

SPEECH NOTES

FOR BRIGADIER NEIL WEEKES, AM, MC (RETD)

LEGACY COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE

SUNDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2007-10-05

1. WELCOME TO ALL THOSE ATTENDING THE LEGACY NATIONAL CONFERENCE, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO HAVE TRAVELLED A LONG WAY TO BE HERE IN TOWNSVILLE, NORTH QUEENSLAND – GOD’S COUNTRY. A SPECIAL WELCOME TO ALL THE LEGATEES, THE WIDOWS, AND CHILDREN OF DEPARTED VETERANS.
2. WELCOME ALSO TO ALL THE VETERANS, MEMBERS OF THE ADF, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, GIRLS AND BOYS.
3. ON 19 TH JULY 1916, THE AUSTRALIAN 5TH DIVISION, COMPRISING MAINLY YOUNG MEN FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND QUEENSLAND, WERE INVOLVED IN THE BATTLE FOR FROMELLES. AFTER AN ARTILLERY BARRAGE WHICH STARTED AT 0600, THE DIVISION WENT INTO ACTION AT 1800 HRS. BY 0545 NEXT MORNING THE DIVISION HAD LOST 5533 OF AUSTRALIA’S FINEST KILLED OR WOUNDED, INCLUDING 400 WHO WERE TAKEN PRISONERS. DURING WORLD WAR 1 AUSTRALIA DESPATCHED SOME 330,000 MEN AND WOMEN TO FIGHT OVERSEAS, FROM A POPULATION OF JUST OVER 4 MILLION. OF THESE MORE THAN 50,000 WERE KILLED AND OVER 160,000 WERE WOUNDED – A CASUALTY RATE OF TWO IN EVERY THREE. WE CANNOT EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE THE DEVASTATION THIS CAUSED TO THOUSANDS OF FAMILIES BACK HERE. ALMOST EVERY FAMILY LOST A FATHER, A SON, A BROTHER OR A NEIGHBOUR. SOME FAMILIES LOST EVERY MALE. IF YOU GO TO A LITTLE PLACE CALLED NEBO, JUST WEST OF MACKAY OR TO SARINA OR TO ANY OTHER LITTLE TOWN, THE COST IS INSCRIBED ON THEIR CENOTAPHS.
4. THEN THERE WAS THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WE HAVE TO WONDER HOW THESE FAMILIES SURVIVED.
5. WHILE NOT AS HORRENDOUS, WORLD WAR 11 ALSO LEFT MANY HOMES WITHOUT A MOTHER OR FATHER.
6. AUSTRALIA HAS LOST OVER 100,000 OF ITS FINEST KILLED IN ACTION IN ALL CONFLICTS.
7. FOR ALL THOSE FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOST A MOTHER OR FATHER IT MUST BE A DIFFICULT CHALLENGE TO GO ON WITH THEIR LIVES.
8. IN AUSTRALIA WE HAVE BEEN MORE FORTUNATE THAN MOST OTHERS BECAUSE BACK IN 1923 A GROUP OF VETERANS, A BAND OF BROTHERS, GOT TOGETHER TO TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER AND, AS ONE DIGGER SAID “TO

TAKE CARE OF THE WIVES AND THE KIDS OF THOSE WHO DID NOT COME HOME”.

