

Dawn service address
25th April 2018
GPCAPT Annette Holian

Your excellency, parliamentarians, senior officers, my community,

In the predawn light we gather on this holy ground to remember those who served and those that we lost. We honour the bravery of those who left comfortable lives, family and jobs to answer Australia's needs. We honour the sacrifice families made to keeping the world and Australia safe. We reflect on what we can give in return.

For many today, thoughts will turn to the diggers of World War one. I discovered a long and honourable history of army service by men in my family, including a Military Medal earned by Gunner George Ridgway near Villers Bretonneux on 24th April 1918. I have great uncles buried on the western front, others remembered on the Menin gate- branches of the family snipped off too soon. One was Private Hedley Howard Thomas. A stretcher bearer, he was shot and killed by a sniper in July 1918 whilst tending to a wounded soldier.

12 months on, a baby boy was named for him. Another Hedley Thomas. He served with the Royal Australian Engineers in Papua New Guinea in WW2. My living uncle Hedley is with us today. I honour his service and those of his generation. We remember too those who served in Korea and Vietnam who received little support from our community on their return.

But today

I stand before you as a woman, a mother, a sister a daughter. I stand for current and recent serving members of the ADF. I stand for the medical teams who served in our longest war. I stand as an orthopaedic surgeon with the honour of representing my generation in my city.

As a child growing up in Reservoir, I did not feel brave, but I was encouraged to try new things, to be who I wanted to be. I did not take the well-trodden path but made my own. Medicine was my calling. Surgery my passion. I did not plan to be a military surgeon, but in uniform I was able to go forward with our men and women and support them in austere and dangerous environments as they support us in securing peace. I have taken the opportunities as they arose. And they have taken me to extraordinary places and to serve with the very finest medical teams.

In Afghanistan our combined surgical and ICU teams were only small: 3 doctors, 5 nurses and 2 medics. We were never off-duty. I watched our two ICU nurses work 12 hr shifts on and off for three weeks straight to keep a local policeman alive. The doctors working in ICU were also on duty in the trauma bay and operating theatre. No relief. No rest in place. No moment when we couldn't be recalled to the trauma bay. Members who hold their values high and live them as they work. Caring compassionate humble people who are not afraid to show their humanity.

I want you to know the stories of those veterans who live amongst you now.

We can live our lives cocooned in the comfort of our homes, never reaching our potential. But these men and women had the courage to let go of comfort. It did not mean they were not afraid. They acknowledged their fears, stepped forward took risks and served anyway.

We learned resilience through adversity. We learned to get through the challenges together. We explored the limits of our potential and found those limits far greater than we suspected. Yet now so many struggle to find employment.

Ask veterans about their service, what stories their medals tell. I want you to know of their bravery, their courage on bases, in hospitals and in the field. You will be inspired by their stories.

To me my medals represent personal hardship, specific challenges and many victories. Medical battles with scalpels, antiseptics, blood and dressings. Mateship and loss. Laughter and humour.

Mine remind me of the people I cared for on deployment.

- A baby whose future I changed by correcting her foot deformities,
- Broken, Injured children
- a hungry child who lost an eye to a rock thrown by a farmer defending his crops
- An 8yo who was shot as he slept
- They reflect my efforts to save the remnants of a soldier's hands lost when his grenade went off- enough to allow his home country to restore his ability to hold his baby
- The Dutch soldiers we cared for who despite all odds made it off our operating table and back to the Netherlands.
- The care we provided for US marines badly injured in IED blasts but who survived because of their extreme fitness and a hospital system designed for trauma 24 hours a day.

They remind me of the emotion we faced

- Living in the devastation in Aceh with streets and rivers choked with debris and thousands of bodies.
- The two survivors we cared for on a ship where on a clear sunny day we lost a helicopter and nine members of the Australian Defence Force. Those lost were medical teams and the helicopter crew. The dignity we gave our dead as we prepared them for their journey home. The grief we felt at their loss, but the leadership that supported us to complete the mission in their honour.
- The pride we felt as Australians in Oruzgan, in being there for the Australian soldiers injured in the Battle of Ana Kalay. My medals remind me of the way we cared for those men not only as medical staff but as family before sending them back towards Australia, to safety.

Wondering always if we had done enough. If we were enough. Could someone else have done better?

Through exercises and deployments, I have faced my own mortality

I have crystallised what is important to me.

Nurturing and supporting my family, my children and my junior doctors

Ensuring our soldiers are backed by the very best medical care possible when they put themselves at risk.

I have raised my children to be courageous and independent
To get up even when totally overwhelmed
To show up and shift their thinking, to seize golden opportunities with open arms
To identify their values
To stand up for what they believe in
To speak up for those who have no voice

I ask you, my community, to take up this challenge
I ask you to be brave
Stand up for what you believe in. Speak up for others.
To be kind especially to yourselves
To be human- to lower the bar and accept imperfection,
We are all imperfect, but that does not make us unworthy.
Accept yourself just as you are- you are enough.

As a leader, whether in front of the group or from within
To help every member reach their potential, to be the best they can be
To encourage your children regardless of gender to be brave.
Especially encourage girls to be brave, to stretch their experiences, to try, to fail, to get up
and try again.
Acknowledge the small moments of courage in every day.
raise up the most vulnerable among us and give them a voice
support each other, our youth and our veterans.

I ask you to join me in doing what we can every day to make life better for the veterans who
served this community and allowed us to live with our current freedoms.
Honour their service, respect their sacrifice and support their families. Give them a fair go.
Give them employment Give them connection and our community will reap the rewards.

LEST WE FORGET

“ANZAC is not merely about loss. It is about courage and endurance and duty and love of
country and mateship and good humour and the survival of a sense of self worth and
decency in the face of dreadful odds.”