

ANZAC Dawn Service Address 2012

By

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Mayor

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Distinguished guests, veterans, serving men and women of the Australian Defence Force and those of other nations here today, ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys.

We are privileged too be gathered here at this Dawn Service, one of hundreds held in Australia and around the World to pay tribute to our ANZACS and to all who have followed in their footsteps.

As we know, attendances at Dawn Services and other ANZAC day services and parades continue to grow, as evidenced by the numbers here this morning and that no doubt will be reported in the news from around the world this evening.

I acknowledge the Noongar people who are the custodians of the land that we are gathered on this morning and I pay respect to their elders both past and present and I extend that respect to other Indigenous Australians who may be present.

While European settlement in this great land occurred only 224 years ago there has lived a culture handed down by custom, ritual, ceremony and story telling for well over 40,000 years – that is the relatively untold story of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who survived as nomadic tribes in a pristine environment during that time.

They had respect for the land, the rivers and waterways and the food sources that ensured their survival and that of their descendants. Interestingly, many of these basic survival skills are taught to our serving men and women today and increasingly, at the elite level this sometimes means the difference between death and survival in some of the world's harshest environments.

And that's where I begin today.

The time span 1854 to 1856 – it was the Crimean War - the guns captured from the Russians during that war and the use of the metal from those guns is also one of custom, ritual, ceremony and story telling handed down through the generations.

I stand before you today knowing that this story will continue to be told for generations to come – a story of battlefields, parade grounds, ceremonial occasions and even museums housing memorabilia.

As the metal is taken from those guns captured in the Crimean War and melted down, hand crafted and shaped to perfection they symbolise the action of one person or several in the heat of battle – they reflect on those who have layed down their life so that others may live – they sometimes shape the outcome of battles – they can prove to be the turning point of a war - of one's life, one's country.

They inspire young men and women to 'dare to dream', to fulfil a childhood passion, to stand in awe, to admire and to reflect on the value of life and how another could sacrifice his or her life for the sake of others.

It has remained unchanged over time - a Maltese Cross in bronze adorned by a crown surmounted by a crowned lion, the emblem of the British royal family, in the centre, with a scroll bearing the inscription, 'For Valour'. On the reverse is inscribed the date of the action. The name and regiment of the holder are inscribed on the back of the suspension bar. The ribbon is red for all Services.

Its wearer is one who possesses supreme courage, a disregard for danger and a complete devotion to duty.

In 1956, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, spoke at a parade in London's Hyde Park to mark the centenary of the first award of the Victoria Cross.

In recalling that troops from throughout the Commonwealth had received the supreme award, she said:

*They were men of all ranks, and they came
from all walks of life.
They were different colours and creeds.
They fought in many lands and with many
different weapons.
But their stories are linked by a golden thread
of extraordinary courage.
Each man...gave the best that a man can give
and all too many gave their lives.*

There are 98 Australians who have received the Victoria Cross, and their actions span more than a century.

The first Victoria Cross awards were to 6 members of the colonial forces in the Boer War.

Following that, there were 66 awards during the First World War; 20 in the Second World War; and 4 in the Vietnam War.

In the last few years, the Victoria Cross for Australia has been presented to Corporal Mark Donaldson and Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith for their conspicuous acts of gallantry in action, in circumstances of extreme peril in Afghanistan.

The glorious fellowship of the Victoria Cross remains unique, it has no order nor chapel. The insignia is a small bronze cross costing a few dollars. It is confined to no caste, imposes no religious requirement nor colour bar.

In the words of the Warrant 'Neither rank nor long service, nor wounds, nor any other circumstance or condition whatsoever, save the merit of conspicuous bravery' shall entitle a man to the award.

You will know that recipients of this Award speak of those around them and not themselves when bestowed with this greatest of honours.

They will say that their courage is personified in the acts of the men around them and the necessity and reliance on each other to get the job done.

Mates helping each other in the time of need, not seeking personal glory or recognition.

And that is what I see throughout the year, veterans helping each other in a time of need; their compassion knows no end.

This in many ways is the life-blood that keeps them going.

As you leave here today, I urge you to think of the brave and gallant efforts of the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice and for those who brought back the wounds of war; some visible and some not so visible.

Take the time to approach a veteran today and thank them for their contribution to ensuring that Australia remains a relatively safe place to live and raise a family that is, in the main, a reflection of their contribution.

I urge you to think of the young men and women 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.

In closing, as we commemorate the brave acts of our Aussies and those of our Kiwi neighbours that led to the ANZAC tradition know in your own heart that the young men and women and children we see here today will continue to carry the Australian flag with pride in honour of our ANZAC's.

I leave you with a quote from the historian of the ANZAC legend, the renowned Charles Bean, he said:

“Their story will stand ... it rises,
as it will always rise,
above the mist of ages,
a monument to great hearted men, and,
for their nation, a possession forever.”

Lest we forget!