

**AN ANZAC DAY ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER
UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, THE CENOTAPH,
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On Anzac Day the famous World War I poem “For the Fallen”
by Laurence Binyon easily comes to mind:

Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They are the second and third verses of that poem, made famous by the fourth verse which is better known as “The Ode” and which we will all recite together in a moment

This is my fifth Anzac Day address and will be my last as Governor of this State for my term in office will expire on 2nd of April next year. A re-reading of Laurence Binyon’s poem in the knowledge that I will not be speaking to you again on this commemorative occasion made me re-examine the troubling question of what is the purpose of Anzac Day.

Professor A C Grayling, former Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, the University of London, writing about Remembrance Day in the United Kingdom said that “[it] has become a soft-focus event, a ritual of laying wreaths, a ceremonial marshalling of dignitaries, a parade of mutually hostile politicians temporarily pretending solidarity.”¹ Harsh words you might think. But I thought in a way he is right when he says that Remembrance Day - which is like Anzac Day - has become what he calls a soft-focus event. Time has passed. Memories soften with the passage of time. They blur; they lose their sharp and painful edges and that is a good thing for it enables the living to go forward with optimism and hope as those eulogized in Laurence Binyon’s poem would have wished them to go forward. And Professor Grayling acknowledges this for he says that a ritualistic remembrance is an honourable thing to do; “an observance for those whose lives were shockingly abbreviated for their community’s sake.” And I agree with him about that. It is an honourable thing for us to do, to gather together in a public place to recognise and acknowledge the sacrifices of those Australian and New Zealand service personnel who were killed or injured fighting when called upon to do so by their country.

But Professor Grayling goes on to say that on Remembrance Days what he calls the “proper recollection of the dead in past wars”

¹ “Life, Sex and Ideas”, A C Grayling Published Oxford University Press 2003 ISBN 13 978-0-19-517755-8. Page 174.

has become “an end in itself” and that is not enough. He argues that as well as honouring the dead on a day such as this one we should question war itself. He writes:²

“Which wars in history were truly worth fighting? How did they start? Why in general, do wars happen? What folly, greed, selfishness, madness, stupidity or wickedness starts them? How can a few fat old men who stay at home in offices send thousands of youths to be maimed and killed in the process of maiming and killing other youths? How can war be tolerated, still less glorified?”

That’s what we should be thinking about today as we pay tribute to those who are euphemistically called “The Fallen”. In addition, maybe these are the questions that should be addressed in the schools when Anzac Day is being discussed and when Anzac Day essays are being written. We need our youth to do more than simply recount or report the wars and conflicts in which our country has been involved and describe the heroism of our servicemen and women in those wars and conflicts. To make the sacrifices that were made in those wars meaningful we should be ascertaining the causes and outcomes of the fighting.

² Supra at page 173.

I agree with Grayling when he says that as well as honouring the dead, we should also take “a hard penetrating look at war and the meaning of war.” After all, as he argues, war is “aimed at making the survivors resolute for peace and as resolute in fighting when fighting is a genuinely necessary and unavoidable act of self-protection”³ – war is “aimed at making the survivors resolute for peace and as resolute in fighting when fighting is a genuinely necessary and unavoidable act of self-protection.” So today, formally honouring the dead and injured is not enough. Anzac Day is a day on which we should also ask those hard questions about the meaning of wars, their causes and outcomes in order to become resolute about peace as well as resolute about fighting when fighting is a genuinely necessary and unavoidable act of self-protection.

And if we do that Anzac Day will become even more meaningful because after all, that was what “the dead thought they were dying for.”

Lest We Forget.

³ Supra at page 174