

2019 ANZAC Day Address

Ben Hardie

Over one hundred years have passed since the conclusion of World War I. More than one hundred years on, we still gather to commemorate the tremendous sacrifice of those that came before us, those who sacrificed all they had for the vision of a brighter future. Today we stand together in the fruits of their bravery, a proud nation celebrating our history and mourning those whose ultimate sacrifice would see them never return home. It is here that we gather on this day to not only remember the spirit of the ANZACs themselves, but to renew our own commitment to strive towards that same dedication to the community and uphold the values they taught us.

On this day we remember. We remember the qualities of unyielding loyalty and inspiring boldness that will be forever linked to the spirit of the ANZACs. We remember the unpayable debt of gratitude we owe them. And we remember too those that still serve, and those who have since returned home.

When the dust had settled and the First World War was over, Australia was left to pick up the pieces of a fractured nation. From a population of less than five million, 416,809 men enlisted. Of them, 59,357 lay down their lives. During the Second World War, 990,900 Australians served. Of those on active service, 27,073 would not come home.

These are not just numbers. These men were sons, brothers, fathers and husbands. These were men with countless dreams and aspirations that would forever remain unfulfilled. It is on this individual level that we remember them. Today is to recognise the strength of character of each and every ANZAC in the face of abhorrent circumstance and incomprehensible adversity.

It is not in the nature of Australians to seek out war or conflict. It is the Australian way to strive for peace and kinship, to cherish the experiences and opportunities that life brings us. It is because of this fact that we must reflect deeply on the individual sacrifices made by so many Australian men and women during times of war. The ANZACs were forced to abandon this peaceful aspect of their nature, of their very identity, to defend the beliefs that they lived by. They fought because they knew that this aspect of the Australian identity was WORTH defending, and it is because of this we should continue to uphold the values of peace and kinship in their memory.

As much as we must not forget these sacrifices of the men and women in World War One and Two, today we can also honour the ongoing sacrifices made by those still in service. Australian soldiers continue to demonstrate the patriotism and selflessness that has come to be synonymous with the Australian identity.

John Maxwell Edmonds said in one of his epitaphs:

“When you go home, tell them of us and say

For their tomorrow, we gave our today.”

As with the hundreds of thousands before them, our present day soldiers give their today, every day. They sacrifice their time and a life at home to uphold those important values, actively protecting our borders and defending peace overseas.

Today is a day for the acknowledgement of these brave men and women, but I would implore all of you here today to think of them often. Pray for them often. Spend every day thankful that they make these sacrifices so you do not have to. When you leave this service today, look upon your home, upon your family and friends, and be thankful for the blessings that our servicemen and women dedicate their lives to defending.

Further, many of those that have returned home still sacrifice their ‘today’. Those returned soldiers who may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or acute stress disorder, those that are haunted by what they have seen or done, their sacrifice is just as important to remember. But we must not only remember and reflect on this sacrifice. It is our responsibility as the community and as individuals to also extend our support to these Australians, and make the transition back into normal life as seamless as possible.

The overarching message of ANZAC Day is, and always will be, to be thankful for all the brave men and women who have served and continue to serve our nation. Let us both revel in the freedom they granted us, and mourn the loss of those who died for that freedom. Let us commit ourselves both to remembrance and to emulating the values of selflessness, courage and mateship that are distinctively ANZAC.

We will remember them, lest we forget.