

Distinguished visitors, Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls, this morning we all remember the sacrifice of those who have served in all wars and conflicts. The significance of this remembrance gets our nation up out of bed in the very early hours of the morning to commemorate our servicemen and servicewomen who have given their all for Australia. I would like to thank the Torquay RSL Sub-Branch members and President Kevin Egan for asking me to speak about Peacekeeping Service today. As a Returned Veteran I thank you all for your attendance at this year's service in Torquay.

We remember the ANZACs, who at first light at a place called Ari Burnu on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, faced their baptism of fire and enshrined themselves and Australia into history. It was Australia's and New Zealand's first test in war together. Particularly for Australia as a new Federated country and not as a British Colony. Despite the heavy casualties of over 26,000 Australians, with over 7,500 New Zealand casualties, this military disaster forged the ANZAC legend. Those Aussie and Kiwi soldiers proved their worth under the harshest of conditions and gained the respect of their enemy – the Turks.

Australians have since answered the call to many wars and conflicts, which we have lost over 102,000 men and women who fought for the freedoms and liberty that we in society today take for granted. The hundreds of thousands of Australians who have been wounded, injured, ill and there are those who have taken home with them the traumatic memories of this service, have had a devastating account to the effects of such freedoms and liberties. This in turn has had a profound effect for them and their families.

Whilst we remember those Australians who fought in wars, there is little known of such service, courage and sacrifice of Australian Peacekeepers. In fact little is known of where Australian Peacekeepers have served and what they have done.

Australian veterans of Peacekeeping Operations are the most mis-understood and under-represented group of veterans that this country has ever encountered. They have served in Australia's longest ever commitment to bring about International Peace and Security **non-stop since 1947 to the present day.**

Not only is this service important for our International interests, but it is very important for our **National** security.

These Australian veterans are misunderstood, because there is a stereotyping of what is Peacekeeping Service. There is also the absence of tangible recognition in the form of a National Peacekeeping Memorial.

It is very hard to describe service on Peacekeeping Operations. Every Operation is different from the other. There is not one Operation that is the same. They have different mandates, different contributing nations, different rules of engagement, different laws of armed conflict, different cultures and languages, different smells, different climates, and different countryside or landscape.

But one thing is not different, that is the sacrifice of our service people.

Australian Peacekeepers have been deployed in small groups of 1 or 2 up to 8,500 and have served on about 60 Operations, to 63 different Countries non-stop since the 14th of September 1947. Australia has the proud military record as the world's first ever Peacekeepers deployed in the field and the world's longest serving nation on peacekeeping operations. It continues today in the Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, South Sudan, Cyprus and the Middle East.

They also consist of Police Peacekeepers, who in 1964 deployed on their first Peacekeeping Operation with the United Nations Force in Cyprus. Our Torquay RSL President, Kevin Egan is one of those Policemen who served in Cyprus in the mid 1960's. In total it is estimated that up to 70,000 Australian Defence Force and Police have served on Peacekeeping Operations to many parts of the world.

But what is Peacekeeping? Well, Peacekeeping is a term that is not defined by the United Nations and defies simple determination.

It is said to be between traditional methods of resolving disputes peacefully, such as negotiation and mediation to more forceful actions. Either way, Peacekeepers are deployed into countries to provide for peace and security for troubled nations, of which Military Operations are aimed to develop lasting peace to a war-shattered country. This Peacekeeping Service involves an enormous amount of restraint by those peacekeepers as well as the threat of violence or combat to un-expectedly erupt.

The term “Peacemaking” is officially the United Nations process of the diplomatic approaches toward striking agreements, cease-fire negotiations and representation of various warring factions to strike a peace accord prior to the dispatch of Troops to a given troubled nation.

Colloquially, “peacemaking” is a term used to recognise those Peacekeeping Troops who serve on war service in circumstances that require the soldiers to enforce peace, normally by any measures that are deemed necessary.

