

ANZAC Day Address 2016

Good morning distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our 2016 ANZAC Day ceremony here at Kastellet.

In Canberra, in Wellington, in Gallipoli and in the Somme, Australians and New Zealanders along with our friends and allies will be gathering for ANZAC ceremonies like ours today.

We remember the service and sacrifice of the men and women of our armed forces in all military conflicts. During the centenary of WWI we give special thought to those who sacrificed their lives in Europe between 1914 and 1918. We remember the Australians and New Zealanders who were killed in the skies over Denmark in the cause of freedom during World War II, and are buried on Danish soil. We also pause to reflect on the service and sacrifice of the Australian, New Zealand and Danish armed forces who are currently serving our nations in military and peacekeeping operations around the world.

ANZAC Day is not about glorifying war. Rather it honours the best and noblest in human nature and calls on us to ponder anew the example of our forebears.

Last year was the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign in World War I, where over 100 thousand lost their lives on both sides over the course of a bloody eight month campaign, among them 8700 Australians and 2700 New Zealanders. It was on

these Turkish shores in the midst of horrific conditions that the character of these young Australians and New Zealanders and our young nations were tested.

For those who survived Gallipoli, there was to be no respite. The vast majority were shipped off to Europe to fight on the Western Front in France and Belgium. They took part in every major British offensive between 1916 and the Armistice in 1918. Over 320,000 Australians fought in World War I – all of them volunteers. More than 60,000 lost their lives, 46,000 of them died on the Western Front.

I had the opportunity to travel to the Somme last year. It is a beautiful part of France, with rolling pastoral fields, picturesque towns and welcoming locals. It is hard to imagine the destructive power that was unleashed there, or the muddy trenches strewn with barbed wire and bodies - where over 8 million perished. I visited the major WWI battle sites and paid my respects at the memorial monuments that were built for the fallen – at Fromelles, Pozieres and Villers-Bretonneux. These were villages that, historian Charles Bean described as “more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on Earth”.

Australians hark back to Gallipoli and the Somme because it was here that the ANZAC legend was born. The Australian Governor General, and former Chief of the Australian Defence Force, Sir Peter Cosgrove, described this spirit in his 2015 National ANZAC Day address. He said “I say to you now . . . what the Anzacs did, what those marvellous, stoic men and women in uniform did, was to reveal such of our national characters as to place an eternal obligation on Australia and New Zealand to always look beyond our shores and place ourselves at the side of those in need,

whatever the cost.”

Australia returned to Europe in World War II to fight the scourge of Nazism, even as our own nation was being attacked from the north. The Royal Australian Air Force served alongside our British, American, New Zealand and Canadian allies. Our airmen were involved in bombing raids over German-occupied territory and provided much needed supplies and equipment to the Danish resistance.

These air missions were dangerous. They were mostly undertaken by young crews – some with only basic training. Their deployments were at short notice, often in the dead of night, and in the face of relentless enemy fire. There was an expectation that many would never return. Sadly, many never did. Over the course of the war, 11,000 Australian airmen were killed - 1400 were never found.

On the evening of 12 March 1945, as the British and Australian crewed Lancaster ME449, was approaching the North Sea on the western coast of Jutland the aircraft was hit and caught fire. Five of the crew parachuted to safety, two didn't make it.

Of the five survivors, two Royal Australian Airforce airmen, Stoney Mitchell and Mervyn Bertie, had a remarkable journey to freedom. They were given food and shelter by the Tarm community and were smuggled across Denmark by the Danish resistance. On 5 April, Mitchell and Bertie crossed the Kattegat Sea to Sweden where they were transported back to Britain and then Australia.

The Gunners, Australian Harvey Porter and British airman Donald Morris did not survive the crash. Their bodies were retrieved by four members of the local community and taken to Tarm Hospital where they were washed and then dressed in their uniforms. The Nazi commandant ordered that the airmen's uniforms be removed and that their bodies be thrown into a shallow grave at the edge of Tarm. The local community were horrified by this. They marked the airmen's burial site with Danish flags and memorial stones. At the conclusion of the war they held a funeral service for them and consecrated their graves.

Last year, on the 70th anniversary of the crash, families of the airmen from Australia and Britain joined the Tarm community to remember those who gave their lives. A plaque was laid to honour them with the inscription "they fell from the sky into the embrace of Danish friends"

All across Denmark, Norway and Iceland there are crash sites like these. In Denmark, 68 Australian and 32 New Zealand WWII airmen are buried, mainly in Jutland but also here on Zealand. They are buried alongside their allied crew members. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, supported by volunteers from the Denmark Team (some of whom are present here today) and many local Danish councils and parishes ensure that these sites are preserved.

Since I've been in Denmark I visited many of the major crash sites – in Stadil, Skarrild, Svenborg and Fredericia. Every year local communities hold ceremonies to commemorate these brave airmen. We are honoured that many of the ceremonies are held on 5 May, the day on which Denmark celebrates its liberation in World War II.

It is a comfort for all Australians that these young men have been laid to rest in a country that continues to uphold the values for which they fought and died.

Some 70 years after WWII, Australians and Danes are working together to defend our shared values, to promote human rights and advance international peace and security. With our allies, we are fighting the terrorist group *Daesh* in Iraq, we are helping to rebuild Afghanistan after decades of devastation, and we are contributing to United Nations peace keeping operations across the globe.

ANZAC Day is a time to think about the past, the present and the future:

We remember all those who paid the ultimate sacrifice to achieve the freedoms we enjoy today;

We are grateful for the men and women in uniform currently serving our nations abroad;

We hope that in the face of an unknown future – we can emulate the ANZACs by showing courage, compassion and resilience – in our collective efforts to build a better world.

Lest we forget