

**ANZAC Day 2017**  
**Windhoek, Namibia**  
**DHOM Speech**

Acknowledgements.

Welcome; g'day; tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, katoa.

We gather this morning to commemorate the ANZAC spirit, forged when 16,000 young Australian and New Zealand soldiers landed on the beaches of Gallipoli 102 years ago today; and strengthened ever since, in war and peace alike.

The ANZAC bonds are surely amongst the strongest between any two nations, and are rightly a source of pride to all Australians and New Zealanders.

Quite aside from giving birth to the ANZAC spirit, the First World War left an indelible, and altogether more sobering, mark on both our nations.

Australia was a nation of 4.5 million in 1914. 417,000 Australians enlisted. 332,000 served overseas. 152,000 were wounded. And 61,000 never returned.

New Zealand had a population of just 1.1 million in 1914. 100,000 New Zealanders served overseas. 41,000 were wounded. Around 18,000 lost their lives. New Zealand suffered one of the highest per capita casualty rates of any nation during the War.

A century ago, the full horror of those losses were yet to be realised. A century ago, Australian and New Zealand diggers were in the thick of the fight on the Western Front. 45,000 Australians and 12,000 New Zealanders died on the Western Front alone.

While Gallipoli was the birthplace of the ANZAC spirit, it was in France and in Belgium where the ANZAC spirit was most tested, but prevailed in the face of horrific conditions. I would like this morning to reflect on the extraordinary sacrifices made on the battlegrounds of the Western Front in 1917.

The Australian and New Zealanders who served on the Western Front were ordinary young men and women, from towns and cities across our two nations. They were not the professional soldiers that we are familiar with today, but valiant volunteers with limited training. Some expected a great adventure. They instead discovered a hellish reality of squalor, mud, disease, fear, injury and death.

The Allom brothers were among the Australians and New Zealanders who fought on the Western Front.

Private Samuel Allom was a farm hand who enlisted in Brisbane on 17 June 1915. Born in Napier in New Zealand, Private Allom migrated to Australia aged 13, and eventually joined the ranks of the 25th Infantry Battalion, serving in Belgium and France during the War. He was killed in action in France, aged 20, and is today buried in the Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery.

His brother, Corporal William Allom, served throughout the war with the New Zealand Army. Corporal Allom was awarded a Military Medal in 1917. His citation reads:

*'He volunteered for the work when the Company stretcher bearers were wounded and carried out the wounded under heavy shellfire. His work won high praise from the Medical Officer. When not stretcher bearing he did not rest but joined carrying parties with water and wire for the front line'.*

These two brothers exemplify the fraternal link shared by Australia and New Zealand.

1917 began with optimism on the Western Front as the Allied Forces pushed for a breakthrough against German lines. Yet the year brought frustration, dashed hopes, and few gains.

Australian and New Zealand diggers had been actively engaged separately earlier in the year, but they were united again in preparation for the Allied summer offensive in Flanders.

The Battle of Messines launched in June 1917 was the first time Australian and New Zealand soldiers fought side-by-side since the Gallipoli campaign in 1915. The attack on Messines sought to seize the strategically important heights of the ridge south of Ypres, which the Germans used as a salient, or bulge, into Allied lines.

Australian, British and Canadian tunnellers, with some New Zealand attachments, laid mines beneath German trenches in the area. Before dawn on 7 June 1917, some 19 mines were blown, obliterating the German positions. The explosions, reportedly heard across the English Channel, were the largest planned detonations until the advent of the atomic bomb. It is thought that 10,000 Germans were killed in the initial blasts.

Captain Frank Hurley was the Official Photographer of the Australian Imperial Force. He witnessed the blast at 'Hill 60', a site where the diggers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Tunnelling Company had laboured over deep mineshafts which they named after the Australian cities of Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Newcastle and Sydney. Captain Hurley wrote:

*'The exaggerated machinations of hell are here typified  
Everywhere the ground is littered with bits of guns, bayonets,  
shells and men  
Oh, the frightfulness of it all  
Until my dying day I shall never forget this.'*

Following the massive blasts, Australian, British and New Zealand troops burst out of the trenches, capitalising on the shock of the explosions to take the devastated ridge. Regarded as a triumph, Messines also marked the first major battle for the 3rd Australian Division under Major General John Monash, who went on to become Commander of the Australian Corps a year later.

Despite the success, the Battle of Messines left 6,000 Australians dead or injured. By the time the New Zealand Division was relieved on 9 June, it had suffered 3,700 casualties, among them 700 dead.

Messines was a vital precursor to a larger offensive to the east later in 1917, the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele. All five Australian Imperial Force Divisions and the New Zealand Division fought alongside each other at Ypres, a place which has come to epitomise the muddy horror of the First World War.

For New Zealand, the ridge leading to the village of Passchendaele will always be particularly significant. Having miscalculated the enemy's strength, 842 New Zealand diggers were killed on that ridge on 12 October 1917 in just one day, making it among the blackest of days for ANZAC forces during the War.

A few kilometres from the front line in casualty clearing stations, and further back in general hospitals, Australian and New Zealand nurses were making no less significant a contribution to the allied war effort.

More than 3,000 Australian civilian nurses volunteered for active service during the First World War with a variety of organisations, more than 2,000 of them with the Australian Army Nursing Service established in 1903.

