

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
EULOGY FOR GENERAL SIR FRANCIS HASSETT
ANZAC MEMORIAL CHAPEL, DUNTROON, CANBERRA
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The passing of General Sir Francis Hasset AC, KBE, CB, DSO, LVO is an occasion of great sadness. All of us who knew him feel an immense sense of personal loss.

It is also an occasion for celebration - a celebration of the life of an outstanding combat soldier, a great military leader and a loving husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather. It is a life of amazing achievements, a life of duty, loyalty and service to the nation, of sacrifice and dedication, and of love of family. It is a life of personal example indeed one of inspiration.

Like many here this morning I was one of those whose lives were touched in some way by Sir Francis.

I arrived here at Duntroon in 1955, to begin my career as an Army Officer, when Sir Francis, as a young Colonel, was serving as the Director of Military Art. He was without question the officer we all aspired to be.

He was battle trained and highly decorated from World War Two and Korea; he had a lovely young wife and family. He had a physical presence and an aura about him that inspired confidence and trust. He also clearly understood young men.

I recall as a young Cadet on a night navigation exercise in the Canberra area. After becoming geographically embarrassed, namely lost, a classmate and I decided that a few quiet beers in the private bar at the Ainslie Hotel would be far more to our liking than trying to find navigation markers on a very cold night in the hills of Canberra.

As the hours slipped by very pleasantly, we eventually adjudged it time to return to the College and so we commenced our long walk back. Around about the Russell Offices area we were getting quite weary and thought it best to further conserve our energy by flagging down the next passing car heading in the direction of Duntroon.

Soon the lights of an approaching vehicle loomed large and I stood in the middle of the road and flagged it down. It stopped, and it was not until my classmate and I had made ourselves comfortable in the back seat, that the unpleasant realisation hit us, that there in the driver's seat was none other than the Director of Military Art, Colonel Hasset.

'Good morning boys' he said. 'Good morning Sir' we said. 'What have you been doing?' he asked. 'Night navigation exercise' we squeaked. 'Umm' said the DMA, totally unconvinced. He drove us to our company lines without further comment or conversation.

We thought we were gone; 21 days confinement to barracks and 84 days stoppage of leave at least; possible dismissal loomed large in our minds. But nothing happened, nothing at all.

We sweated for weeks on the consequences of that fateful evening, however it never came. Years later as a very junior General, when I asked why we were never reprimanded, Sir Francis replied with a smile 'I knew that in waiting for the sword to fall, you were punishing yourselves far more than I ever could'.

So true and so typical of his leadership style.

Sir Francis was born in Marrickville Sydney in 1918. He left school at 15 and was accepted into the Royal Military College in March 1935, aged 16.

He soon proved himself a capable cadet; eager to learn, quick to adapt, athletic and smart. He excelled at military subjects and featured in the College rugby, boxing, equestrian and athletics teams.

On graduation, in 1938, Sir Francis was posted to the Darwin Mobile Force first as a rifle platoon and then as a Mortar Platoon commander.

At the outbreak of World War Two, he was posted to the 2nd/3rd Battalion of the Sixth Division as Adjutant and sailed for the Middle East in 1940.

He fought at Bardia and Tobruk, was wounded in action and mentioned in despatches. On recovery, he attended the British Army Staff College and was subsequently promoted to Major and posted as Brigade Major to the 18th Brigade in Syria under Brigadier George Wootten. He then returned to Australia after the Japanese entered the war and, at just 23, was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, the youngest Army Officer to attain that rank.

He saw further service in New Guinea, ending the war as a staff officer with the 3rd Division, having again been Mentioned in Dispatches for meritorious service and appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.

Sir Francis returned to Australia at the end of the war and served as an Instructor at the Australian Staff College. On 18 May 1946 he married the beautiful Hallie Roberts - a relationship based on love, admiration and mutual support. To quote Brigadier John Essex-Clark, 'Hallie Hassett not only supported her husband, she also illuminated him'.

Peace for Sir Francis, however, was not to last. After briefly commanding 1 RAR in Australia, in July 1951 he assumed command of 3 RAR 'Old Faithful', as part of the 28th Commonwealth Brigade in Korea.

He led his battalion magnificently through some of the toughest fighting of the war, which reached its peak in October 1951 in the Battle of Maryang San, seen as one of the finest examples of a phased battalion attack in the annals of Australian Military History.

Chinese forces held the group of hills overlooking the Imjim River and the Commonwealth forces positioned nearby.

Maryang San, or Hill 317, rose 200 meters above the valley, dominating the ground and everything and everyone around it.

