

Good morning and welcome to the ANZAC Day Dawn Service in the Chatswood Garden of Remembrance. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Cammeragal people of the Eora nation. We also acknowledge all traditional owners of country throughout Australia and pay our respect to their culture and their Elders, past, present and emerging.

We recognise that this land on which we meet is a place of age old symbolism, ceremonies of commemoration, celebration, initiation and renewal and that Eora living culture has a unique role in the life of this region.

I would like to formally acknowledge all official parties to today's service. Including

- Willoughby Mayor Ms Gail Giles-Gidney
- Members of Willoughby Council, NSW State Parliament, Federal members, as well as foreign dignitaries from the French and Papua New Guinean governments and their representatives.
- Relatives of Willoughby's WWII posthumous Victoria Cross recipient Albert Chowne, who grew up and enlisted kilometres from where we stand. He knew this precinct well.
- Chatswood RSL Sub-Branch President Mr Barney Flanagan, and Director Mr Garry Brigden, Chatswood RSL President Mr Garry Owen, Lt Col Matt Vertzonis, the 2/17 Bn NSW Royal Regiment Catafalque Party, Dignitaries, National and Organisational representatives, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Across our nation this morning Australians are gathering at memorials varying from large edifices in capital cities to small memorials in suburban parks and quiet memorials in tiny country towns. Yet, these sacred spaces all do the same thing: they serve as places to gather and remember the sacrifices of past generations of Australians in times of war and uncertainty.

Last year we uniquely commemorated Anzac Day, physically distanced at the end of our driveways. However, this socially distant act served to bring the community together. This morning, we can come together here at Chatswood to commemorate those to whom we owe such a great debt, as we continue to reflect on the Australians who have suffered in war and to offer them our sincere thanks and remembrance.

The word 'ANZAC' (is an) holds special significance for Australians.

Over the years, it has been used to describe an Army Corps, a place, an individual, and a national spirit. Those ANZACS who landed at Gallipoli had no idea that they were forging a national identity through their actions. The ANZAC values have always been hard to define., For mine, they symbolise (but) the ideals of a fair go for all, courage and good humour in the face of adversity, resilience and endurance, looking after your mates and sacrificing for the greater good. These values are still relevant today. ANZAC means togetherness - shared courage in the face of adversity.

ANZAC Day is the day on which Australians remember the sacrifice of those who have died at war. It is commemorated every year on 25th April. ANZAC Day 1915 marked the start of a campaign that lasted 8 months and resulted in 25,000 Australian casualties, including 8,700 soldiers killed in action or who died from their wounds. New Zealand lost 2721 soldiers in the campaign, almost one in four of those who served on Gallipoli.

Private Roy Denning described his pride in being part of the Gallipoli campaign in a letter he wrote home to his mother in 1915. He wrote: *"In the early hours of the morning I heard the officers going along amongst the men saying "Stick to it lads, don't go to sleep", and the cheerful reply would come*

*"No Sir, we won't go to sleep"...and my heart swelled with admiration....give me Australians as comrades, and I will go anywhere duty calls".*

Following Gallipoli, our soldiers fought tenaciously in the trenches of the Western Front in France and Belgium, and in the Middle Eastern Deserts, between 1916 and 1918. Their actions resulted in Australia gaining international recognition as an independent nation. The men and women who served in the Great War gave birth to the ANZAC tradition and pride to a nation yet to develop its sense of identity.

Whilst these battles may appear distant in memory, it is important to remember that the men and women of the defence force serve us still in Iraq and Afghanistan. I believe that the ANZAC spirit is truly summarised in one sentence, spoken by an SAS Sergeant reflecting on his experience the battle of Tizak in Afghanistan:

*"To fail would be worse than death.*

*To let your mates down in combat...would be worse than death...*

*You don't let your mates down".*

Today we gather in our Garden of Remembrance which has at its far end a plaque recognising the Willoughby City residents who made the supreme sacrifice in war. The Roses of Picardy surrounding us were brought from the war cemeteries of France (to this Garden). In the last 6 years, my school, St Pius X College has made three pilgrimages to Papua New Guinea to walk the Kokoda Track. We have made a special connection with the 2/33<sup>rd</sup> Battalion whose Association have asked us to keep their story alive. The plaque presented by Year 12 students Liam Chang and Matthew Brannan this morning tells a part of their story.

As a student of St Pius X College, I am very proud of the contributions of past students when serving our country. Our College honour board holds pride of place in the foyer of our school and reminds the current generation of the proud service and sacrifice of our forebears. In the centenary of our Royal Australian Air Force this year, I particularly honour 19 year old Flight Sergeant Anthony Gillespie who lost his life in early 1945 over Germany.

On a very personal note, today I wear the medals of my Great Grandfather. He enlisted in 1940, and was a member of the 2/14<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment deployed to New Guinea. Edmond O'Keeffe fought in a war far from his family, missing his wife and daughter. He was away for the birth of my grandfather, a story all too familiar in so many households of the time. I am immensely proud of my Great Grandfather, and all the other servicemen and women who personally sacrificed so much to protect us all.

Resilience, determination and camaraderie are words that come to mind when we reflect on the values held by those we honour today.

In the half light of this beautiful place, this morning beside the trainline which has stood here for generations, and the soil and sand which has lain here for millennia longer, I can sense the ANZAC spirit welling from the plaques beneath each rose bush, and the soil in which they are bedded.

Much of the spirit of Australia was forged through the ANZACs. They were young men and women desperate to give a good account of themselves. To unify and give strength to our country through selfless service and sacrifice. What they achieved is our legacy and hope for the future.

Lest we forget.