

Speech

Address By

His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)

On the occasion of

Anzac Day Dawn Service Address

Bomana War Cemetery, Papua New Guinea
25 April 2017

We come here in this early morning light to be amongst those who rest here in perpetuity.

Lying in the earth beneath these headstones—each etched with their own personal, final epitaph—are the remains of those who died fighting for our countries.

We may only visit this place once a year, once a week or once in a lifetime.

But those who gave their lives and lie here are always in our hearts.

They are part of our history.

Their deeds, their sacrifices and the battles they fought have shaped us.

And as time passes our respect and reverence for what they did in this part of the world grows ever stronger.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the battle to protect Port Moresby, 75 years since the treacherous ‘to and fro’ on the now storied and venerated Kokoda track.

At a time when Singapore had fallen, and northern Australia was being bombed, the fighting here was crucial to halt the Japanese advance.

And the men and women of the day responded magnificently.

They rapidly came to know the dangers, the cost and the sacrifices involved.

But they also knew that after so many battles and lives lost in faraway lands, this was a time to think of home.

In their minds was the conviction that this was a time to fight for Australia, for our future, our sovereignty, our loved ones.

And that is what they did.

In the tradition of their forebears, they put service before self.

They were courageous and enduring in some of the worst conditions warfare can demand.

And many would fall here in the jungle, away from the wide brown land they loved, but were destined never to see again.

There were heroes amongst them.

Men like Corporal Jack French, awarded the VC for single-handedly taking out three enemy machine gun posts during the

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Battle of Milne Bay.

Although badly wounded he continued to advance until fatally shot.

There's Squadron Leader John Jackson, a veteran of Middle East campaigns who returned to lead No 75 Squadron's defence of Port Moresby.

It was a role he was widely praised for, but sadly a role that would see him killed in action before war's end.

There is Merchant Navy surgeon Charles Augustus Tunstall, serving and operating at 66 years of age, killed when Japanese bombers attacked the MV Macdhui in Fairfax Harbour.

And then there is Sister Marie Craig, the only woman buried here.

As part of the Medical Air Evacuation Unit, Marie would regularly fly in and out of combat zones, tending to the wounded.

On 18 September 1942, Marie, 27 patients and crew, left Biak in West Papua for Horn Island in the Torres Strait.

They did not make it—the crash site not found till 1970 and Marie's remains only transferred here just over a decade ago.

We remember Marie and the care and comfort she gave, and we remember all the Australian nurses who died on active service during the war.

And there are many others laid to rest here.

Ordinary, everyday Australians who died in service of their nation.

Soldiers like:

- PTE Grenville Harold Lewis, a toymaker by trade, shot and killed during a training exercise at just 19, four days after arriving in Port Moresby.

- PTE Kenneth John Hastings a watchmaker from Ipswich who enlisted one month after his 18th birthday, he was to be killed in action before he was 20.

- o One of more than 500 Australian troops lost in Bougainville.

- And my own uncle, Flight Sergeant Bill Cosgrove, a Beaufighter Pilot from No 30 Squadron.

- o Today mourned here by his only child, Madeline.

This is also a time to remember those who made it back home.

These veterans now few amongst us.

They have assumed the mantle of national treasures, a living link to a time when our nation fought for its very survival.

We also remember the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels.

Stretcher bearers, guides, a shoulder to rest on par excellence.

I doubt there would be a digger who does not have a memory or a story of their deeds, all done with a smile and a reassuring calm.

Like all Australians I was saddened by the news of the passing of Faole Bokoi, one of the last of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels.

As the mist lifts.

As the light breaks.

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As we peer into a new day.

Our thoughts are with those below, who will remain after we leave, but will always, in some way, be with us.

These heroes all.

At rest.

At peace.

Their place in history assured.

Their immortality secured through their sacrifice.

Lest we forget.

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