

2012 ANZAC DAY ADDRESS GIVEN ON ANZAC SUNDAY AT BEXLEY RSL

BY

COMMANDER PHILLIP ANDERSON OAM RAN

Veterans, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

We gather here at this cenotaph, in quietness and community, to remember our fallen heroes. To mourn their passing. To honour their deeds. To breathe their spirit. We remember those ordinary, decent Australians and New Zealanders who paid the supreme sacrifice, and we remember the debt we owe to the generations that came before us. We also remember every man, woman and child who died so that the lights of freedom and humanity might continue to shine.

Between 25 April 1915 and 9 January 1916 men from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, France and other countries fought a fierce but ultimately unsuccessful campaign to capture the strategically important Gallipoli Peninsula. It has often been said that Australia came of age on the morning of 25 April 1915—only 14 years after Federation. That may be true, and perhaps that is why we hold the day in such high regard. It certainly is not a day to celebrate a great military victory, because it was not. In fact, it was a military disaster; except for the well-planned and successful evacuation, which followed some eight months later.

However, it is not just the Gallipoli campaign that we remember on Anzac Day. The service here today, and the services to be conducted across the nation next Wednesday, give us the opportunity to remember and commemorate the bravery and self-sacrifice of past and present generations of service men and women who have served their nation in war and in peace. Today, we thank and recognise all those who served in the first and second world wars, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan. So today we remember and honour all Australians who have served our nation, in spite of the risk of losing their lives.

As we reflect on the many conflicts in which Australians have been involved, and the many incredibly dangerous situations faced by our defence forces in other operational deployments, one thing clearly stands out—mateship.

Mateship is at the heart of what we refer to as the core Anzac value: it drives loyalty, courage, endurance and sacrifice. It is a compelling reason for most acts of heroism, and is a powerful motivator in our nation's psyche.

However, mateship has never been the exclusive preserve of our defence forces. Whenever Australians are called upon to assist, mateship comes to the fore. We see it in our fire fighters and emergency services teams, in our vast band of community volunteers, our medical staff, our police and many others who respond to those in need. Perhaps most of all, Anzac Day is a celebration of ordinary people who have done extraordinary things.

To all of you gathered here today I say:

Take this act of commemoration to an even higher place by following the Anzac example of mateship—by committing yourselves to lead lives worthy of their sacrifice by looking after your mates and your fellow citizens as well as you are able. This is the test of humanity, which will make you worthy of this inheritance. And in this way, you renew your pledge of nationhood by honouring those who served and suffered or died.

To our veterans and service men and women I say:

When you parade on Anzac Day reflect upon the opportunities and freedoms bequeathed to you by your forebears—they would be comforted in knowing that you, and the people of Australia, remember and honour your service.

Be proud of what you have done, as we are proud of you, and be confident in the knowledge that your deeds are appreciated.

And thank you for the work that you have done, and continue to do, on our behalf, and for creating and promoting a tradition that our nation can display with honour.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a few lines from ‘A Sonnet for ANZAC Day’ by Alf Woods:

Sound the Last Post, lest we forget the freedom that we cherish has been bought - not found like mushrooms in the field; the debt is ours to pay, mindful of those who fought and fell - yet still they held the torch aloft! Sound the Last Post to hold the memory bright, then sound the Reveille and keep the torch alight.