

## **An Address by Neil Pigot to the Anzac Day, 2018 gathering at Numurkah.**

Veterans  
Families of the fallen  
Distinguished guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
Boys and girls

Today marks the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of a day that is unlike any other on our calendar. It is not like our national day where we enjoy some time up the river or at a backyard BBQ, often grateful it seems, only for the long weekend.

On ANZAC day we often stand in the cold and the rain to remember. But what is it exactly that we are gathered here to pay tribute to.

Some will say that at these ceremonies we celebrate the fact that on this day in 1915 at a place called Gallipoli a wellspring was tapped, a wellspring from which flowed our national identity.

The poet Banjo Patterson certainly believed it. Of Gallipoli he wrote;

*The mettle that a race can show  
Is proved with shot and steel,  
And now we know what nations know  
And feel what nations feel*

Charles Bean, Australia's war correspondent and celebrated historian was another who saw Gallipoli as the birthplace of a modern independent Australia and let us not forget New Zealand because that despite the fact they struggle to say fish and chips, there would be no ANZAC without the NZ in the middle.

What Bean saw over those costly months in 1915 was an attitude, a set of qualities he felt lay latent in us as a people that were drawn together and succinctly expressed by soldiers under incredible duress.

“Reckless Valor in a good cause  
Resourcefulness  
Enterprise  
Fidelity  
Endurance  
Comradeship”.

And he called these qualities The ANZAC spirit.

Now whilst Gallipoli may have been the wellspring, it was by adhering to those six values on the battlefields of the Western Front that the Anzac legend grew, stood tall and announced a new people to the world.

And when we look back at the character of the ANZAC today, the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli landing, this same day that 100 years ago saw Australians engaged in hand-to-hand fighting in the streets of Villers-Bretonneux.

It’s fair to think that Charles Bean should have added humor, self-deprecation, human decency and a sense of duty beyond the call to his list. It was on a march in France not long before that battle at VB, dissatisfied with their treatment at the hands of one officer that a man called out, Sir can you hear me to which the officer replied yes. Can you see me, No. Do you know who it is. No, why? ‘Cause I just wanted to tell you to get stuffed. After Albert Jacka had single handedly retaken a trench at Courtney’s Post on Gallipoli that had threatened to allow the Turks to break the Australian lines he was asked by an officer what prompted his action. Jacka replied, “I think I just lost my nut.” Jacka was awarded Australia’s first Victoria Cross of the Great War there on Gallipoli as a corporal. Incidentally that same Albert Jacka was wounded 100 years ago during the second battle of VB leading his men as a Captain.

During a German counterattack at Pozieres on the Western Front Percy Cherry closed in on a German soldier who was mortally wounded. As he approached, the German reached out and handed Percy some letters he had written for home saying simply “so it ends”. Cherry posted the letters.

It is easy to find other examples of the Anzac Spirit in the deeds at ANZAC Cove or on the Western Front, but it would be wrong not to acknowledge

that the ethos of the original Anzac has remained the template for Australian servicemen and women for more than a hundred years. And across that century over 100,000 have given their lives for our country and its values. So, whilst ANZAC Day may be cause to celebrate the birth of a nation most importantly today we remember those 100,000 and remember too that a great many of those 100,000 were volunteers. Ordinary, decent Australians like you and me, who gave their lives not for a career, not for fame, not for a bigger house or a better car but for a cause and a set of values.

And when you look today, or perhaps next week or even next month at a memorial or a war grave it's important to realize that you are looking at more than the name of a soldier who died often tragically young You are reading the name a man or a woman who had a laugh, who lost their nut, who posted some letters, men and women who felt a duty, people who believed in something so implicitly that they gave their lives.

And you also are seeing the tragic loss of the things we take for granted. Like the dreams of youth, of marriage, the joys of parenthood, the pleasures of old age. These simple things we sometimes forget are part of the gift they have given us.

I was recently filming in Villers Bretonneux in Northern France, a place that has a deep resonance for Australians and also a strong connection to this town of Numurkah.

A young woman approached me and asked if I was English. When I said that I was an Australian she grabbed my hand, nearly crushed it and said "n'oublions jamais l'australie" Let us never forget Australia.

Above every blackboard in the primary school in 'Viller Bret', are those words. Let us never forget Australia.

That school, on Rue de Victoria, was built after the Great War with money raised on train platforms and tram stops around this state over a number of years by primary school children, penny by penny. What those young Victorian children did in the years after the war is part of what we are celebrating here today.

Part of how the example and unselfish sacrifice of the ANZAC shaped us as people.

The ANZAC Spirit lives in VB as it does in the Dardanelles, in the olive groves of Crete, the deserts of North Africa, in the Jungles of South East Asia

where many men from, and later those who came, to live in this district served, in the skies and on the seas of the world. In Kapyong in Korea where the Kiwi's again stood with us, in Vietnam, Timor, Iraq, Afghanistan and the many other countries where Australians have served as peacekeepers or in humanitarian capacities.

Many of those 100,000 Australians lay in these places and as a result, as I have found out, we too live in the heart of these places and their people. That is also part of the ANZAC's gift to us.

Brig General Pompey Elliot, born in Charlton led the Australian 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade during the first Battle of Villers Bret in 1917. He wrote:

"When anyone speaks to you of the glory of war picture to yourself a narrow line of trenches two or three deep with bodies mangled and torn beyond description.

Live amongst this for days.

This is war, and such is glory".

Wars continue, and the glory continues to elude us.

By coming here this morning, we are saying that we have not forgotten those 100,000 and that their sacrifice means something to us.

It would be ridiculous to say that they were all saints. They were human, just like you and me. But when push came to shove they did not fall back on their vices, instead they reached for their values.

And at a time when the world is experiencing such turmoil, when we can feel overwhelmed by the complexity of life in this world, I would like to think that ANZAC day could become more than just a day of celebration and remembrance. Perhaps it can be a day when we actively pay tribute to our fallen by believing, as they did, that an individual can make a difference and by renewing our commitment to those values they aspired to.

And their most passionately held ideal, what they strove and selflessly died for, was the simple notion that everyone in this world deserves the right to fulfill their promise and to live with freedom and in peace. And for that we honour every one of them.

Lest We Forget