The New Zealand Army established its Nursing Service in 1915, all too aware of the demands that would be placed upon it in the coming months and years. Fifty New Zealand nurses set sail for Egypt in April that year.

Like the ANZAC diggers, many of the Australian and New Zealand nurses served in Gallipoli, before moving to the Western Front. They were remarkable women, doing remarkable work, under the most trying of circumstances.

Seven nurses from the Australian Army Nursing Service, Sisters Dorothy Cawood, Pearl Corkhill, Clara Deacon, Mary Jane Derrer, Alicia Kelly, Rachael Pratt and Alice Ross-King, were awarded the Military Medal 'for acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire' while working in casualty clearing stations in France.

One night in July 1917, Sister Pratt was on duty at a casualty clearing station in Bailleul, France, when a German bomb exploded near her tent. Metal fragments tore into her back and shoulders, puncturing her lung, but she continued to provide care to her patients right up until she collapsed.

Following surgery in Britain, Sister Pratt was posted to various Australian auxiliary hospitals there, before returning to Australia at the end of the War. As a result of her service, she suffered from chronic bronchitis for the rest of her life.

During one bombing raid in August 1917, Sister Kelly shielded her patients' heads with enamel wash basins and bedpans. A chaplain found her in a hospital tent, holding a wounded man's hand as the bombs fell. 'I couldn't leave my patients', she said simply.

After serving at the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian General Hospital at Rouen in France, Sister Ross-King moved closer to the front to the 2nd Australian Casualty Clearing Station in mid-1917, and then closer still to an advanced dressing station immediately behind the front line in November that year.

She cared not only for Australian diggers, but, in the finest humanitarian traditions of the nursing profession, also for German prisoners of war. Sister Ross-King recounted hearing the cries of 53 wounded German prisoners. She later wrote:

*‘They had gone without food or water ... everyone on our staff was dead beat, but I got the doctor to come and fix them up. We did forty patients in 45 minutes (the other 13 had died). No waiting for chloroform ... amputations and all, and onto the train an hour and a half after I had found them.’*

Remarkably, Sister Ross-King went on also to serve in the Second World War. The legacy of Major Appleford, as Sister Ross-King became, lives on today, with the Alice Appleford Memorial Award presented annually to an outstanding member of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps.

In my few short words this morning, I can only scratch the surface of the ANZAC contribution to the Western Front. A century on, let us today remember and honour these men and women, ordinary men and women who made extraordinary sacrifices.

Charles Bean was the official historian for Australia's involvement in the First World War. Although he wrote about Australians, his words are equally applicable to our New Zealand brethren. He wrote:

*'They do not intend to be thought or spoken of as heroes. They're just ordinary Australians, doing their particular work as their country would wish them to do it. And pray God, Australians in days to come will be worthy of them.'*

Let us today remember the sacrifices made by their families and communities at home, who also shared in the heavy burden of the First World War.

Let us today express our deep gratitude for the support and sacrifice of all our allies during those dark days. While other nations may more immediately come to mind, I was intrigued to learn that Japan is among their number. The Japanese Navy Battleship *Ibuki* was part of the convoy that escorted the troops who were to become the first ANZAC diggers across the Indian Ocean, sailing from Albany in Western Australia in November 1914.

Let us today remember those whom we fought against when the ANZAC spirit was forged, be they the young Turkish men and women who bravely served their nation at Gallipoli, or the German men and women who did the same on the Western Front. Their losses were no less horrific. A century on, Australia and New Zealand share the bonds of friendship with Turkey and Germany, united in our remembrance of events never to be repeated.

Let us also thank the men and women who currently serve Australia and New Zealand in active operations around the world. They continue the ANZAC spirit. On this continent, our Defence Forces are again serving alongside one another in a peacekeeping role in South Sudan.

Let us do all this, grateful that we are standing in Namibia, a nation that shares the values of democracy, freedom, equality and respect that underpin the ANZAC spirit. A nation that knows all too well what it means to fight for freedom. And a nation which itself has a place in the ANZAC tradition. More than 600 Australians and New Zealanders, mostly military engineers, served in Namibia as part of nearly 4,500 men and women from 50 countries who formed the United Nations Transition Assistance Group, or UNTAG, in 1989 and 1990. This was Australia's largest military deployment since the Vietnam War.

As this audience will be aware, UNTAG supported Namibia's transition to independence and democracy. Australian military engineers provided logistical support to UNTAG by building roads, bridges, airstrips and accommodation. They also marked or cleared mines and unexploded ordinance, particularly in northern Namibia, before participating in monitoring the historic election in November 1989, working alongside civilians from the Australian Electoral Commission and my organisation, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In a letter to our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gareth Evans, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, highlighted the ‘remarkable contribution made by the Australian military and electoral personnel’, saying that their ‘dedication and professionalism had been widely and deservedly praised’.

So today, and each ANZAC Day, we remember and reflect on the sacrifice and service of all Australians and New Zealanders, men and women, who have bravely and selflessly served, or continue to serve, in all conflicts and peace-keeping operations involving our nations.

Those whose names we may not know, but whose courage and sacrifice we will continue to honour.

We will remember them.

Lest we forget.