It is also noted that during these particular Operations that there has been and continues active involvement of the Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal Australian Navy. Not just in aircraft and ships, but also in personnel on the ground. Many people may think when Troops are mentioned, it only pertains to soldiers. However, it also includes our sailors, airmen and airwomen. These servicemen and servicewomen serve alongside each other. On a number of occasions our servicemen and women serve with their New Zealand counterparts – fostering the ties of the ANZAC tradition from 1915.

Some Australian Peacekeeping operations have only had specialised troops deploy such as Medical, Communications, Engineers, Infantry or Military Observers from the Army. A few Peacekeeping Operations have had Air Force aircraft such as a Helicopter Squadron that deployed to the Middle East during the mid to late 1970s. Royal Australian Navy ships deployed to Somalia to support the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment Battalion Group during the early 90’s.

The inherent risks of serving in some of the most dangerous countries in the world is the frustration of being unable to intervene whilst witnessing atrocities, such was the case for the Australian Defence Force Casualty Clearing Post in Kibeho, Rwanda, in April 1995.

The small Casualty Clearing Post witnessed the massacre of over 8,000 men, women and children. There was no discrimination in the killing. It was a purely evil atrocity conducted by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) on un-armed, scared and starving refugees, who had no-one to protect them.

The Australians for over three days endured some of the most horrific scenes and dangers that have ever been witnessed by our most hardened war veterans. They held themselves in the highest esteem. Recovering and treating the wounded under fire. It is truly a moment for all Australians to be deeply proud of our servicemen and women.

They and many others continue to carry the ANZAC tradition. However, those who have not served on Peacekeeping Service may unfortunately hold a prejudice by citing *“Standing on a street corner handing out lollies to kids with Blue Berets on their heads...”* As has been ignorantly stated in the past.

Many Peacekeeper veterans feel that their service is not understood by friends, family the community and the Government. Many have suffered Mental Illness. Some have unfortunately taken their own lives.

The recorded deaths of Australian Defence Force and Police personnel on Peacekeeping Operations have been thankfully relatively low on these dangerous Operations. Whilst we remember the 33 soldiers who have been killed in action in Afghanistan, there have been 28 Australian Defence Force and Four (4) Police who have died on Peacekeeping Operations, since 1953 to the recent loss of Craftsman Beau Pridue who was killed in a Military Vehicle Accident, whilst serving with the Australian-led International Stabilisation Force in Timor Leste in September 2011.

There are however better sides to Peacekeeping. Australian service personnel have served and continue to serve in these dangerous places with the sincere dedication of providing a safe place for the children of war-torn countries. They prevent violence and ongoing war. They are proud to be a part of an opportunity to provide peace, prosperity and re-building of a shattered nation. To give those children the opportunity that many in this country take for granted. An education, better sanitation, self-reliance and of course resilience. Peacekeepers are essentially the frontline of the International Rule of Law.

It is worth the inherent risks toward self, to see the children smile. To see their mothers and fathers move on from poverty and despair to being able to provide. To see the country gradually recover from the effects of war, famine and the ever present violence.

For our veterans, this makes it all worthwhile. That we have been able to be a part of a Peacekeeping Force that has changed the dynamics from conflict to peace and prosperity. It is worth the frustrations, it is worth the risks.

I am sure that these are the same principles that those who went to war before had in their hearts and minds. That they were and did make a difference to International Peace and Security. That they represented Australia as ambassadors, teachers and soldiers to effect peace by whatever means necessary.

In closing, Peacekeeping service is a noble cause that has seen our service people go to some of the most dangerous and inhospitable places on earth. They deploy without the luxuries that are the norm at home. They deploy without their families and loved ones. They are on a mission for peace and are determined to see it through.

All that is needed now for Australia's Peacekeeper Veterans is better community understanding and wider Government recognition of these sacrifices. For these Peacekeepers are the legacy of those ANZACs that landed on Gallipoli 97 years ago.

A legacy that has been maintained by our Peacekeepers and I can proudly say the ANZAC Legacy will continue now and into the future.

THANK YOU.

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