

ANZAC DAY 2024
ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART CENOTAPH, THURSDAY 25 APRIL 2024

Good morning. I warmly welcome you all to our annual Anzac Day commemorations.

I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose Country we gather. May I acknowledge all veterans present and those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have served in our Defence Force in times of peace and war.

On this Anzac Day, we commemorate the anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli. We remember Australian and New Zealand soldiers involved in the Gallipoli campaign in 1915.¹ (the ANZACs). We also commemorate the lives of those who died in the Second World War, and all those who lost their lives in military and peacekeeping operations in which our Nation has been involved.²

May we also remember that major wars are being waged in the Ukraine and in Gaza. Thousands of lives have been lost. We hope and pray for an end to these conflicts, and others which are less reported. We remember the ongoing human cost of war to all nations. We hope and pray for peace, and for people to live with dignity, and without fear and hunger. We especially pray for the children impacted by war.

Significantly, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the deployment of our Australian Forces to East Timor. This followed the referendum held in August 1999, in which the Timorese people chose independence from Indonesia. RSL Tasmania asked that special reference be made to that conflict, and I am very pleased to do so.

¹<https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac-day> accessed 22 Feb 24

² <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac-day/traditions> accessed 25 Feb 22

In the wake of the independence referendum vote, pro-Indonesian militias began attacking civilians. Violence spread throughout the country. Entire towns were destroyed. Around 1,400 civilians were killed. Some 500,000 people were either forcibly displaced from their homes or found places of hiding and relative safety.

On 15 September 1999, the United Nations Security Council authorised the formation of a multinational force, the International Force East Timor or INTERFET. Australia led this International Coalition.³

This was the largest deployment of our Australian Forces since the Vietnam War. This was also the first time that our Country led a major international coalition of some 22 nations, with some 5,500 personnel deployed.⁴

Australians in East Timor were confronted with distressing scenes of violence. In Dili, there was evidence that fuel trucks had been driven along commercial and residential streets spraying fuel that was later ignited. The destruction of infrastructure, from medical facilities to schools and community places, was extensive.

In December 1999, the 1st Aviation Regiment's 161st Reconnaissance Squadron arrived in East Timor. I have a first-hand account from one of the pilots, Colonel David Hughes, now my Official Secretary. He had joined the Squadron only some nine months earlier. On arrival at Suai airport, he and other new arrivals immediately felt the heat and humidity.

Wearing full body armour and combat equipment, it was an eerily silent trip to Sector West Headquarters, in the middle of Suai and the Squadron heliport, and next to a burned-out orphanage. There was evidence of violence and destruction all around.

Deployment to Timor for then Lieutenant David Hughes, a junior and newly qualified pilot, was daunting. Intelligence reports indicated that INTERFET personnel and aircraft would be targeted. Lieutenant Hughes was surprised that

³ <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/peacekeeping/summaries/east-timor-1999-2013> accessed 22 Feb 24

⁴ Ibid.

he had no fear when his aircraft came under fire for the first time. Rather, he experienced annoyance about the Indonesian backed militia firing at his aircraft. However, this firing meant that the militia unmasked their positions, allowing ground forces to engage with them more easily.

In February 2000, the INTERFET mission came to an end. Australian peacekeepers remained in Timor-Leste under several United Nations missions until 2013. Five Australians died during the peace operations in East Timor.

INTERFET and the Australian military contributions to making the Timorese people's lives more secure and safe have made a lasting impression.⁵

Recently at Government House, we hosted Her Excellency Ms Inês Almeida, Ambassador to Australia for the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. At our formal dinner, Her Excellency spoke fondly and appreciatively about the impact of the peace and security established by INTERFET forces led by Australia. May I quote her:

“Timor-Leste and Australia share a history which began in the Second World War. This experience gave birth to our solidarity and the friendship between our countries...”

Our bonds of friendship were strengthened following our historic vote for independence in 1999. It was the INTERFET forces led by Australia that helped to establish peace and security after our people voted overwhelmingly for self-determination. Since 1999, thousands of Australian peacekeepers have served in Timor-Leste and many are from Tasmania...” End of Quote

May I conclude by returning to the Gallipoli campaign. The campaign was a military failure, yet our ANZACs displayed bravery, endurance, loyalty to mates, and sacrifice. The campaign resulted in over 8,000 Australian deaths and over 26,000 wounded, having a profound impact on their families and communities. Overall, 60,000 Australians were killed in World War I.

⁵ INTERFET was constituted under UN Chapter 7 Article 42 which enables the Council **to use force to maintain or restore international peace and security if it considers non-military measures to be or to have proven inadequate**. INTERFET was therefore a peacemaking rather than peacekeeping operation that entailed a higher level of risk and much wider rules related to the use of force.

As we remember and honour our servicemen and women, let us continue to aim for a world where accepted diplomatic standards of conflict resolution are the preferred options. Let us continue to aim for a world without war, which should, and must be, the goal of every nation.

As we commemorate Anzac Day, let us remember, honour, and thank all those who bravely gave their lives, or were wounded in service, for Australia. Let us ensure that our veterans are well supported.

Lest we forget.