

Speech by
Mayor Logan K Howlett, JP
to
Combined School's ANZAC Parade & Service
held at
RSL Park, Spearwood
Monday 30 April 2012

Good Morning One and all. In particular, I acknowledge the Veterans here today and their families, the serving men and women of the Australian Defence Forces and the school communities from across our district.

I thank Pastor Sealin Garlett for his wonderful 'Welcome to Country'.

Pastor Garlett is a highly respected Noongar Elder in our community and I thank him for the contribution he continues to make to our community and further afield.

I acknowledge the Noongar people who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we are meeting today.

I pay respect to the Elders both past and present of the Noongar Nation and extend that respect to other Indigenous Australians who may be present.

Today's event was first thought of ten year ago by Mr Arthur Stanton, a RSL Veteran. It has grown in stature and the number of attendees over that time reaching a record attendance this year.

I would ask that Mr Stanton please stand as we acknowledge the realisation his dream and importantly the ANZAC message that is sent to those students who attend.

Thank you Mr Stanton.

Today we pay tribute to the courage and sacrifice of our ANZACS who landed at ANZAC Cove 97 years ago.

We also pay tribute to the generations of Australian service men and women who have followed them and to those who are currently serving in theatres of war and peace keeping efforts in far distant lands, away from home, away from family and friends, fighting for our freedom and that of others, most of whom we will never know or meet.

A truly remarkable story came to my attention a few years ago. It concerns Fay Catherine Howe, who was to become known as the 'Little Girl of Breaksea Island'.

Located in King George Sound, 12 kms south east of Albany, Breaksea Island and its lighthouse not only protected mariners and their ships it provided a welcome acknowledgement that the Australian mainland was close by in one of the world's most treacherous stretches of water.

In October, 1914 thirty-eight troopships from New Zealand and the eastern states en-route to the Middle East and Gallipoli, anchored in King George Sound to take on coal and water.

Those ships held 30,000 men and over 7000 horses.

From Breaksea Island, Fay had a ringside seat to watch history unfold.

The daughter of the lighthouse keeper, she had watched the ships steam past the island and take anchor in the sound.

Fay had watched for hours as some of the soldiers came ashore to march through Albany, but most stayed on their ships from what she could see.

For many of the soldiers on board this was to be their last glimpse of Australian soil before heading off to war.

It was during this time that the little girl from Breaksea Island made contact with several of them from one of her favourite spots on the windswept island.

She would stand there and semaphore (or in the context of today's world she would text) the soldiers standing on the shipdecks in the cold, grey waters of the sound.

When they replied with messages to be sent home to anxious eastern seaboard families that they had arrived safely thus far in their journey;

Fay would Morse code their words of love across Australia via telegraph.

On 1st November 1914, at dawn, the troopships formed a massive convoy to sail west to the Middle East and Gallipoli.

Fay watched as the ships disappeared over the horizon wondering whether she would ever see them again.

As the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months a small trickle of postcards from the Middle East began to arrive in Albany. Most were yellow and parched, a message written by hand, the ink slightly smudged.

They were addressed: 'To the Little Girl on Breaksea Island, Albany. Western Australia.

Some were beautifully embroidered and others displayed the pyramids and camels; scenes that Fay was unfamiliar with, as she had spent her entire life of 14 years on the island.

Her Mother had died when she was young and she seemed destined to look after her Father forever.

The simple, but treasured postcards that Fay received seemed to open up a whole new world.

Gone from her mind were the episodes in her life when food was short and she had to go out shooting rabbits and collect nettles on the island for greens.

The Little Girl from Breaksea Island was to leave an indelible image in the hearts of the Australian and New Zealand soldiers and sailors who had sailed from King George Sound.

Sadly many never returned.

Today, the light from the Breaksea Island lighthouse still shines out into the grey cold waters of the Southern Ocean; offering hope to all.

Two of Fay's children live nearby and this story acknowledges a true link with our great ANZACS.

We can all assure Fay's family that the ANZAC spirit is alive and well and set to endure for generations to come.

On ANZAC Day in 2015, the peoples of Australia and New Zealand will commemorate 100 years from when our troops first landed at Gallipoli.

Preparations are already underway to place Albany at the forefront of the many commemorative services that will be held in Australia, New Zealand and at other places around the world.

I hope you will leave here today thinking of all those brave men and women who have fought for our freedom and that of other peoples around the world.

I hope you will also remember Fay Catherine Howe - the 'Little Girl of Breaksea Island'.

Lest we forget!