

20 April 2017

Greetings

Moderator's Anzac Day Message 2017

Below is a worthy tribute, written by the Rev Dr Tony Martin, to the men and women who've served our country through the military over the years of our nationhood – many of whom have made the ultimate sacrifice – the giving of their own lives.

This offering of all that one has for the sake of family, friends and nation is perhaps behind the rising popularity of Anzac Day observation by the young. And yet, it is still war that we remember and the tension between the glorification of war, which is inimical to our faith, and the honouring of those who gave all that they had for us is real.

I believe we must live with that tension - as much as we should hate war and all that it represents, we must also acknowledge the incredible self-giving of those who serve us through it. In the final analysis, let us worship at the altar of peace while glorifying the spirit of self-sacrifice in war, and wherever it may be found.

We will remember them...

I commend to you this reflection by the Rev Dr Tony Martin, who has served in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Church of Scotland, and has wide experience in both parish ministry and army chaplaincy. While serving sixteen years in the British Army he served British Army he served four years with the Parachute Regiment, spent five years on operational tours in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Kosovo and was NATO Senior Chaplain (ARRC) in Germany.



Richard Dawson
Moderator, Presbyterian Church Aotearoa New Zealand



Anzac Day is observed in New Zealand as a day of commemoration for those who died in the service of our country and to honour all servicemen and servicewomen from the army, navy and airforce. The date itself marks the anniversary of the landing of New Zealand and Australian soldiers – the Anzacs – on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915. Most of us are aware that thousands of people lost their lives in the Gallipoli campaign.

Anzac Day was first marked in 1916. The day has gone through many changes since then. My first memory of Anzac Day was as a very young child, living in Haumoana in Hawkes Bay, being disturbed by the sound of bagpipes with men shouting military commands outside my bedroom window, which faced the street opposite the war memorial.

I have since been privileged to participate in services in Westminster Abbey and on the battle fields in Europe. The ceremonies that are held at war memorials up and down the country, or in places overseas where New Zealanders gather, vary in size and ritual but essentially share the same approach of giving thanks for all who have served to protect our country and to honour every effort to secure peace with justice.

It is helpful to remember that in World War I, 100,000 New Zealanders served overseas, from a population of one million. More than 18,000 died and over 40,000 were wounded; that is a 60 percent casualty rate. And most were young men. The horror of war impacts everybody, and no one hates war more than those who have served.

This year we remember the Battle of Passchendaele which has entered New Zealand folklore as one of the bloodiest in our country's history. In fact, the New Zealand Division fought two battles - the first on 4 October 1917, which was regarded as a comprehensive victory, and eight days later they attempted another attack, which resulted in no objectives being taken, and many New Zealand soldiers being killed and injured. It was our Army's most disastrous day of war and the losses shocked the nation.

As a young man serving in the New Zealand Army I attended a presentation by a brigadier. At the end of the presentation he was asked, "Why are you a soldier?". Without hesitation, his eyes welled up with tears and he replied: "I serve as a soldier so we may never experience another Passchendaele". I thought his reply was slightly enigmatic and I have often reflected on his comment. And I ask you today



to reflect on the Battles of Passchendaele and on how, as a nation, we should do things differently in the future.

It is fair to say that many Christians genuinely struggle in reconciling their faith with military service; and especially in supporting the government of the day in committing our nation to armed conflict. This is not unique to Christians, nor should it be lightly considered. I believe the Lord cares deeply for the world and all its people; and I have no doubt God wills justice and love to prevail. However, the reality of our sinful nature and at times the consuming evil in the world compels our democratically elected leaders to deploy our armed forces, to defend the helpless and to restore justice. Perhaps there is no more difficult and fearful decision a government can make. In saying this, we should remember that it is the sailor, soldier, and airman and airwoman who join the battle and make the ultimate sacrifice.

Etched on the back of a 29-year-old New Zealander serving in the Australian Army are the words “For Honour, For Country, For Brothers, For Anzacs”. Curtis McGrath summarises how many in the armed forces feel about their military service. Curtis paid the price of serving in the Australian Army when he stepped on an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan which nearly killed him, and resulted in the loss of both of his legs.

On Anzac Day this year Curtis will address the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, where he will speak to the nation at the Dawn Parade. I can think of no better example of the Anzac spirit that lives on today, and I am proud that he is a member of my family. Anzac Day is an opportunity for the nation and the Church to remember and honour our servicemen and servicewomen.

As we say the Ode together, and as we fall silent for the Last Post and Reveille, let us remember our fallen, honour those who serve, renew our commitment to each other, and renew our commitment to the causes of peace and justice throughout the world.

Rev Dr Tony Martin