

## **Joint speech by captains James and Abby from St Teresa's Catholic College.**

Good morning everyone,

**Abby:** On a cold winter's day a few years ago, I had the honour of retracing the footsteps of the first ANZACs in a windswept corner of northern France.

I remember the chill clearly. The wind cut through every layer of clothing, leaving me uncomfortably cold as I walked among the headstones of Australian soldiers who had lost their lives in that place so far from home.

Despite the temperature and howling wind, I had slept in a warm hotel bed the night before, enjoyed a hot breakfast, and travelled in a heated car. Yet I still found the cold discouraging. The place I stood was Villers-Bretonneux — the site of one of the most significant battles Australians would fight in France. Remarkably, it took place on another April 25th.

Standing in the shadow of the memorial, reading the names of the fallen, and looking out across fields once scarred by the brutality of war, I felt an overwhelming sense of sorrow. Those Australian soldiers had been so far from home for so long, often without news from loved ones, fighting in a war they barely understood.

They endured dysentery and trench foot. They battled lice, rats, and the constant discomfort of life in waterlogged trenches. Their meals were often little more than bully beef and rock-hard biscuits. And still, they fought on.

I remember thinking: how did they do it? How did men — many only a few years older than I am now — withstand such relentless hardship?

Now a few years later, I understand that the story of the ANZAC'S isn't just about war. It's about people. It's about their resilience, pride, remarkable courage, and mateship. It was their bond with each other, their pride in representing their country, and their unbreakable determination that carried them through. The will to survive — and to keep their mates alive — was stronger than the suffering they faced.

These are qualities we talk about today and strive to build within ourselves. But we can only hope to possess them in the measure those sick, tired, and homesick young men did on the Western Front.

**James:** There is a different vocabulary for seventeen-year-olds today. At seventeen, I've never held a rifle in trembling hands or watched the fleeting moments of my childhood slip away beneath the weight of a uniform. I've never clutched my mother for the last time, unsure if I'd return. But on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1915, this was a reality for countless people. young men, not so different from me and some of you, who etched false ages onto enlistment forms just to stand on the front lines. Young women, who became nurses, learning to tend to soldiers amongst the deafening sounds of war. They were scared, but they showed up. They still served.

At seventeen, the hardest sacrifices I make are things like giving up a weekend to study or turning off my phone when I need to focus. But the people we honour today- the ANZAC soldiers gave up far more than time or comfort. They sacrificed their safety, their connections, and in many cases, their lives. The depth of what they endured I can acknowledge, but never fully comprehend.

Today, we acknowledge their sacrifice. People who gave up the normalities of their lives, leaving behind family and loved ones, leaving behind their homes and the plans they had for the future. To step onto a path of uncertainty. As their lives quickly changed due to the catastrophe of war and their old lives became foreign, the ANZACS walked into moments of terror because they believed it was the right and noble thing to do. Because they believed in protecting others, even if they were merely strangers.

Tragically, many never made it home. And those who did often carried scars- some marked across their skin, and some carrying wounds you couldn't see at all. The kind of wounds that never fully heal, that linger with them long after the battle concluded. Because they paid a price that most of us will never have to pay.

And to me, that's what ANZAC Day is about. Not glorifying war, not recounting historical events. Today, we acknowledge the sacrifice of the Australian and New Zealand Soldiers. We remember that because of their nobility, everything we enjoy today, the freedom, the safety, and even the little things we take for granted, came from people who were willing to give up everything for their country.

**Abby:** As we gather this ANZAC Day to remember all those who served — from Tobruk to Milne Bay, Kapyong to Long Tan, from Suai to Derapet — I find myself thinking of the spirit shown at Villers-Bretonneux. The same spirit shown at Gallipoli. The same spirit shown by all generations of ANZACs.

It's a spirit defined by resilience, pride, courage and mateship. And it's one that continues to shape who we are as Australians.

To those who served, to those who never came home, and to those who still carry the stories — we remember you. We honour you. And we thank you.

Lest we forget.