ANZAC Day Speech

We meet today not to celebrate or glorify war, but rather to remember those who have served our country during conflict and crisis.

We remember too, those who served on the home front, supplying material and moral strength to our fighting forces for theirs was no lesser service to Australia.

On ANZAC day, we salute not only the spirit of the ANZACs but, in paying tribute to them, we take the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to striving for our country as they did and upholding their finest qualities of courage, commitment, endurance and mateship.

ANZAC day is more than a national holiday, but rather a fundamental Australian tradition. Wherever Australians or New Zealanders are to be found today, it is likely that an ANZAC day service of some description is taking place. Such is the feeling that Australians have for the 25th of April.

ANZAC day is not merely a date, or some remote campaign, but rather a spirit. It is a time to reflect on the qualities of past generations of Australians who in hardship displayed courage, discipline, self-sacrifice, self-reliance, resourcefulness and friendship. Even as the numbers of ANZACs grow smaller, the ANZAC spirit, which was bequeathed to us from battlefields long ago, will live on because it is a reflection of the very heart of our nation. Our men and women of the Australian Defence Force serve in Australia and overseas, carrying on the spirit of ANZAC and the legacy of the ANZACs.

Every nation remembers some past event, some battle, or some defining moment of history. Our defining moment came in 1915 at Gallipoli, a campaign, which if not an outright defeat, was certainly not a success.

History shows that, for a peace loving people, we have been a formidable adversary, when stirred to action and also remarkably successful at the business of war. On every occasion when Australians have been called upon to protect freedom, they have done so generously, effectively and efficiently.
Gallipoli was not the first occasion on which Australians had served overseas. In 1885, New South Wales sent a contingent to the Sudan war and as the twentieth century dawned, Australian contingents also served in the Boer war. Although Australians died in all of these wars, none had the international or domestic impact of the Gallipoli campaign.

The young men of Gallipoli were the first ANZACs, ordinary young Australians doing their best in a campaign of intense ferocity. Their casualties, here horrendous, nearly 8,000 Australians were killed, and 78,000 wounded, and to what end?

The campaign was a failure, and yet of all the battlefields on which Australians have died, it is the disastrous Gallipoli campaign that has come to symbolise the Australian soldier’s courage, determination, fighting prowess, humour and mateship. The essence of Gallipoli was that in the face of adversity and potential defeat, the Australian spirit triumphed.

Gallipoli was not the only battle of the great war. At the conclusion of the war a quarter million Australians from a nation of only 5 million had been casualties, and sixty thousand Australians had been killed; a tragic average of one person for every seventeen in our population, either dead or injured as a result of war. I pause to reflect what might have been had we not lost such a significant number of our finest young men:

- The potential leaders of industry, trade and commerce that were lost; and
- The economic development that was stymied.

The pride and grief of Australia following Gallipoli formed a bond, so strong that it made a statement to the world that we had come of age and that our armed forces and our people were truly of one nation. By coming together on 25 April each year, this spirit of national unity is rekindled.

ANZAC day reminds us that wars are to be avoided, but when necessary we must stand up for our values.

It requires us to reflect on the past with pride, but also to look ahead and build on the achievements of our predecessors. By displaying the characteristics of the ANZAC spirit, comradeship, unselfishness, courage and tenacity of spirit, we can enrich the Australian tradition.
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.

We have the need of the qualities of the ANZACs still, and we should continue to draw on them, for they can only make our community better and our nation more confident. Let us all remember ANZAC. In particular, we should pass on the significance of the occasion to our youth.

The ANZAC spirit exists in each of us so therefore let us be guided by the ANZAC spirit in facing the national and personal challenges ahead, and let us strive to be worthy of the memory of those we honour today.