9. WE ALL KNOW THAT THE WIDOWS OF DECEASED VETERANS RECEIVE A PENSION. HOWEVER THIS BAND OF BROTHERS, THE LEGATEES, THE PEOPLE HERE TODAY, OFFER MUCH MORE THAN THAT. YOU HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING, AN EMPATHY WITH THE GRIEVING FAMILIES. JUST TO BE ABLE TO SIT DOWN AND HAVE A CUPPA AND A CHAT, OR TO OFFER A KIND WORD OF CONSOLATION OR OF ENCOURAGEMENT. THAT'S THE HUMAN TOUCH THAT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES CANNOT PROVIDE. THAT IS THE HUMAN SPIRIT THAT TRANSCENDS ALL THE FINANCIAL AND PHYSICAL SUPPORT. THAT TOO IS IMPORTANT AND LEGATEES GIVEN OF THEIR TIME WITHOUT QUESTION TO HELP THOSE IN NEED. WHEN GOING INTO ACTION, MEN OFTEN PASSED A HURRIEDLY WRITTEN NOTE TO THEIR MATE WITH A REQUEST THAT IF THEY DIDN'T MAKE IT, WOULD THE MATE DELIVER IT TO THE ADDRESSEE. WITHOUT EVEN SAYING IT, THEY ALSO KNEW THAT THEIR MATE WOULD, SOMEHOW, TAKE CARE OF THOSE WHO WERE LEFT BEHIND. THAT IS REAL MATESHIP.
10. LIKE MANY WHO HAVE SERVED OVERSEAS, I CAN STILL VIVIDLY RECALL SEEING YOUNG GIRLS OF 6 OR 7, AT A LITTLE PLACE CALLED DAT DO IN VIETNAM, WHO WERE LOOKING AFTER YOUNGER CHILDREN, OF TWO OR LESS, BECAUSE THEIR PARENTS HAD BEEN KILLED OR FORCED TO TAKE UP ARMS. THEY HAD NO ONE TO LOOK AFTER THEM. THANK GOODNESS THIS DOES NOT OCCUR IN AUSTRALIA.
11. TODAY, AS THE NUMBER OF OUR VETERANS CONTINUES TO DIMISH, THE CHALLENGES FACING LEGACY INCREASE, PARTICULARLY AS MANY WIDOWS WILL LIVE LONGER AND THEIR NEEDS WILL INCREASE. IN MANY WAYS, OUR NATION HAS BECOME A LITTLE DESENSITISED TOWARDS THE WIDOWS AND CHILDREN OF VETERANS. BECAUSE OF OUR EVER INCREASING POPULATION, WE ARE NO LONGER AS PERSONALLY AFFECTED WHEN ONE OF OUR MILITARY PERSONNEL IS KILLED OVERSEAS. IN FACT WE HAVE HAD VERY FEW OF OUR MEN AND WOMEN KILLED, THANK GOODNESS. HOW EASY IT IS TO SAY THAT BUT IT WOULD NOT BE EASY FOR THE FAMILIES OF THOSE FEW.
12. IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT WE GATHER AT THIS CENOTAPH TODAY TO REMEMBER ALL THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY WE REMEMBER THAT THEY LEFT US A LEGACY OF FREEDOM AND THEY KNEW THAT THEIR MATES WOULD TAKE CARE OF THOSE LEFT BEHIND. I SOMETIMES THINK IT IS IRONIC WHEN I LOOK AT THE INSCRIPTION ON THE CENOTAPH AS IT SAYS “IN MEMOERY OF THE MEN AND BOYS WHO FELL DURING THE GREAT WAR”. THERE IS NO MENTION OF THE LADIES, OR OF THE FAMILIES WHO HAD TO GO ON WITH THEIR LIVES, WHO ENDURED ALL TYPES OF LONELINESS AND HARDSHIPS BECAUSE THESE MEN AND BOYS HAD NEVER RETURNED. WAR IS A HUNGRY BEAST THAT DOES NOT DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN FRIEND OR FOE, OR BETWEEN COMBATANTS AND

CIVILIANS, OR BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN OR EVEN CHILDREN. IT HAS A VORACIOUS, CRUEL UNCARING APPETITE.

13. WITHOUT LEGACY AND ALL THOSE WHO ARE INVOLVED, IN MANY WAYS, THERE WOULD BE MANY FAMILIES WHO WOULD BE IN EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TIMES THAN WHAT THEY ARE OR HAVE BEEN
14. SO, ON BEHALF OF ALL THOSE WIDOWS AND THEIR FAMILIES, I SAY THANK YOU TO ALL THE LEGATEES AND SUPPORTERS FOR ALL THE SUPERB WORK THAT YOU, AND THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE YOU, HAVE DONE, AND CONTINUE TO DO, FOR THE FAMILIES OF THOSE WHO DID NOT RETURN, AND FOR ALL THE WORK YOU DO FOR OUR NATION, I HOPE THAT ONE DAY WE WILL NOT NEED YOU BUT THAT WOULD MEAN WE LIVE IN A PERFECT, PEACEFUL WORLD, UTOPIA. WHILE EVER WE SEND OUR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN INTO DANGEROUS SITUATIONS THE CHANCES ARE THAT SOMEONE WILL BE KILLED. THEN A FAMILY WILL BE IN DARKNESS, BUT AT LEAST THEY WILL KNOW THAT THERE IS A TORCH, A LEGACY TORCH, THAT WILL HELP THEM, VIA THE LEGATEES, THROUGH THEIR DIFFICULT TIMES. THAT TORCH IS NOT JUST A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS IT IS THE LIGHT OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT, OF MATESHIP (AND I USE THAT WORD INCLUSIVELY OF MALE AND FEMALE). IT IS A LIGHT OF HOPE THAT HELPS ONE GO FORWARD.
15. THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU ALL.