As long as the Chinese held Maryang San, they could dominate the whole area to the south. Earlier attempts by US forces to attack the Chinese position had failed and the Commonwealth Division was then given the task preparatory to a general advance.

On 5 October, while British forces attacked further west, men from A Company 3 RAR attempted an advance along a spur south-east of the summit. The attack acted as a feint by drawing Chinese defenders away from the main ridgeline, up which B and D Companies then advanced.

In a series of intense and hotly contested assaults, D Company captured four knolls leading up the ridgeline. Later that day, C Company took over the attack and captured a feature known as Baldy, before moving on quickly to occupy the summit, which fortunately had been abandoned by the Chinese.

Throughout the next day, the Australians held the summit against heavy Chinese fire and attempts to infiltrate the position. Early on 7 October, B Company captured the final objective 'the Hinge' after a fierce action highlighted by a number of acts of great bravery.

The following day the Chinese continued to launch bombardment after bombardment at the Australians. In the evening, after one of the heaviest Chinese bombardments, the Chinese attempted a number of counter attacks. After each attack the Chinese withdrew with heavy casualties, until they finally gave up in the morning and the Australians' hold on Maryang San was secured.

20 Australians had been killed and 89 wounded in some of the heaviest fighting that Australians were to see in Korea. Several hundreds of casualties were inflicted on the enemy. For outstanding leadership in this battle, Sir Francis was rightly awarded an immediate Distinguished Service Order.

The men of the Battalion under LTCOL Hassett's command performed superbly, in some of the toughest combat conditions of any theatre of war in the 20th Century.

As a battalion commander in Korea, Sir Francis excelled as an inspirational and tactically astute leader. He led without regard for his own safety, sharing every danger with his men and displaying the finest qualities of a Senior Officer - courage, calmness, a capacity for detailed planning and execution and displaying a total trust in his subordinates. Above all he had a tremendous regard for his men; they knew it, sensed it and returned it in spades.

A newly arrived reinforcement officer to the battalion after Maryang San, LT Ron Grey had this to say about his CO:

'There were feelings, almost an aura of command and calm confidence that surrounded the Commanding Officer. "The Hassett touch" left a lasting and life long impression on me as a young rifle platoon commander; a recent reinforcement still as raw as a bunch of freshly cut carrots and on my first day in the line, ready to set out on a night fighting patrol.

Just before last light and ready to go, the field telephone rang. Expecting it to be Basil Hardiman finding yet another fault in me. I answered. It was in fact LTCOL Frank Hassett and he said "I know it is your first time out, good luck, see you at the debrief in the morning". Although a relatively small thing, it left an impression that has remained all these years since May 1952.

What the now General Grey didn't say was that at the briefing session the next morning, surrounded by battle hardened veterans of the battalion orders group, it was the young reinforcement officer's advice that was both called for and accepted by his CO.

Returning from Korea, he had four very happy years at Duntroon, before serving as a Marshal for Queen Elizabeth II's world tour in 1954.

In 1960 he was promoted to Brigadier and specially selected to command of the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade in Malaya. His foresight and influence resulted in the 28th Brigade achieving a far more multinational focus as it conducted counter-insurgency operations in Northern Malaya, prepared for its South East Asia Treaty Organisation role to secure a key airfield in Laos and moved into its new and wonderfully appointed barracks at Terandak in Malacca.

Sir Francis also led participation in regional exercises with Thailand. He contributed to developments in the conduct of, and doctrine relating to, tropical warfare and counter-insurgency. For this work, he was upgraded to Commander in the Order of the British Empire.

As the Australian Army's involvement in the region grew (Borneo and Vietnam), this multinational and targeted approach to command would serve him well as he assumed more senior appointments - including his first two star appointment in 1968 as General Officer in Command of Australia's Northern Command.

With his wealth of training and operational experience, he was a certainty to be chosen to lead the Army Review Committee in 1970, more colloquially known as the "Hassett Committee".

Its far reaching reforms included moving from a geographical to a functional command system, which involved in part the replacement of the various State Army Command Headquarters with a national field force, training and logistics command system; a system that remains largely in place today and has proven its effectiveness in peace and war.

In 1971 as Vice Chief of the General Staff, he was appointed to implement the organisational reforms he had initiated, as well as supervising the end of conscription, the withdrawal of our troops from Vietnam and the consequential organisational changes brought about by a reduction in Army manpower.

In 1973 he was promoted to Lieutenant General as Chief of the General Staff and oversaw the development of brigade bases in Townsville, Enoggera and Holsworthy. In 1975, he was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia for eminent service.

