

Speech – Remembrance Day 11 November 2014

Red poppies have long been a symbol of Remembrance Day.

From the fields of Belgium and France and elsewhere across Europe where the poppies have swayed with the soft breezes for time immemorial we know of their fragility, their burst of red when in full bloom, albeit for a short time, their colour dominating the landscape.

As their petals begin to separate and drift on the wind, their stems dry and time passes their seeds burst forth signalling a new start – it is a cycle that ensures life forever more for those blood red poppies.

Our Aussie and New Zealand boys were also in full bloom as they arrived at those battlefields 100 years ago. Like the poppies, their blooms lasted all but a short time before they fell to the hail of bullets and bombs and their bodies were as one with the soil where they fell.

For them there would never be a new start - the opportunity had been taken forever.

Perhaps that's why the red poppies have captured our hearts and minds, why wherever they grow we stop and admire them – just long enough before their petals start to drift on the breeze.

At a time when we have just commemorated the centenary of the departure of young Aussies and New Zealanders from the ports of Fremantle and Albany to the battlefields of World War 1 we know deep down that those red poppies have grown in stature, importance and symbolism – they are in full bloom again.

Little did those young fresh faced Australian and New Zealanders know that those blood red poppies would one day be worn with such pride and reverence by millions of people throughout the world as we come together to remember.

Little did they know that one hundred years on that thousands of women, in the main, would be sitting down in their homes, workplaces and at social events knitting and crocheting red poppies with that distinctive black button to be worn on lapels, or as we have recently seen, laid out on the sands of Middleton Beach, Albany in a sea of red, gently swaying in the soft breeze.

Little did they know that 'Motherly' love is passed down through the generations and that is why Mothers always keep the home fires burning while their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and nearby neighbours journeyed off to war.

Little did they know that the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand would come together on Saturday 11 November 2014, in Albany, Western Australia amidst a crowd of 60,000 people and make the following statements (in part) to the world:

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said it was a “heavy day in our history” when – 100 years ago to the day – four warships and 32 transport ships packed with almost 30,000 Australian and New Zealand troops sailed from Albany as dawn broke on November 1, 1914

New Zealand Prime Minister John Keys said the ANZAC legend had forged “brotherhood” between the two countries that “is as strong today as it was back then”.

Veterans, serving men and women of the Australian Defence Force, Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls:-

The red poppy will remain forever a symbol of the Great War and wars and conflicts that have occurred since; just as the home fires will always burn, in the hope that our young men and women will return safely to their families and friends.

Those knitted and crocheted blood red poppies that laid on the shores of Middleton Beach, Albany will forever more symbolise our love, understanding and compassion for those ANZACs and for all of those who have followed in their footsteps.

They will in their own special way always be in full bloom in our hearts and minds.

Lest we forget.