



ADDRESS TO 60TH ANNIVERSARY VP DAY RECEPTION

by

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL ANGUS HOUSTON, AO, AFC

13 August 2005

It is a great privilege to speak here this evening on behalf of all the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of victory in the Pacific, and to pay tribute to the extraordinary contribution made by Australian servicemen and women during the Second World War.

The Second World War remains a defining moment in the history of our nation. Six years of tragedy, struggle and immense sacrifice in widely differing theatres of war, from the skies over Europe, through the deserts of North Africa, to the islands of the Pacific, right to our own doorstep. To date it is our largest and most complex experience of war, and the most destructive conflict the world has ever seen.

Over one million Australian men and women served during this time, and, tragically, 39 000 of our fellow Australians paid the ultimate price in defeating fascism and preserving democracy. The strong and spirited character of our nation rests firmly on the inheritance of this sacrifice. It also rests on those who were fortunate enough to come home. They were the driving force that shaped our great Australian nation in the second half of the 20th century.

Of course, we are all gathered here this evening not only to commemorate this sacrifice and give thanks to the extraordinary veterans here with us, but to also celebrate the fact that 60 years ago, this dreadful war finally came to an end.

When Prime Minister Chifley famously decreed, "Fellow citizens, the war is over", and signalled that all Australians could look forward to a life unthreatened by war: some celebrated with triumph and renewed hope; some spent the day in quiet reflection. Ultimately though, everyone knew that the war was over and that nothing would be quite the same again—too many people had lost too much.

Sixty years is a long time. A sad consequence of the passage of time is that every year the numbers of surviving WWII veterans diminish. It is our privilege and our duty to ensure that their great service continues to be remembered and honoured. This is a lasting debt we owe to all those that have served our fine nation.

So tonight—indeed this whole weekend—we commemorate, we remember, we honour and we give thanks to an entire generation of Aussies, who—when it mattered most—served, sacrificed and demonstrated those finest Aussie qualities of courage, compassion, and endurance.

Tonight we should also not forget the men and women of the ADF who are currently serving with great distinction on operations overseas. You can be very proud, just as I am, of the contribution they are making and the way in which they are conducting themselves. They are serving in the fine tradition established at ANZAC Cove and reaffirmed sixty years ago by the remarkable World War II generation. Indeed, they are inspired by the incredible achievements of those great World War II Australians who fought so bravely to secure our future.

To all World War II Veterans and their families here tonight, a very sincere thank you for your service and sacrifice. You have given us a wonderful nation.

Lest we forget.

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