer be, "I honoured those who gave their lives so I could live in peace and freedom by making a personal pledge to take every step I can to ensure that they did not die in vain."

Lest we forget.

