

Speech

Address By

His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)

On the occasion of

Centenary of the Royal Australian Survey Corps Wreathlaying Ceremony

The Australian War Memorial, Canberra
1 July 2015

Good morning.

On this day, 100 years ago, the Australia Survey Corps was formed.

And today we lay wreaths.

To remember.

To pay tribute.

And to honour those surveyors who served and gave their lives in conflicts around the world.

As any soldier will tell you, maps are fundamental to warfare.

In the 1700's the Prussian King Frederick the Great put it well when he said that '*knowledge of the country is to a general what a rifle is to an infantry man*'.

In the Peninsular War the British forces led by Arthur Wellesley and John Moore used reconnaissance officers to spy out land in path of the enemy and to develop map detail that proved crucial in battle.

So it has always been the case that maps are of great tactical importance in the battlefield.

They inform good decision making.

And they save lives.

And I have seen this first hand.

In Vietnam, the A section of the 1st topographical Troop served with distinction and provided a level of support well beyond what was planned or expected.

These men were widely renowned as dedicated, tough and great innovators.

They worked in testing conditions and with basic equipment—but they always produced whatever was asked of them, quickly and accurately.

But it was the outbreak of the First World War that heralded the establishment of the Australian Survey Corps and what would become 80 years of service in a range of conflicts around the globe.

Serving with the AIF—and some with the Royal Engineers—Survey Corp members were active on the Western Front and in the

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Middle East.

And proudly, two soldiers Sgt William Stafford RAE (*Royal Australian Engineers*) and WO2 Alan Murray were awarded DCMs, second only to the VC, for gallant performance of their survey duties.

Today, Murray's medals take pride of place in the Survey Corps Museum.

The advent of World War II saw a huge expansion of the Corps as it reached a full strength of 1700, its largest size in its 81 year history.

Altogether, some 1400 different maps were produced during the war with roughly half of them being within Australia.

Units served with distinction in many theatres, from Palestine and Lebanon to the South Pacific and New Guinea.

In recognition of this service the title 'Royal' was granted to the Corps in 1948.

On the Kokoda track, the great contribution of surveyors is remembered at Owers Corner, named after Lieutenant "Gerry" Owers, Australian Survey Corps.

And today the surveying tradition continues, with ADF surveyors most recently serving in Afghanistan.

Apart from active service, it is also appropriate that we acknowledge the peace time contribution the Survey Corps made to our nation

The Corps produced almost half of the general purpose mapping required by Government for the national development and defence of Australia.

And its members provided the initial mapping for big national projects like the Snowy Mountains Scheme and the Woomera Rocket Range.

But it is the active service, the sacrifices and the contributions made by the men and women of the Royal Australian Survey Corps that we commemorate here today.

On this 100th anniversary, we pay tribute to those whose skill and passion for surveying became integral to the work of the Australian military.

And of course we offer our deepest respects to the 20 men who have given their lives serving with the Survey Corps or as members of the ADF on military survey operations.

It was their duty to serve and it is our duty to remember them—and that is what we do today, and every day.

Lest we forget.

—ends—

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