

Once again it is a great privilege for me to be here for this service today - an unexpected privilege, as I had not expected to be still here. Again, it is a privilege that brings mixed feelings: Why are we here?

The easy answer is that we are here to remember those who gave their lives for their country and in support of others, especially at Gallipoli, where the Australian & New Zealand Army Corps was effectively born. In more recent years ANZAC Day has become a time for Australians and New Zealanders to celebrate their national identities, forged so strongly for those two very young countries at Gallipoli and on the other battle fields of the First World War.

This time last year we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the battle at Gallipoli, where in a single day so many lives were lost in horrifying and futile circumstances. This year we commemorate another centenary — that of ANZAC forces' entrance into the European theatre of WW1. New Zealand sent more men to fight in the First World War per head of population than any other nation. Of the thousands killed, almost a third were buried half a world away from home in unmarked graves. July this year will be the centenary of the battle of Fromelles, which saw the worst 24-hours in Australia's military history with some 5533 ANZAC casualties. Five mass graves dug by the Germans of some of the ANZAC dead in this battle were only discovered in 2007.

The people of the French village of Villers-Bretonneux, mark yet another anniversary at this time, though not a centenary. On April 24-25, 1918 the village was the scene of the world's first tank battle between British and German troops which the Germans initially won, occupying the township, only then to face two Australian brigades in counter attack. By the end of the battle, there were 2400 Australian casualties with the decisive battle marking the end of the German advance in the Somme. Commemoration services in the village this year mark not just the battle but the 290,000 Australian soldiers who served on the Western Front of whom more than 46,000 were killed and 134,000 wounded. About 45 per cent of Australia's eligible males signed up for war between 1914 and 1918; 10 per cent would die, 20 per cent would be injured and within 10 years another 20 per cent would be dead. The village commemorates also the continuing relationship with the Australian state of Victoria, which helped raise funds to rebuild the village school in 1919. So as we recall the horrific consequences of war, it is at least some consolation to know that shared loss on such a scale may also lead to the forging of longstanding relationships across national and language barriers.

And we mark yet another centenary this year - that of the first ANZAC Day service. There was no dawn service or the wearing of poppies then; those traditions were yet to begin. Instead people gathered at town halls, schools and churches to remember those who returned from Gallipoli, and those who were left behind.

The tradition has developed and continued unbroken over that century. And yes, we are here to remember -the living and the dead. Yet, for most of us, the causes are lost in the murkiness of time. While we commemorate and give thanks for those who died in this war - so often referred to as The Great War, which was to be the war to end all wars, this past century has been a century of war of which, it seems, WW1 was merely an overture.

And so we mark this century with sadness and contrition as we remember the carnage and the futility of war. For us, this is a day of mourning for the loss of the lives of so many mostly very young people, not only at Gallipoli and in France but in both world wars and in the many conflicts since - all of which have been fought less in our own defence than in the defence of others.

For Australians and New Zealanders ANZAC is our own day - a day which affirms the relationship of our two countries and the values that we are willing to defend. We gather, not to glorify war but to remind ourselves that we value who we are, to acknowledge the courage of those who contributed so much to shaping our identities; to remember not only those who have died in war or as a result of it but those who are still on active service. We gather to remind ourselves of our commitment to peace and an end to all conflict so that their sacrifices might not be in vain. And we gather to remind ourselves of our own shortcomings and short memories. Mindful of those shortcomings and short memories I close with a Prayer for Remembrance Day by Marianne Griffin©:

*For those who were killed in battle,
For those who gave up their lives to save others
For those who fought because they were forced to
For those who died standing up for a just cause
For those who said war was wrong,
For those who tried to make the peace
For those who prayed when others had no time to
For those creatures who needlessly die
For those trees that needlessly are slaughtered
For all of mankind*

let us quietly pray:

*May your God hold them in peace
May Love flow over the Earth and cleanse us all
This day and for always.*