

RSL WA

Commemorative Service

**Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC
Governor of Western Australia**

Monday 25 April 2022

Speech length (8 mins)

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

Good morning.

It is an honour and privilege to provide this final ANZAC address as your Governor.

ANZAC Day is more than a rightfully appropriate time to reflect on lives lost, and lives ruined in the tragedy of armed conflict. It is also a day to honour the lives of so many Australians who entered that baptism of fire on the Gallipoli Peninsula on the 25th of April, 1915.

The 25th of April is a date etched in Australia's history. It is regarded by many, including myself, as Australia's most important national day. While the Gallipoli campaign was seen as a baptism of fire, it was also seen - at the time - as the birth of nationhood.

On that morning, in 1915, Australian troops knew they made a landing on hostile soil. Yet that campaign saw characteristics displayed by the Australian and New Zealand troops that endured in later wars and conflicts, and in other crises and hardships.

The troops displayed great courage, endurance, initiative, discipline, and mateship – qualities that came to be seen as the ANZAC spirit.

This did not escape the attention of one of Australia's most respected wartime military leaders, Sir John Monash, who cut his command teeth on Gallipoli. He said of his men in France during the First World War that there was a uniqueness that was misunderstood by other Allied commanders.

Monash observed that the Australian soldier was: “a curious blend of a capacity for independent judgement with a readiness to submit to self-effacement in a common cause. He had a personal dignity of his own”, and certainly understood the politics of war. Indeed, Monash was so annoyed at the opinion of his troops by British generals that he said, and I quote:

“Very much and very stupid comment has been made upon the discipline of the Australian soldier. That is because the very conception and purpose of discipline have been misunderstood. It is, after all, a means to an end, and that end is the power to secure co-ordinated action among a large number of individuals for the achievement of a definitive purpose. It does not mean lip service, nor obsequious homage to supervisors, nor servile observance of forms and customs, nor a suppression of individuality.”

Mates helping mates when the chips are down is in Australia's D-N-A, and that has built an Australia we can all be proud of.

Recently, both the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison and Federal Opposition Leader, Anthony Albanese, attended the Australian War Memorial to mark the opening of Federal Parliament for 2022.

The subject of their speeches delivered during the Last Post Ceremony was a reflection on the life and death of Western Australian Victoria Cross recipient, Percy Gratwick. His selfless courage is instructive for what the ANZAC spirit means to so many.

Private Percival (Percy) Gratwick was born in Katanning in 1902 and was well into his thirties as World War Two approached. A resourceful character, he was a leader of men, building up a droving business in the North West.

When he first tried to join the A-I-F, he was knocked back. Why? Because he had a broken nose, a common affliction in Australia of the day. Having had it fixed, at considerable expense to himself, he was finally accepted in December 1940. After training, in September 1941, he joined the 2/48th Battalion in September 1941 that was under siege at Tobruk.

It was there that circumstances conspired to see his courage under fire that earned him the Victoria Cross during the second battle of El Alamein.

In an attack at Miteiriya Ridge, Gratwick's company suffered heavy casualties and was held up by intense enemy fire. His platoon lost its commander, its sergeant, and most of the men.

Seeing the seriousness of the situation, Gratwick launched a single-handed attack with grenades, rifle, and bayonet on the German posts. He finally fell to a burst of machine-gun fire but, while mortally wounded, he was still able to hurl a grenade that silenced the enemy.

His lone efforts had a big impact on his mates, inspiring the remaining soldiers to advance and capture the ground the Germans had occupied.

As he had done all his adult life, Gratwick asked no one what to do. He had always measured people by their actions, not their words, and he lived and died by that belief.

A framed portrait of Private Percy Gratwick VC is proudly displayed, among the other Western Australian VC recipients, in the Victoria Cross Room in ANZAC House along with other W-A recipients.

As ANZAC Day grew to be more than a reflection of bloody conflict, there was – and still is - a continued reminder that wars and conflicts have more casualties than those who fought. It includes the innocent victims on all sides – the families, the children and the lost opportunity to live a peaceful life.

Of ANZAC Day, noted wartime Prime Minister, John Curtin, once opined that the day was not an observance of “sacrifice to the god of war, but to the fairer god of peace” and that the reason veterans came together was “of memories of pals who died.”

So what do we make of ANZAC Day?

When we gather to remember, we fulfil a promise we made to those brave souls who fought to defend our nation when it was under direct attack. Eighty years ago – in our year of living dangerously - we mobilised and fought in brutal combat in the Battle of the Coral Sea, and on the Kokoda Track. During it, our city of Broome was bombed.

This was a time of great peril where we fought for our very survival, and before the involvement of our American allies was fully engaged. We defended ourselves valiantly, but not without great loss and sacrifice. In that war our society took total ownership of ANZAC Day. Our society was the most mobilised of all belligerents. Women were in branches of the services and critical in war industry.

Since that time, our nation has enjoyed relative peace and security. But it is vitally important that we keep alive the memory of the price that was paid for that freedom.

Year by year numbers continue to grow for ANZAC Day services and commemorations – many of them children. A classic example of this is the annual observance of what ANZAC Day means by the young students at Rosalie Primary School in Shenton Park.

Each year the school observes a special 'Rosalie Remembers' service with the strong support of parents. This year they focused on 80 years since the Kokoda battles in Papua New Guinea.

RSLWA has also heard from other parents who say ANZAC Day not only commemorates sacrifice, it also depicts mateship at its finest.

For their own children, they felt ANZAC Day opens their eyes to see how people can work together in sometimes dire circumstances. It demonstrated that, even though something horrible was happening, by working together they were able to get through.

While children hear about war, hear about conflict, hear about death there is the view that ANZAC Day gives parents the opportunity to talk openly to their children and help them process, understand and appreciate what has come before, what is happening in other parts of the world and for the society we are lucky enough to live in.

We are indeed a lucky country. Luck is not enough to keep us safe. We can take nothing for granted. We are moving into a political environment in our region where luck has little to do with prospects of survival. We need to deeply understand the conditions for survival.

Here in the beauty and tranquillity of Perth, the horrors of 80 years ago can seem far away and long ago. It is precisely for this reason that we must remember.

When we gather here, year after year, we recall a harsh reality. That peace is maintained through strength.

Weakness augments the possibility of aggression. It also diminishes our capacity to diplomatically influence our region in the direction of peace and prosperity.

We are learning, at this moment, the cost of deterrence. We are also learning how inadequate we can be for the first phase of war. Already, the U-S has drawn down one third of its supply of Javelins, This is for a battle in Ukraine on a very small front.

We speak with pride about achieving a goal of two per cent of G-D-P spent on defence. Remember when we were fighting for our survival. In that year 34% of our G-D-P was spent on Defence. \$50 billion this year that would be north of \$500 billion.

When we are asked calculate the cost of defending our freedom, and the value of the sacrifice made in our name, I am reminded of the words from RSLWA that “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance”. It is also about the mobilisation of us all.

Thank you.