

They will live in our hearts forever

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Mildura man Laurie Andriske gave a moving address to the Mildura ANZAC Day service held at Henderson Park before a large gathering of about 2000 people. His address was a heartfelt tribute to the many who lost their lives so that all Australians and future generations could live in peace. Sunraysia Daily today publishes Mr Andriske's address in full so that those who were unable to attend the service may gain insight from his thoughts.

We have come here today to pay our tribute to those who gave their lives that we may live in a just and equitable society – that we may live in a free and democratic way in this country we love.

The Battle of Gallipoli was the catalyst that welded our nation together – it matured the young nation of Australia and produced a nation ready to take its place in the growing world. It is the 85th anniversary of this debacle when the Australian and New Zealand troops with other forces landed in Southern Turkey to undertake the strategic capture of the area and take control of the Dardenelles.

All did not go well from the very beginning – there was no element of surprise. In fact, the Turkish troops knew the attack was to take place – the only question was just where and when. At 4:30am on this darkest of nights, April 25, as the boats pushed off, a ship funnel sent a burst of sparks skyward. Did the enemy see it? Who knows but as they crossed the open water the enemy met them with ceaseless fire and the Battle of Gallipoli had begun.

We have many accounts of the superhuman bravery on that day – the merciless rattle of the machine guns and rifles and artillery was continuous and heavy. The uphill fight against insurmountable odds almost succeed but slowly we were beaten back with horrendous casualties and that day came to an end.

The result – almost 2,500 men were killed, and thousands injured – Australia was never the same. The dreadful spectacle of this war was to continue for another seven months before the killing stopped and our forces withdrew. Out of this nightmare when the cost was counted, 120,000 men of both sides had given their lives and thousands more injured.



Was it worth it?

Maybe if it had succeeded it may have shortened the Great War, but it left only an army of grievors – wives, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts to grieve in the greatest of disasters to that time.

Unfortunately, the great war was raging in another place, and our forces were to rest and transfer to Europe and the killing fields of the Western Front in France and Belgium where the slaughter was raging with incredible ferocity – a nightmare that was to continue for another three years – a disaster from which the world has hardly recovered to this day.

The Battle of Verdun – over a million killed, millions injured or effected. The Battle of the Somme – 500,000 killed, our worst day at Fromelles in Belgium when over 5,500 Australians were killed in one day, and meanwhile the New Zealanders were suffering the same distressing conditions and losses.

Great War – probably the greatest disaster of all time – finally came to an end in November 1918 and the world began to count the cost. The incredible bravery, devotion to duty, the suffering, the heart break, mourning for lost and loved ones continues almost to this day.

I always feel for the mothers – it is the mothers who bear the brunt of war, who bear and raise children and then lose them to the senseless stupidity we call war. It is for them we weep the most.

We would have thought we had finished with war forever in 1918, but the God of War had not been put properly to rest, and in 1939 we were again called to arms and the men and women of Australia responded with their great sense of duty.

The British Empire was under attack, the country that fostered us was under attack, and we rallied to the cause, sending forces, army, airmen and sailors to England and the Middle East to help repel the dictatorial forces of Germany and her allies.

This was a new war – now a war to end all wars – the weapons of mass destruction became a must and killing became a science, and when we had hardly come to be organised to assist in Europe our lot became further complicated with the entry of Japan into the conflict, and we had a war raging in two hemispheres.

Who can forget the events that brought war to the shores of our homeland, Pearl Harbour, the bombing of Darwin, the advance of the Japanese through Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, New Guinea, until their impetus fizzled out with the defeat firstly at Kokoda and then throughout Papua-New Guinea, Borneo, the Philippines and then to Japan itself. The war in Europe had ended a little earlier, and the world again began to count the cost.

We have never had a final count, and I suspect we never will.

So, the accounts give 20 million, some give more, only God knows the fearsome destruction.

The bravery, the cruelty, the hopelessness of life for millions mutilated, separated, repatriated and dispossessed and the awesome task of rebuilding had to begin.

We were done with war. The world was sick of it, or so we thought, but no. In 1958 we had to raise troops for Korea to assist an ally who assisted us at the Battle of the Coral Sea, so our forces took part in this insidious war where two Koreas are still in dispute, and it remains unsettled to this day.

The world had become a dangerous place.

We had hot wars in Vietnam and cold wars with Russia; small wars here and small wars there.

For us, Vietnam was the last and sad conflict again for which we are still paying the price.

Brave men and women are our contribution and dead men and women are the cost, and a nation must stop for a moment and pay tribute to the contribution of all those who served to make this a better place.

I have been the most fortunate of people, and I have been able to visit the battlefields of Europe and Asia and see for myself the result of man's inhumanity to man, and see at first had the rows and rows of crosses in Flanders Field where poppies grow, the white crosses row on row.

To silently look around and count the dead.

To read the epitaphs which would break your heart.

To think of the families still silently grieving for loved ones, in some cases only God knows where.

To visit also the graves of German soldiers in France, for the kith and kin grieve also. To visit the graves in tropical New Guinea where a lot of our best and finest will make forever that place as Australia, to Singapore, to Darwin where the war has also left its mark.

And finally, to Thailand to that special place where our soldiers captured, starved, tortured and killed are buried at that cemetery near the River Kwai – a place where man's wickedness to his fellow man is still not understood and not forgotten. But I remember that day of my visit as if it was yesterday.

To see those crosses, read epitaphs in this sacred place where you feel the emotions trickle down your neck and you sit and wonder why. There lie the graves of over 1000 Australian soldiers, many so young, who gave their lives so we may live. Please remember them.

I want you to remember also the deeds and contributions of our nurses, the women at home, the AWAS, WAAFS and Land Army, the farmers and factory workers. It takes a nation of supporters to conduct a war. "They also serve who only stand and wait" and Churchill said.

Today, however, it is ANZAC Day. It is a special day for us to pay our respects to those who gave their lives – the ultimate sacrifice – for their country. May they reside in the lap of God, protected in that Great Kingdom where generals lie with privates, where there is peace and understanding.

They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old.

No, they shall live in our hearts and their deeds remembered forever. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

We are left to mourn and pray and grow old without them.

At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we shall remember them.

Thank you, Laurie Andriske.