

REMEMBRANCE DAY ADDRESS
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GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
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The historical circumstances of this Service are well known to us all.

At 11 am on 11 November 1918, after four years of horrifying war, the guns of the Western Front fell silent. The ensuing Armistice led to peace in the form of an unconditional surrender by Germany to the Allied forces.

That conflict left up to 13 million dead, perhaps as many as one-third of them with no known grave.

Australia committed well over 400,000 men to that war. More than 60,000 were killed and over 150,000 were wounded, gassed or taken prisoner.

On the first anniversary of the Armistice in 1919, two minutes' silence was instituted as part of the main commemorative ceremony in London. The two minutes' silence thereafter became a central feature of commemorations on Armistice Day.

In 1920 the interring of the remains of an unknown soldier in London, and in Paris, added to the significance of the event.

After the Second World War, the Australian and British governments changed the name to Remembrance Day, in order that the Day might commemorate all war dead.

In Australia in 1993, the 75th anniversary year of the Armistice, an unknown Australian soldier, exhumed from a First World War military cemetery in France, was ceremonially entombed in the Australian War Memorial's Hall of Memory.

The then Prime Minister, the Honourable Paul Keating, gave a truly memorable speech on this occasion. I will quote just part of it:

Because the Great War was a mad, brutal, awful struggle, distinguished more often than not by military and political incompetence; because the waste of human life was so terrible that some said victory was scarcely discernible from defeat; and because the war which was supposed to end all wars in fact sowed the seeds of a second, even more terrible, war – we might think this Unknown Soldier died in vain.

But, in honouring our war dead, as we always have and as we do today, we declare that this is not true.

For out of the war came a lesson which transcended the horror and tragedy and the inexcusable folly.

It was a lesson about ordinary people – and the lesson was that they were not ordinary.

On all sides they were the heroes of that war; not the generals and the politicians but the soldiers and sailors and nurses – those who taught us to endure hardship, to show courage, to be bold as well as resilient, to believe in ourselves, to stick together.

The Unknown Australian Soldier we inter today was one of those who by his deeds proved that real nobility and grandeur belong not to empires and nations but to the people on whom they, in the last resort, always depend.

In 1997, then Governor-General Sir William Deane issued a proclamation formally declaring 11 November to be our Remembrance Day, for all of those men and women who died or suffered for Australia's cause in all wars and armed conflicts.ⁱ

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The reflective meaning of this Service is well known to us all.

It is that we come together formally to remember the sacrifices made by our fellow Australians in serving our country during times of conflict.

For some of us here today, that means remembering individuals who we once knew.

Some of you will be thinking of family members; of friends; of fellow soldiers who were members of the Australian Army, the Royal Australian Air Force, the Royal Australian Navy.

I remember my father, a Rat of Tobruk, who survived World War Two but who suffered its ill-effects for the rest of his life and died at age 65.

This Service and this Day enables us to reflect upon the difficult paradox that our military professionals, when called upon to fight, do so not out of hate but out of love for country.

And we reflect upon the fact that our people in uniform today are acutely aware that they stand ready to uphold hard-won freedoms.

The First World War, arising out of a myriad of nationalistic and geopolitical complexities, supposedly became the war to end all wars.

The Second World War, with some 60 million deaths, prevented global totalitarianism.

Considering this, we are thankful indeed to those who, in the full knowledge of the horror of military conflict, nonetheless choose to serve our country.

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The message of this Service should be a lesson to us all.

It is that we have to do all that we can to keep our world from entering into a 21st Century global conflict.

As Paul Keating said on Remembrance Day 20 years after his Unknown Australian Soldier Speech:

Commemorating these events should make us even more wary of grand ambitions and grand alliances of the kind that fractured Europe and darkened the 20th century.

It is vital that our international organisations, specifically the United Nations – successor to the post-World War One League of Nations, which failed to prevent World War Two – be fully respected by all members.

The message of this Remembrance Day – as it has been every year, on November 11, when the guns fell silent in 1918 at 11 am – is that war should be the last resort. We are surely wise enough now to heed the grim lessons of those two world wars.

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Lest We Forget.

ⁱ <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/remembrance/tradition/>, accessed 30 October 2016.