



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
FAREWELL TO HMAS SYDNEY, TOBRUK AND OXLEY
FREMANTLE - 14 MARCH 1990**

Lord Mayor of Perth,
Mayor of Fremantle,
Minister for Police, Graham Edwards,
Parliamentary Colleagues,
Men and Women of the Royal Australian Navy,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

We are here today to farewell the crew of HMAS SYDNEY and HMAS TOBRUK. They have a rendezvous with history.

On 25 April, with the crew of HMAS OXLEY, they will have the honour to represent Australia and the Royal Australian Navy at the Dardanelles for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli.

Friends,

Many of the great landmarks of Australia's unfolding story are inscribed with the names of ships and fleets - from the eleven little ships of the First Fleet in 1788: to the vast armada of ocean liners which, after 1946, throughout the fifties and into the sixties, brought countless thousands of families to their new home, to a new life of hope and freedom in Australia. For most of them, Fremantle was the first Australian port of call.

But in all this story written upon the seas, nothing matches, as the embodiment of a young nation's pride, its hopes and fears, the voyage undertaken 75 years ago, and symbolised by the journey which SYDNEY and TOBRUK begin today.

The world had not seen such a voyage before. Its uniqueness is evident from the vivid description of the Official War Historian:

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"From 24 October 1914, there began to arrive in King George's Sound, the great, safe, lonely harbour of Albany in the south-western corner of Australia, transport after transport, carrying men, horses, guns. At 6.45 a.m. on 1 November, the Orient liner ORVIENTO, carrying General William Bridges, his staff, and over one thousand men from Melbourne, led the transports out from the harbour heads. The twenty-six Australian transports formed up first, in three divisions, steaming parallel with a mile between them. The ten New Zealand ships in two similar divisions followed, and the warships escorted. Two days later, two Western Australian transports, out of Fremantle, met the fleet at sea. Then, with the British cruiser MINOTAUR five miles ahead, the IBUKI and MELBOURNE four miles out on either beam, and the SYDNEY far astern, the thirty-eight transports, (carrying some thirty thousand men and eight thousand horses) headed for Suez en route to England".

We know, of course, that momentous decisions were even then being made in London, which changed the plan and led, ultimately, to the Dardenelles campaign.

Before new orders were received, HMAS SYDNEY, on 9 November 1914, pursued and destroyed the German raider EMDEN off the Cocos Islands, allowing the convoy to proceed unchallenged across the Indian Ocean.

But as a result of the new orders, the voyage ended at Alexandria on 3 December, and the ANZACS disembarked to complete their training in Egypt.

Thus it happened, that an army of young Australians, drawn from every part of a Commonwealth brought into being only fourteen years previously, encamped in the shadow of the Pyramids, in the same place where the armies of Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon had camped before.

Six months after they sailed from home, they were to land on Gallipoli. Nearly 8,000 of them were to fall there.

Next month, when we assemble to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the landing at Anzac Cove, in the honoured presence of a significant number of First AIF veterans, we will be thinking deeply about the true meaning of ANZAC, its meaning for the life and spirit of this nation.

But let it be said at once:

In honouring the immense sacrifice of Gallipoli, we in no way glorify war.

Nor do we seek to justify the immeasurable tragedy of the First World War, still working its way through human history, in the tremendous events re-shaping Europe today.

Yet there can be no doubt as to the profound and enduring impact Gallipoli and all it stands for, has had on this nation, from the first moment the electrifying news reached Australia.

But I suggest, my friends and fellow Australians, that the source of Gallipoli's power to grip the imagination and stir the spirit of the nation, lies deeper, much deeper, than Australian pride in courage, endurance, and prowess in battle, deeper even than the sense of so much loss and waste.

And I believe that the heart of its meaning can be discerned, if we reflect for a moment on the very purpose of our meeting here today - to farewell the crews of SYDNEY, TOBRUK, and OXLEY, as they leave home.

The Official War historian, the late Charles Bean, takes us to the heart of the matter when he asks the question:

"What motives sustained the Anzacs?"

And giving his answers, he wrote this:

"The love of country in the Australians was intense- how strong. they did not realise until they were far away from their home:"

This, I believe, leads us to a deep truth about the place of the Anzacs in the development of this nation and its sense of national identity, its nationhood.

In those terrible years, 1914 - 1918, Australians, some four hundred thousand of them by the end - all volunteers - by no means, all of them born here, and fewer still with parents born here - came together; and for the first time, shared a common endeavour, a common adventure, a common danger, a common sacrifice - not as Western Australians or South Australians, not as Queenslanders or Tasmanians - but as Australians.

And bonding this splendid company of young Australians together, in an unbreakable mateship, was the very fact that they were all so far from home - swept, almost inexplicably, by great tides of history, thousands of miles from home, thousands of miles of ocean from all they knew and loved.

And for the first time, Australians, not just as individuals, but as a nation, came to realise how much they loved Australia, their home. And sixty thousand of them were never to come home.

It is this that gives Gallipoli and all that followed its almost unbearable poignancy.

It is this that gives it its true meaning, as a seed event in the growth of the Australian national consciousness, and therefore an imperishable place in the story of our nation.

And this is something, I believe, which gives a special meaning, an added significance, to this occasion today. Not only to farewell the men of HMAS SYDNEY, TOBRUK and OXLEY, and the men and women from HMAS KUTTABUL who will sail on the TOBRUK in the wake of that memorable convoy of 75 years ago

- but to wish you safe return to the nation you help to guard
- a safe return home, to our beloved country.

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