

RSL WA

Remembrance Day Commemorative Service

Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC Governor of Western Australia

Wednesday, 11 November 2020

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

We gather here today, together, to pay our respects to those who went to war and never returned and to those who did return, many bearing the physical and mental scars of armed conflict.

We promised them and their loved ones they would never be forgotten. This is a sacred duty we must perform. In itself that is an act building the spirit for our continued defence.

This Remembrance Commemoration further reminds us of the need to build and maintain community spirit in time of adversity – for us it is the current threat of the Coronavirus pandemic. We know through what transpired in the trenches and on the battlefields of the First World War, and conflicts ever since, that freedom has its price.

In the four years of the war from 1914 to 1918, more than 416,000 Australians had enlisted. More than 60,000 were killed with another 156,000 wounded, gassed or taken prisoner. That dreadful war cast a long shadow for decades and generations to come. In ten years of that shadow another 60,000 passed from war caused effects. Of those West Australians who went overseas to fight in that global war, more than 5,200 were killed – their names depicted on the walls within the State War Memorial behind me.

For Australia, there was of course more deep sadness to come. The 2nd World War saw almost one million Australians serve in the armed forces with more than 39,000 giving their lives. This year is the 75th anniversary of that conflict. Our whole nation was mobilised – arguably the most extensively of all combatant nations. Our men and women, including our Aboriginal people were deeply engaged. In both the first and second world wars we demonstrated unsurpassed national resilience.

In Korea, of the 17,000 Australians who served, 340 were killed and over 1,200 wounded. In the Vietnam War some 60,000 Australian service personnel left our shores with some 500 of them never coming home. And in Afghanistan, 43 Australian soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice - once again a signal to us all the legacy of what armed conflict can inflict on our national psyche.

Today – Remembrance Day – is also a time to reflect that the need to stand tall when tyranny threatens. As uncertainty now surrounds our international environment we are challenged morally and intellectually to draw on its manifestation of national resilience. To demonstrate effectiveness not only to deter but to reach out with an open heart to friends and neighbours with a conviction that the prosperity peace and security we wish for ourselves we wish for them.

War, in any form, is a dreadful thing. Yet there have been times in the past – and regretfully probably into the future – when such a stand is essential for freedom and the democratic society we enjoy today.

As wartime leader, Winston Churchill once said: *“to show how easily the tragedy of the Second World War could have been prevented (was) how the malice of the wicked was reinforced by the weakness of the virtuous.* Churchill took this conviction to his grave.

General John Monash, best known for his role as commander of the Australian army corps in France during World War I, also reflected that victory can come at a terrible cost. In his memoirs, he made clear his view on the terrors of armed conflict. He said the following:

“Let it not be assumed that the part that fell to my lot afforded me any satisfaction nor enthusiasm for war. Quite the contrary. From the far off days of 1914 until the last shot was fired, every day was filled with loathing, horror and distress. I deplored all the time the loss of precious life and the waste of human effort. Nothing could have been more repugnant to me than the realization of the dreadful inefficiency and misspent energy of war. Yet it had to be. And the thought uppermost was the earnest prayer that Australia might be forever spared of such horror on her own soil.”

Now, here in the year 2020, we live in peace. Yet the words of General Monash still ring true, in that the price of peace is eternal vigilance. But we still have a lot more to do. While we remember those who never returned, we have a duty to look after those who did. And for that matter, any Veteran of the Australian Defence Force.

Tomorrow I will have the honour of officially opening the new ANZAC House Veteran Central building on St George’s Terrace in the Perth CBD. It is the new home of RSLWA but also home to a groundbreaking initiative to deliver a wide range of services to Veterans and families under one roof.

The collaborative approach comes at a time of a tragic and alarming spike in veteran suicides, unemployment and homelessness. As a society can do better to look after and support our valued veterans with the new RSLWA facility, and planned Veteran Hubs throughout the State – a very encouraging way forward.

In a short while, we will stand for the playing of The Last Post and the ensuing One Minute’s Silence. During that minute, let us reflect on the red poppies that adorn the Memorial and the Flame of Remembrance....the red poppy that symbolizes the blood shed on battlefields by brave Australians far away from home.

Lest We Forget.