ANZAC Day Assembly – Friday 24 April

Principal's remarks

On ANZAC Day we gather not to celebrate war, but to remember it and to understand why it must never be forgotten.

Australians pause to remember those who served, those who suffered, and those who never came home. Many of them were not much older than you, young people who left behind their families, their friends, and the lives they knew, stepping into something uncertain, frightening, and completely out of their control.

ANZAC Day is not just about history. It is about memory, and responsibility. Memory, so that the stories of courage, sacrifice, and loss are not lost to time. Responsibility, because what we remember shapes who we become.

We commemorate ANZAC DAY not because war is glorious.

It is not.

But because in the darkest of times, people reveal the very best of who they are, the very best of human character. And it is those qualities - courage, mateship, endurance, and compassion - that we choose to carry forward.

To remember is to honour … and to ensure that their legacy continues, not just in words, but in the way we live our lives.

The ANZAC tradition comes from the experiences of Australian and New Zealand soldiers, particularly those who served in World War I at Gallipoli. Over time, it has come to represent something more:

> values like courage, mateship, endurance, and sacrifice. The "ANZAC spirit" isn't just about war. It's about how people respond when things are at their hardest, and how they look after one another in those moments.

It is in the stories of how people responded that we can see how the ANZAC tradition, the ANZAC spirit, is meaningful for us today.

During World War II, many Australians found themselves fighting far from home in places like Southeast Asia. In early 1942, Japanese forces rapidly advanced through the region. Australian troops, including a doctor named Edward “Weary” Dunlop, were stationed on the island of Java. They were outnumbered, under-resourced, and cut off from support. After the Battle of Java, Allied forces had no real choice but to surrender.

As a result, thousands of Australians became prisoners of war. They were captured and transported to prison camps, and many, including Dunlop, were forced to work on the Burma–Thailand Railway. It was a brutal project, built in harsh jungle conditions, where prisoners faced starvation, disease, and violence on a daily basis.

Dunlop wasn’t a soldier fighting on the front line. He was a doctor. And in the middle of unimaginable suffering, he made a decision about the kind of person he would be.

Dunlop saw war for what it was. He called it “a sordid, filthy business of cruelty and starvation.” There was nothing heroic about the conditions he lived in. But instead of becoming bitter or giving up, he focused on what he could control.

Every day, surrounded by sick and dying men, with almost no medicine or equipment, he chose to care. He believed that “nothing matters except… the sick and suffering.” Compassion, for him, wasn’t optional. It was a duty.

But caring wasn’t enough on its own. Dunlop also understood the importance of discipline. In a place where everything was falling apart, he insisted on basic standards: cleanliness, organisation, routine. These small actions helped preserve dignity. They reminded the men that they were still human, even when everything around them suggested otherwise.

He also recognised the strength of the people around him. He wrote about the “courage and endurance” of ordinary people, those who supported each other, shared what little they had, and refused to give up. This is what resilience looked like: not just individual toughness, but a commitment to community.

And when it mattered most, Dunlop showed courage. He stood up to guards to protect prisoners who couldn't protect themselves. He believed that no one should be left behind, especially not the weak, the vulnerable, the sick, or the forgotten.

So, what does this mean for us today?

Most of us will never face the kind of hardship Dunlop did. And yet his story is powerful and relevant to us.

Because every day, in smaller ways, we face choices.

Do we look out for others, or ignore them?
Do we keep our standards, even when it's easier not to?
Do we keep going when things feel difficult?

Who we are as people and as a community is built through small choices and actions, over and over again … especially when it would be easier to just look out for ourselves.

And so, ANZAC Day isn't about glorifying war. It's about recognising the values people carried through it: compassion, discipline, courage, and mateship.

How are those values important in the Australia … in the Beaumaris, we want today?

How we can live those values in our own lives?