

## Merici College ANZAC Assembly Service 2023 – CMDR Ween

Thank you, Georgia, for that lovely introduction. Good Afternoon Mrs Masters, teaching and support staff, parents, fellow former and current serving Defence members and most importantly, Merici students. Some of you may know me as Elizabeth, Madeline, Georgia or Alexandra's Mum; others will know me as Mrs Ween or Christina and the rest of you will know me as Commander Ween. No matter which hat I am wearing, I'd just like to say that I'm so thrilled to be here today to speak to you about ANZAC Day, what it means to me personally and how it relates to Communitas or Community.

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging. I would also like to pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

ANZAC Day commemorates the landing of Australian and New Zealand troops on the Gallipoli peninsula on the 25th April 1915.

We gather as always, not to glorify war, but to remind ourselves that we value who we are and the freedoms we possess; and to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of those who contributed to shaping the identity of our nation, and those that continue to serve.

We are here today to remember those of all generations, who have served our nation and paid the ultimate sacrifice; never again to return home to the land they loved; never again to see their family and friends.

Sadly, our World War II service members are now very few in number. Known as the Greatest Generation- they helped our allies to defeat hate, cruelty and greed in Europe and across the Indo-Pacific.

These veterans, both women and men, who returned, tempered by war, took on the task of rebuilding Australia. We are all in their debt, and we pay our respects to those of that generation of citizens, still with us today.

The experience of wars in Korea and Vietnam remains vivid in the hearts and minds of many Australians. Those of us in uniform today have inherited the legacy of those who served in these wars, they epitomised the spirit and values displayed in every battle in which Australians have proven themselves. The men and women of today's Australian Defence Force, strive daily to emulate the qualities of self-sacrifice, courage and a fair go for others demonstrated by those who have come before us in the Australian Uniform. Their example offers both inspiration and the required standard of us.

There are also younger ADF veterans who equally deserve our respect and our gratitude. Marked by their experience far from our shores, many have lost friends, and there is still much pain from these losses. These veterans stand alongside us every day, making their contribution to our Nation; serving their community just as the earlier generations of veterans have done.

ANZAC day, was first commemorated during the First World War, to ensure that the sacrifices made by Australians and New Zealanders on the shores of Gallipoli on the 25 April 1915 would not be

forgotten. We pause to reflect on the contribution, made by all of our past and present service personnel who have chosen a life of service to their country.

Now when I think of ANZAC Day, I am reminded of my own service over the last 30 years and the sacrifices made by my family in supporting my desire to serve this nation. I joined the Navy as a 19-year-old back in 1993 but unlike the Anzacs who were of similar age going off to war, I instead, commenced degree studies at the Australian Defence Force Academy. I really had no idea of what my future would hold beyond wanting to travel the world and defend Australia and her interests. It is hard to explain exactly what it is that I do, but as a Maritime Logistics Officer, I am very much aligned to helping community.

At sea; a logistics officer is responsible for people and delivery of logistic support functions to keep the ship at a high-level readiness to conduct operations. This includes the management of spare parts for maintenance, port visit planning and replenishment, finances, catering & hospitality, and business management. This is important not only in operating in our region, to protect our maritime trade and deter aggression but also in providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief including responding to domestic crises or just being part of the Australian Community. You'll see throughout my slides, typical examples of how this is achieved.

In January 2004, one week before my first wedding anniversary, I deployed without notice and without access to communications in HMAS SUCCESS, an oil replenishment ship, to conduct Operation CELESTA. This was the patrol of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone or EEZ in the vicinity of Heard Island. Now Heard Island is an Australian Island, listed as a world heritage site, about 4000km southwest of the mainland in the Southern Ocean and about 1500 kilometres north of Antarctica. It is very difficult to get to and takes around 10 days sailing time from Western Australia. At the time, the Urugyayan fishing vessel Maya V was intercepted by HMAS WARRAMUNGA whilst illegally fishing for Patagonian toothfish in the Southern Ocean. WARRAMUNGA conducted a very difficult boarding in freezing conditions resulting in four crew members being thrown into the sea before being rescued.

It was a pretty scary time with some of those crew members recovering from hyperthermia; but once the boarding party operations could resume, and WARRAMUNGA had control of the Maya V; SUCCESS located and recovered the illegal fishing bouys in order to stop exploitation of this valuable fish stock. Despite the sub-zero temperatures, hazardous boat and helo operations and risk of hitting icebergs close to the Antarctic circle; protecting our valued fishing resources just seemed like the right thing to do and is just one of the ways our Navy protects our community and national interests.

Some years later, on the 8th of November 2013; Typhoon Haiyan, known as Super Typhoon Yolanda struck the Philippines and was one of the most powerful tropical cyclones ever recorded and the Philippine's worst-ever natural disaster. More than 8,000 people lost their lives and over 14 million inhabitants were affected by the storm. HMAS TOBRUK, an amphibious heavy lift ship, arrived at Ormoc, just 2 weeks later, in support of Operation PHILIPPINES ASSIST. More than 500 ADF personnel were deployed to the Philippines to assist in the clearing of debris, and to repair and reconstruct schools in the Ormoc area. Tobruk assisted in the delivery of supplies to outlying islands and difficult to reach communities. In the early weeks of the operation, the ADF evacuated more than 1250 people, transported almost 200 officials into the disaster zone and provided 360 tonnes of emergency relief supplies.

Amongst delivering tents and food, we also helped rebuild local schools and replaced much needed school books and sporting equipment for the children. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my career and when I eventually spoke to my children aged 2,4,6 & 8 to tell them I might not make it home in time for Christmas, my eldest said, its Ok Mummy, those children in the Philippines have lost everything and they need you more than us right now. I will never forget my children's generosity of spirit and the support they have given me over the years whilst I have deployed for extended periods of time. It is not only my sacrifice but their sacrifice that supports our community and neighbouring countries.

In more recent years, our Defence personnel have supported our own people here at home. This was the case in Australia's intense 2019/20 bushfire season where fires engulfed more than 12.6 million hectares of land, destroyed more than 3,000 homes and killed 33 people. Defence's initial support began in Queensland but as the situation deteriorated with fires multiplying across the nation, Operation BUSHFIRE ASSIST was stood up on New Years' Eve for three months. At the operation's peak, some 6,500 ADF members provided support to emergency services and authorities in six states and territories. They included about 3,000 Reservists and was the largest ever mobilisation of the ADF in response to a domestic disaster. Over the summer, Defence personnel worked behind the bushfire front lines, in the sky and on the sea, and in offices and operational backrooms to support their fellow Australians. Just like the ANZACs, they showed courage, resilience, mateship and altruism – qualities that have come to define our national character, particularly in times of hardship and adversity.

Each year, the ANZAC spirit inspires me still; in more ways than I have time to share with you today. It is also time to pass the mantle on, to the next generation which includes my own family as you have probably noticed in the pictures. When I take the uniform off, I continue to be an active member of my community – I challenge all of you to do the same; to give back and be part of the Merici community, whether it be through Christian Service Hours or the activities you undertake with your families.

As we stand together as a community today, we acknowledge the vital role of all those who have served, and continue to serve on the home front. Without the support, commitment, confidence and sacrifice of wives, husbands and children, mums and dads, brothers and sisters, it would simply not be possible for Australian service personnel to do the work they do.

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