

ADDRESS BY
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GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
OFFICIAL UNVEILING OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE MEMORIAL
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL, CANBERRA
8 SEPTEMBER 2010

Ladies and gentlemen

I am very pleased to join you today for this important occasion, here at our treasured War Memorial.

Over the last couple of years, I have been privileged to represent Australia and Australians:

at Gallipoli on Anzac Day

at Fromelles on the burial of the 250th unnamed soldier

at Geraldton for the 67th anniversary of the loss of HMAS Sydney II

at our Vietnam Veterans' Remembrance Day

at Sabah on Sandakan Day

at Lismore for the dedication of the Sandakan Death Marches Memorial

and here on the 68th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea.

These are a few; there have been many others:

large, formal ceremonies

small, quiet exchanges

each of them embedded in their own special histories, characters, and stories of human courage, sacrifice, suffering and loss through war.

As we pause for these moments,

we reaffirm their place among us,

their significance to us;

we peel back another layer and come a little closer to their core;

we try to revisit what we may have missed,

understand what has confounded us

and make sense of the past in the hope that we may see our present and our futures more clearly and more honestly.

In opening our minds, year by year, we expand our knowing of the experiences of so many affected and torn by the workings of war.

We wend and pave a richly-hued, uneven trail, abound with branches, crossroads, cracks and imperfections.

But each time we lay another stone, it

broadens and fortifies

welcomes another generation of travellers

and forges on - robustly, respectfully, and ever inclusively.

Today,

we pause to lay a stone in the trail

for another group of men:

nearly 300,000 of them

of the same fine ilk as all those who've been acknowledged before them,

and all those who we're yet to find along the way.

Today,

we dedicate this handsome, solid ballast

of granite, stone and bronze

to the steady, gallant and devoted effort

of Australian men

called up for National Service between 1951 and 1972.

They were trained in all forces.

They prepared well, and worked hard, as reservists and in conflict.

They served alongside our regular military in Borneo, Vietnam, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.

Of those given the choice of active service, many enlisted.

These men were true patriots.

They knew:

the meaning of citizenship

the value of working for the common good.

They knew that, with civil and personal rights, came responsibilities to the nation - the obligation to serve capably with dignity and loyalty.

As they did - no matter the challenges they faced at home and on the battlefields.

On the 14th of February each year we remember our National Servicemen - our Nashos - who fought and died and altered the course of their lives for us.

From this day hence, their service and their sacrifice are enshrined here

for their relatives and loved ones to recall and cherish

for all Australians to observe and be thankful for.

A stone for the trail; a touchstone for its travellers.

Do not stand at my grave and weep;

I am not there, I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow.

I am the diamond glints on snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain.

I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's hush

I am the swift uplifting rush

Of quiet birds in circled flight.

I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at the my grave and cry;

I am not there. I did not die.