

**ANZAC DAY SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE PETER
UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, THE
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The First World War began one hundred years ago when Britain and Germany went to war in August 1914. According to the Australian War Memorial, [quote] "Prime Minister Andrew Fisher's government pledged [this country's] full support for Britain. The outbreak of war was greeted in Australia, as in many other places, with great enthusiasm." ¹

That war remains the most costly conflict in terms of deaths and casualties. From a population of fewer than five million people, nearly half a million Australian men enlisted, of which over 60,000 were killed and 156,000 were wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner. ²

In his Remembrance Day speech last year, former Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, described the start of that war in these terms, "... the horror of all ages came together to open the curtain on mankind's greatest century of violence – the twentieth century."³

What a terrible indictment on those of us who have lived the majority of our lives in the twentieth century. Despite the fact that the last 100 years have been witness to huge technological advances, incredible scientific discoveries and great artistic achievements - all of which bear witness to the

¹ <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww1/> accessed 15th March 2014

² Supra.

³ <http://www.keating.org.au/shop/item/remembrance-day-speech-2013>

ingenuity, skill and capacity of humankind - a Prime Minister of our country describes the last hundred years as "mankind's greatest century of violence." If Mr. Keating is correct when he says that - and there is a great deal of evidence to support what he said - what do we say at this centennial commemoration of the start of World War I to all those who were killed or wounded in what was ironically called "the War to End all Wars"?

On 16th December 1918, just a few weeks after the Armistice that marked the end of that war, the English statesman and architect of the Gallipoli campaign, Sir Winston Churchill, said:⁴

"We must look forward one hundred, two hundred, three hundred years to the time when that vast continent of Australia will look back through the preceding periods of time to the world shaking episode of the Great War, and when they will seek out with the most intense care every detail of that struggle; when ... every family will seek to trace some connection with the heroes who landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula, or fought on the Somme, or in the other great battles in France."

Well Mr. Churchill, 100 years have passed and we are now, as you forecast we would be, looking back through the preceding periods of time and what do we see? Former Prime

⁴ "Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches" by Winston S. Churchill. Published by Hyperion, November 2003, pages 75-76.

Minister Keating can see a 100 years of the greatest violence, no doubt having in mind the fact that a mere 20 years after the end of "the War to end all Wars", the world plunged into World War II that raged for two years longer than the first World War; to be followed, within a mere five years, by the Korean War, and then there was Vietnam, which saw Australian combat troops being killed and physically and psychologically wounded during ten long horrific years. And there have been others since then; the latest in Iraq and Afghanistan. The latter turned out to be Australia's longest war and the most favourable view of it, as articulated by the current Prime Minister, is that it ended "... not with victory, not with defeat, but with, we hope, an Afghanistan that is better for our presence here."⁵

Mr. Churchill's exhortation to us was to seek out on this anniversary, with the most intense care, every detail of that struggle. Implicit in that exhortation is that we seek out the truth; the truth of the causes of that war; the truth of what happened in that war; and the truth of what we have done to avoid there being another war like it. Until we find the truth, we cannot begin to pay proper homage and respect to those who fought in that terrible conflict 100 years ago and to the many others who have subsequently fought in other wars when called upon to do so by their country.

As we look backwards to try and find the truth, we would do well to bear in mind the opening sentence in Professor

⁵ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/our-afghan-war-ends-not-with-victory-nor-defeat/story-e6frg8yo-1226748567937> accessed 16th March 2014

Joanna Bourke's book "An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare".⁶ She wrote:

"The characteristic act of men at war is not dying but killing. For politicians, military strategists and many historians, war may be about the conquest of territory or the struggle to recover a sense of national honour but for the man on active service warfare is concerned with the killing of other people."⁷

So, on this Anzac Day, the centennial anniversary of the commencement of World War I, how do we commemorate - that is, call to remembrance - that terrible event and all the subsequent violent conflicts in which Australia has been involved over the last 100 years - mankind's greatest century of violence? Much has been, and will be, said about the Anzac spirit, but I venture to repeat the caution that I have sounded before on this day, against glorifying war with descriptions of the mythical tall, lean, bronzed and laconic ANZAC, enthusiastically and unflinchingly carrying the torch of freedom in the face of murderous enemy fire, or as Lieutenant Colonel Burke wrote, the "bold, laughing soldiers" who "fought as they lived - bravely, openly, independently, and without fear."⁸ Australia needs to drop the sentimental myths that Anzac Day has attracted. They are not part of the truth that Sir Winston Churchill urged us to seek out.

