ANZAC Day Speech

We meet here today, not to glorify war or praise victors, but to remember those who have served our country during times of conflict and crisis, and to reflect upon their selfless sacrifice.

To all Australians, ANZAC day is a tradition, paid for in blood and celebrated in our freedom. It is a day in which not only do we salute the ANZACs, but in paying tribute to them, we also take the opportunity to invigorate our national spirit and pride.

On this day, in 1915, a group of volunteer Australian and New Zealand soldiers found themselves wading ashore before dawn at a small beach on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. Many of these men were only teenagers, some as young as 16. All were anxious to prove their courage and national identity.

Over the eight months following the landing, those young ANZACs underwent a ‘trial by ordeal’. In total 36,000 Australian and New Zealand soldiers were killed or wounded at Gallipoli.

But in those terrible battles, young Australians earned a reputation for courage, self-reliance and mateship. The experience drew Australians together as a nation and established the national character. The standards that they set and the ANZAC spirit, have been handed down ever since to all the Australian soldiers, sailors and airmen who followed them. From WW2 to Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, the gulf and many peacekeeping operations in the middle east, Pakistan, Southeast Asia, and Africa.

This same spirit is represented among the diverse group of veterans gathered here today.

We pause today to acknowledge all current and former members of our defence forces – the brave men and women who represent our country on a daily basis. No Australian is left untouched when a member of our defence force is killed in action. It is difficult to comprehend the grief associated with the loss at war of a parent, partner, child or sibling, let us also ensure that we remember the families.

In 2011 alone, as a nation, we have felt the loss of 11 soldiers and the wounding of a further 50 in Afghanistan alone. We have seen our personnel serve in Australia and overseas carrying on the spirit of ANZAC. We must not forget today’s veterans’, the
young men and women who are returning from duty in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste. ANZAC Day is a day to remember all men and women of the Australian Defence Force, regardless of the time they served.

On ANZAC Day we pay tribute to all current and former members of the Australian Defence Force, those lost in training, on operations, the wounded, injured and ill.

The ANZAC spirit forged at Gallipoli will never be forgotten. This is why Australians come together every ANZAC day. We do it to remember the ANZACs and their achievements; and we should remember them not as old soldiers from a distant war, but as the young Australians they were in 1915.

Our vast country with its harsh beauty and open skies, helps to shape healthy, confident, competitive, innovative and freedom loving individuals, who with good leadership and high motivation, can more than match the best in the world; in whatever they do.

The ANZACs showed us these same qualities. We have the ability to face challenges together and overcome them, to put community before self, to be courageous, determined, self-reliant and strong. We should be proud of our heritage. This is the spirit of ANZAC; the spirit that we must pass to the next generations.