

ANZAC DAY ADDRESS 2011
BY
THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART - MONDAY 25TH APRIL 2011

On this day we gather together in groups, small and large, across the length and breadth of Australia to remember those who gave their lives or were wounded in the service of their country. Some of them served in a World War, some of them served in other conflicts such as Korea, Vietnam, Borneo, Malaya and more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of them served on peace keeping missions in places such as the Solomon Islands, Cyprus and Darfur. Some of those who died or were wounded in the course of serving their country were regular service personnel, some were volunteers – we call them reservists these days - and some of them were police officers. All of them responded when called upon by their country to serve the nation. That is why we gather to remember them and to say thank you for your service and your sacrifice.

Interestingly, even though the number of years that have passed since the end of both World Wars has increased to such an extent that there are now no living veterans of the First World War and very few living veterans of the Second World War, there has been an increase in the number of young people who take an interest in Anzac Day and those wars. Evidence of that increase was apparent in Hobart in the large number of young people who were at the Dawn Service and who are here at this service. Such interest is to

be encouraged, for knowledge of a country's history is essential to a proper understanding of the culture and the people of that country.

So, in the course of recalling Australia's history on this day – the anniversary of the day that the Australians and New Zealanders made that disastrous landing at Anzac Cove – it is customary to recall, or speak of what we call the Anzac spirit, the qualities of which we tend to claim, erroneously in my view, as the exclusive property of Australians and New Zealanders. When asked what the Anzac spirit is we often have recourse to the official war historian, C.E.W. Bean who wrote that the Anzac spirit "stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance that will never own defeat."¹

Retired Colonel Arthur Burke OAM wrote a piece about the Anzac spirit and concluded it with these words: "The Spirit of ANZAC is invincible. It is the flame that burns forevermore in the heart of every true Australian and New Zealander. Today we stand safe and free, clothed with all the privileges and rights of citizens in these great free countries. And all these things – liberty, security, opportunity, the privileges of citizenship – we owe to those men who fought, endured, suffered, and died for us and for their country. Their deeds and their sacrifices gave us the invincible, the intangible, the Spirit of ANZAC."²

¹ C.E.W. Bean Anzac to Amiens, Sydney: Halstead Press, 1946, p. 181.

² <http://www.anzacday.org.au/spirit/spirit2.html>

That's all very well and indeed, I note that the editorial in the Mercury newspaper for 18th January spoke of the help given freely by so many Australians to those affected by the Queensland floods during January as the "true Anzac spirit." But all of us, especially our young people must take great care not to distort our history and from all these rather glamorous and high sounding descriptions end up with the impression that those who have answered the call of their country were involved in something that was glorious and heroic. *They* may well have been heroic but the business of war is never itself heroic.

War is not an abstract noun. War is about people; individual men and women who have mothers and fathers , wives, husbands and children; men and women who love and have been loved; men and women who have laughed and sang, many of whom were killed or seriously wounded and who will never again love or be loved nor laugh and sing. That is the real face of war. That is what each of those men and women whom we remember, and to whom we give thanks today, had to endure. It is ugly. It is horrible. It is terrifying. It is lonely and it is painful. We mustn't let all those fine words about the Anzac Spirit gloss over the horror of war. To say that we mustn't let all those fine words about the Anzac Spirit gloss over the horror of war is not to denigrate the Anzac values, qualities to which we could all do well to aspire. To say that is not to diminish the sincerity and depth of our remembrance; indeed it enhances the remembrance for it shows that our remembrance appreciates the real nature of war and

the horror, the fear, the pain, and the losses that those whom we remember suffered in the service of their country.

On this special day remember that war is about real individuals and not just about numbers of dead and wounded. Remember that it is also about the families and loved ones of those individuals who gave their lives in service of their country. In Launceston on the 14th February this year I attended the funeral of 22-year old Corporal Richard Ewan Atkinson. He was killed on Wednesday, 2nd February 2011 by a roadside improvised explosive device and a companion was seriously wounded. Corporal Atkinson was the first Australian soldier to die in Afghanistan in 2011. He was born in Hobart and attended the Launceston Church Grammar School. His parents and brother still live in Launceston. Just before he went on deployment to Afghanistan his girlfriend Dannielle Kitchen agreed to marry him. The devastation that his family and his fiancée feel is beyond the understanding of those who have not suffered a loss like the one they have just suffered. Today we thank him for his service and we remember him and we remember them.

The saddest, and for me, the most moving moment at that funeral occurred when his senior officer said “Corporal Atkinson has gone to join the Anzacs.” What a terrible loss of a young life. Lest we forget.