⁶ "An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare" by Professor Joanna Bourke who is Professor of History in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at Birbeck College, Granta Books London

⁷ Ibid page 1.

⁸ <http://www.anzacday.org.au/spirit/spirit2.html>. Accessed 19th March 2014

In his book "Anzac's Long Shadow"⁹, James Brown, a former Australian Army Officer, writes that it is fitting on this anniversary to commemorate World War I and Australia's military campaigns¹⁰ and he refers to the War Memorial in Sydney's Hyde Park where an inscription urges [quote] "let silent contemplation be your offering." But he rejects, as I do, the expenditure of many millions of dollars to embark on what he describes as "a discordant, lengthy and exorbitant four-year festival of the dead."

The truth is that in the last 100 years, Australia has, on several occasions, engaged in conflict, sending our men and women into the business of killing and being killed. We should remember and honour all of them for they went to where they had no wish to go, and did what they had no wish to do, because they believed that they had to do so in order to give us peace and freedom. But remembrance and honour will neither bring nor preserve the peace for which they thought they died. That is not enough. We must actively strive for peace on a daily basis and I think that we could best begin that process, and thus properly honour and remember those who were killed or wounded while their country engaged them in the business of killing, by declaring this centennial year of the start of the War to end all Wars, the *Year of Peace*.

In the spirit of true remembrance, the Year of Peace should be spent examining and talking about the causes of war and how we got involved in wars. We should spend less time

⁹ "Anzac's Long Shadow" the cost of our national obsession by James Brown Published Redback 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid at pages 23-24.

studying Simpson's donkey and more time looking at why we were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan for so long. All this is not in order to criticise past decision makers, but in remembrance of the dead, to help us avoid doing it again in some other place, simply because we failed to examine all the alternative means of resolving conflict.

In this the Year of Peace, Australia should establish an Anzac Centre for the Study of Peace, Conflict and War. This is not an original idea of mine, but was a recommendation made by the National Commission on the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary set up by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's government to look at options to mark the Centenary of the First World War.¹¹ . The idea was that the proposed Centre be a high-profile initiative to honour the memory of the original Anzacs in the best way possible—by working towards understanding conflict and focusing attention on how the risk that future Australians will have to take part in war might be reduced.¹² Unfortunately, the Advisory Board appointed to implement the Commission's recommendations rejected the idea.¹³ Well, if that can't be done, perhaps in the Year of Peace it might be possible to divert some of the millions of dollars that will be spent on the "Anzac Festival" to provide proper support for the University of Sydney's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, which after 26 years of operation is still

¹¹ http://www.anzaccentenary.gov.au/anzac_centenary/nat_commission.htm. Accessed 19th March 2014

¹² "How Australia may commemorate the Anzac Centenary." The National Commission on the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary. March 2011, page 28.

¹³ "The Anzac Advisory Board report to Government" at page 32.
http://www.anzaccentenary.gov.au/anzac_centenary/publications.htm#acab_report

heavily dependent on membership subscriptions and volunteers to continue its work?¹⁴

It has been estimated that about 16 million people were killed in World War I.¹⁵ The next world war was worse. The estimated number of human beings killed in World War II range from 60 to a staggering 70¹⁶ or even 85 million,¹⁷ making it the deadliest war in world history. So the killing got worse as the century wore on. Surely, now that the curtains have closed on mankind's greatest century of violence, the least we can do is start the next century with a Year of Peace and commit to setting up and maintaining, or otherwise fully financing, a centre that is dedicated to the study of the nature of social conflicts, causes of violence and definitions of peace, as well as engage in research into new approaches for resolving conflicts. **That** would be a fitting call to remembrance. Lest We Forget.

¹⁴ Annual Report for 2013 of the University of Sydney's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies http://sydney.edu.au/arts/peace_conflict/docs/reports/Annual_report_2013_Final.pdf accessed 14th April 2014.

¹⁵ http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/World_War_I_casualties.html accessed 18th March 2014.

¹⁶ <http://worldwar2.org.uk/how-many-people-died-in-world-war-2>

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties#cite_note-1. Accessed 18th March 2014