

UNVEILING AND RE-DEDICATION OF DESERT CORPS  
MEMORIAL AT ALBANY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

11TH OCTOBER, 1964

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies.

Mr. Minister, Your Excellency and Ladies and Gentlemen :

This is a day of history and symbolism for two countries - Australia, certainly for us - New Zealand, certainly for them, our enduring brothers in this world. The Minister has told you something of the history of this memorial. It was in 1932 that it was unveiled by W.M. Hughes at Port Said, and there was an interesting symbolism about its position in Egypt, because there it was, at the mouth of the northern entrance to the Suez Canal; there it was, looking out towards Palestine, Syria, towards the very centre of the Old World.

A very remarkable piece of symbolism that was, that on an errand of war, men should have come from two countries to find their way into one country which was the home of Christendom, and a group of countries which in a true sense were the home of European civilisation. We don't always remember that the civilisations of Europe came from originally the vicinity of the Caucasus and that the Phoenician moves across Europe first of all produced the great civilisation of Greece and then of Rome and then of the Romance countries and then of Great Britain herself.

Therefore, here was a country which, however desert it might look, was the very cradle of religion and of civilisation, and men came to it from the far corners of the earth, from our two countries which had comparatively little history of their own and very little long-derived history, although they were old in point of years.

Now this was, of course, a matter of enormous significance. It meant that people who might have been thought to have no particular interest in that part of the world went there in order to resist aggression, in order to right wrongs, in order to give - let it be remembered, a practical demonstration of Christian faith in the very home of Christianity, and therefore it was a most appropriate and symbolic thing that this monument, as it then was, should have pointed the way to this remarkable series of countries, this remarkable cradle as I have called it, of civilisation and religion.

Then in 1956, it was attacked in the most vandal-like fashion. There was no reason in it, there was no sense in it. Indeed, when I heard about this, I couldn't help remembering that in 1941 and 1942, Egypt had been protected against being over-run, by forces from Great Britain and Australia and New Zealand at the Battle of Alamein, and this therefore was a wanton act. However, it had one result and that is that by great skill and artistry, the memorial has been re-established, and now it has been re-established in a place which I venture to describe as equally symbolic in its own fashion. If it couldn't stand to point the way to what was then the future at Port Said, it is a good thing that it should stand here to point the farewell to those who left here to go to Egypt, to go to the Middle East, the last point of departure, the last lovely glimpse that some of them were ever to have of their own country.

And, therefore, I subscribe to the views, if I may with great respect, of the Soldiers' Leagues of both Australia and New Zealand in their view that this was the proper place in which this memorial should stand.

Now, Sir, there is one other thing I would like to say. War memorials are perhaps not uncommonly misunderstood. There are those who think that they are merely commemorative of war, that in some way they glorify war. I would like to think they do far more than that. I would like to believe, and I know you believe, that they are symbolic of something enduring in human nature, something enduring in the human spirit, because it is, after all, human nature, the human spirit that is the enduring element in all history. It may be turned aside from its normal occupations, it may be called upon to perform great sacrifices, it may have its moments of anger and even its moments of hatred, but when these things have settled down into their place, it is the human spirit which is the continuing element in our civilisation.

It is a wonderful thing, isn't it, that we should occasionally be able to stand in a place like this and think about the human spirit, think about indomitable human nature and be proud of it and be refreshed by it. This to me is the great significance of this place. It may very well be that this memorial will not be seen by thousands of people at a time as it might be in some other place, but whoever comes here and looks at it and remembers its history will, I believe, feel that he's had his own spirit touched and refreshed by contemplating what man can do, what man can endure, what wonderful lovely qualities in man can survive every kind of trial.

I remember early in 1941 at Chequers in England, sitting after dinner with Winston Churchill and he was kind enough to say something to me, to deliver his philosophy to me in a sentence, as I know he has to other people, but I was lucky to hear it myself on that occasion. This was early in 1941, when there was no second front, when all the apostles of gloom were talking about defeat, when America was not in, when Great Britain had conducted the Battle for Britain and was under bombing attack every night, and I remember the great man turning to me and saying, "However long you live, remember this. This is the truth. In war, fury. In defeat, defiance. In victory, magnanimity, and in peace, goodwill." This I believe is a marvellous philosophy and it might well be borne in mind by all of us as we look at this memorial to wonderful fighting men and as I take the opportunity and give myself the honour of unveiling a plaque on this occasion.

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