

ANZAC Day 2016

ANZAC Address

Thank you, Akhil; and good morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

I too would like to acknowledge the Wadjak people on whose land we meet today and respectfully acknowledge their leaders – past, present and future. In particular, I also pay my respects to the past and present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have served in the Australian Defence Forces. Despite having few rights, poor living conditions and not being allowed to vote; over 1000 Indigenous Australians fought in the First World War.

I would like to welcome our special guests who have joined us this morning including:

- Ms Lisa Baker, MLA, Member for Maylands
- Mr Barry McKenna, Mayor, City of Bayswater
- Mr Ted Dubberlin, OAM ED JP, Secretary of the Bedford/Morley RSL
- Mr Doug Fettes, Vietnam Veteran
- Mr Wayne Wilson, CEO, MPA Skills and
- Ms Megan Lloyd, Chair of the John Forrest College Board

Thank you all for joining us in commemorating ANZAC day at John Forrest Secondary College.

As most of you would be aware, ANZAC was the name given to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps soldiers who landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey on the morning of 25 April 1915. It is the day on which we remember all Australians who served and died in war and on operational service.

2016 represents significant anniversaries in our wartime history. It is the 100th anniversary of some of the most deadly battles on the Western Front and it is also the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam. This morning I would like to share with you some of the history of the Battle of Long Tan and the broader Vietnam War.

The Battle of Long Tan occurred in the Phuoc Tuy (fook twee) province in South Vietnam. The province is covered with rainforest, thick scrub and grasslands. It is a little before lunchtime on 18 August 1966 when D Company of the 6th Battalion start patrolling a rubber plantation. It is the wet season, which means temperatures in the high 30s with 100% humidity. After patrolling for over four hours, the Australians were attacked by the Viet Cong. There were 108 Australians against 2500 Viet Cong.

The Australians called for artillery and air strike support, but suddenly the monsoonal rain began. Visibility was less than 30 metres. No support could be provided. After three hours, it was still raining and the Aussies were running out of ammunition with less than 100 bullets between them. Finally, two helicopters dropped them some more ammunition. Shortly after, the tanks arrived and together they forced the Viet Cong to withdraw. At the end of the battle, 18 Aussies were dead and 24 injured. But the small company's fighting had been quite amazing, for there were 245 enemy soldiers killed and hundreds more injured. D Company was awarded a Unit Citation by the President of the United States for extraordinary heroism.

The story I've just shared with you probably sounds similar to stories you would have heard from World War I and World War II. All major battles describe terrible encounters in which many people lose their lives. Stories about ANZACS describe soldiers as unbelievably brave, they describe mateship, tenacity and heroism.

But there were a couple of big differences for the soldiers in the Vietnam War. Many of the soldiers were not volunteers. They were conscripted – which means they had no choice. They were made to join the military if their birthday was drawn out of a barrel. The other big difference for these soldiers was the reaction of the rest of Australia. In previous wars, Australians were supportive of the war throughout. Vietnam started the same way, but over time as more and more conscripted soldiers died, the public became less supportive. In the early 1970s, over 200 000 people marched in the streets to protest our involvement in the war.

Trying to protect the soldiers, authorities returned many soldiers in the middle of the night – hiding them from the public as if they had done something wrong. It took more than 15 years before Vietnam veterans were welcomed into ANZAC Day parades, where we finally recognised the ANZAC spirit demonstrated by them all. That was 1987. I remember it clearly, as it was four months after I had joined the Australian Army myself and I was in the middle of my initial training at the Australian Defence Academy in Canberra.

That year was the first time I realised that most soldiers, sailors and aircrew don't like war. They don't like fighting and they don't like death. But they do like Australia. They like freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom to live and think. It is the same freedom that has brought many new families to Australia from all over the world. It is the freedom that has been assured by the ANZACs over the last 100 years.

Thirty years later, we gather together once again. We remember the ANZACs. We honour them. We thank them. We seek to live our lives in a manner that is worthy of their sacrifice.

THANK YOU