In November of 1975 he was promoted to General, and appointed Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee - the equivalent to today's Chief of the Defence Force. Indeed, he was the inaugural Chief of the Defence Force Staff when the position was created under his watch in February 1976.

The creation of the Chief of the Defence Force Staff was indicative of the major changes that characterised the Defence establishment at the time. Sir Francis worked tirelessly and exhibited tremendous leadership in fusing together three independent and essentially stove-piped structured Services and their separate support bureaucracies.

Given Sir Francis' extraordinary service, his knighthood in June 1976 came as no surprise. But unfortunately, his career-long battle with ill-health would force him into premature retirement in April 1977.

And so ended 42 years of dedicated, loyal and courageous service to the Australian Defence Force, during which his impact upon it was unmistakable. His influence can still be seen across the training, doctrine, structure and functions of Defence. It was largely a result of his impressive leadership that the difficult task of creating a joint organisation was achieved without major stresses and divisions.

Throughout these extraordinary years, Sir Francis was supremely blessed to have the enduring love and support of Lady Hassett in a family relationship that he greatly cherished.

Having met after the war they began courting, and to quote the Commandant at the Army Staff College where Sir Francis instructed at the time:

'Frank Hassett was impossible when he was courting Hallie; he lacked concentration and was often looking for good reasons to get away. I believe that he was absolutely besotted with her - and I could see why'.

Luckily for Sir Francis, and perhaps for the Commandant, Lady Hassett accepted Sir Francis' proposal and they were married on 18 May 1946. They were blessed with four beautiful children - Lyndal, Michael, Sandra and Jonathon and in turn seven wonderful grand-children and a great granddaughter in whom he had so much pride.

Although tragically suffering the loss of their son Michael in a motor vehicle accident, Sir Francis and Lady Hassett embraced family life and later country life with passion and dedication. Their inspiration has seen three of their grandchildren Michael, Andrew and Christopher serving with distinction in today's Defence Force.

Their love endured all the stresses of service life: operational deployments, frequent postings, separation and the loss of a much loved son. Throughout his lengthy illness it was Hallie who cared for and loved him right to his peaceful passing at home, where he wanted to be.

So from whom did this quiet but very special infantry officer draw his inspiration as a military leader?

There were three: Warrant Officer Sid Greville of the Australian Instructional Corps, General Sir William Bridgeford, his inspirational commander in Bougainville, and General Sir Thomas Daly, his boss as Chief of the General Staff.

The common characteristic shared by these outstanding men was that they were all quiet achievers, strong believers in the military ethic and with a great love for their soldiers; themes that resonate with Sir Francis' own leadership style.

Sir Francis believed in leadership by example, self-discipline and quiet competence. His subordinates thought that he was charismatic and his professional confidence and loyalty permeated through all who worked for him.

Colonel Maurie Pears, a platoon commander at Maryang San, once wrote:

'My service with the General in Korea was the turning point in my life. It gave me confidence, an understanding of my fellow man, and a realisation that good care of your men will provide massive returns. His trust in personally briefing me before Maryang San gave me the confidence in myself for the first time. I doubt whether I would have had the courage to proceed to Maryang San after the assault on Kowang San without his comforting and inspirational presence. I had moved from a troublesome and unconfident subaltern to one who was conscious of his men and his responsibilities because of the Hassett inspiration.'

Sir Francis earned the admiration, gratitude, affection and respect of those soldiers who served in battle with him.

He was a man of high values - particularly integrity and compassion. He was a born leader and epitomised the Royal Australian Regimental motto of 'Duty First'.

Corporal Ted Doyle, Sir Francis' batman for many years once said 'If I had to sum up the General in a few words, I would say he is the finest man I have ever had the pleasure to meet, let alone to work for'.

Sir Francis' influence on leadership continues today. The Hassett Award, established, in 2006 thanks to a generous donation by Sir Francis and Lady Hassett, reflects his own experiences in youth. It annually honours the best of junior leadership within the Royal Australian Regiment to inspire the next generation of promising leaders. I was particularly proud to have had the opportunity to present the inaugural award with Sir Francis in October 2006.

May I conclude with a quote from Brigadier John Essex-Clark's fine newspaper obituary:

'His personal and primary legacy was as an exemplar of inspirational leadership, gracious and quiet charisma, unflappable planning and decision making, extreme will power under pressure and a belief in the wisdom and ability of his fellow men.'

May a good, great and gentle man rest eternally in deserving peace.