

ANZAC Day 2018 remarks

Australian Ambassador to Italy, Dr Greg French

Today is a special day for us Australians and New Zealanders, when we remember the sacrifice of those who died, served or suffered in times of war. It is not a celebration of victories, but a commemoration and honouring of sacrifices.

It is fitting to recall today, one hundred and three years after the landings at Gallipoli (Çannakale) in 1915, that our noble ANZAC story was born of a military campaign that was not a victory.

- in which around half the combatants, from both sides, were either killed or wounded.

So this is not a story of triumphalism, but of pride and compassion and determination that the sacrifices of the fallen may help to maintain the freedoms and rights that we have come to know and cherish.

We are deeply grateful that the sacrifice of the first ANZACs, and those who followed, eventually made a space for wisdom, a wisdom of the kind that His Excellency Ambassador Patrick Rata just cited from the Book of James.

The wisdom of the warrior to walk the path of peace, from a position not of weakness, but of confidence.

Wisdom born of courage.

Thus may former enemies become friends.

One of the greatest writers in history, the Greek poet Aeschylus, spoke of this wisdom in his play "Agamemnon". Aeschylus' wisdom was hard-won: he was a veteran *hoplite*, a heavy infantryman who fought with distinction at the battle of Marathon in 490BC and at the sea battle of Salamis in 480BC, not far from the landing places of the ANZACs of 1915.

Aeschylus wrote:

"In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

Aeschylus' words resonate with those of another brave soldier who fought at Gallipoli 24 centuries later: Mustafa Kemal, later known as Atatürk, who commanded Turkish forces at Gallipoli in 1915. And it was this same man, as founder and first President of the Turkish Republic, who found words of comfort for the grieving parents of our fallen soldiers, demonstrating the wisdom of which Aeschylus wrote: the wisdom of the warrior to transcend anger and pain, and to walk the path of peace, and harness the power of reconciliation. Atatürk's words are engraved in stone at Gallipoli, Canberra and Wellington, and His Excellency Ambassador Murat Esenli will shortly read them to us.

*[Those heroes that shed their blood
And lost their lives:
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country,
Therefore rest in peace.
There is no difference between the Johnnies
And the Mehments to us where they lie side by side,
Here in this country of ours.
You, the mothers,
Who sent your sons from faraway countries,
Wipe away your tears.
Yours sons are now lying in our bosom
And are now at peace.
After having lost their lives on this land
They have become our sons as well.]*

In this spirit, we honour all those who lie here in this ground, and in many other places in Italy and around the world, who gave their lives in the service of their countries.

While we cannot know them all, perhaps we can let the part speak for the whole. Here lie, alongside their comrades from many lands, Australians and New Zealanders who died too young. In honouring their names, we honour all the fallen. They were

- Flight Sergeant Sidney Close;
- Warrant Officer John Craner;
- Flying Officer Ivor Godby;
- Flying Officer David Gow;
- Major Richard Harding;
- Private James Leitch;
- Private John McQuire;

- Private Harold Morris;
- Lance Corporal Owen Penney;
- Private Cyril Redmond;
- Staff Sergeant George Thomson;
- Private Noel Tudor;
- Private Aubrey Whytock; and
- Flight Sergeant Ronald Williams.

In Flanders an Australian grave from the First World War bears the following epitaph:

*Will some kind hand
in that far off land
place on his grave a flower for me?*

May our answer always be “yes”.