

**2/2 Memorial Service  
21 November 2010**

It is a tremendous honour and privilege to be asked to give this address today. This is a memorial service of particular significance, as 2010 marks the end of a long chapter – this year will see winding up of the 2/2 Commando Association.

I will try to do the occasion justice.

I have been attending Anzac Day ceremonies and war-related remembrance ceremonies as long as I can remember. No doubt many of the others here today, who are descendants of war veterans, have done the same.

At most of those ceremonies, a very inspiring verse from a poem is read. This one verse comes from a poem called “For the Fallen.” It was written in 1914, by an English chap, Robert Laurence Binyon. This is a wonderful, poetic tribute to those who have died fighting wars. It was written about young men who died fighting for England, but we have commandeered it, thanks very much.

We now refer to it as “The Ode” and this one verse of the poem goes like this:

***They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:***

***Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.***

***At the going down of the sun and in the morning***

***We will remember them.***

Here’s the thing. Most of us certainly will remember them, but probably not at the going down of the sun and in the morning, at least not on most days. As anybody who has lost a loved one knows, life does go on. Just as the dead person would probably have wanted, we adjust, we move on, we deal with grief.

I'm not criticising The Ode in any way. I think it's fantastic. I just want to expand the idea or remembrance and look at it on a personal level. I'm not saying we forget. I'm saying we each remember in our own way. This event, commemorating the men who fought in the 2/2 Independent Company has a particular meaning or significance to every person here today.

Some of us fought, some lost a husband, a father, a brother, an uncle or a loved one of some other kind. Some lived their lives with a war veteran who was affected by the war, and know only too well the effect of the horrors of war on that man and his life. Some of us, I suspect have a less personal link, but want to pay respect to the men who wrote one of the most important chapters in Australia's military history.

As I'm fortunate enough to be the one with the microphone, I'm going to spend a few minutes talking about why this occasion is of special importance to me, personally.

I want to tell you a short story in three parts.

The first part takes us up to the fateful day of 20 February 1942. It's a bit weird to be describing the events in East Timor on that day to this gathering, some of whom were there. Please excuse me for what must be a condensed version of an important story.

The 2/2 arrived in Portuguese East Timor on 12 December 1941, just days after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. At that time, East Timor, was a Portuguese colony. Portugal was neutral in the war, and because we expected that the Portuguese would offer little or no resistance to the Japanese, the 2/2 was given the job of stopping them in East Timor.

With the 2/2 was the man who was later to be my father, Warwick Crossing. He was in 9 Section.

After stirring the hornets' nest at Pearl Harbor, the Japs very quickly made their way through much of Asia and were heading towards Australia, apparently meeting little resistance for most of the way. Before long, the nine

sections of the 2/2 were dispersed in strategic positions in and around Dili, in anticipation of the Japanese invasion.

Lieutenant Archie Campbell was the officer in charge of 7 Section. On 20 February 1942, 7 Section was camped at a place called Three Spurs, in the mountains outside Dili. There were no satellite pictures, radios were fairly basic, and military intelligence back then was nothing like what it is today. What they didn't know was that the Japanese had in fact invaded Dili the day before.

Almost all of 7 Section was going for a day off in Dili in the ration truck. There were 16 young men in the truck and four stayed behind - Archie Campbell, Mick Calcutt, Ron Dook and Ted Monk. Reg Murray was going to stay, but he changed his mind at the last minute and ran out, boots in hand, to jump in the truck as it pulled away.

The truck was ambushed. The men were taken completely by surprise. They were surrounded at gunpoint, ordered out of the truck and had their hands tied behind their backs with signal wire.

Of the 16 young men of Archie Campbell's 7 section on the truck that day, 14 were killed. One, Keith Hayes, survived being shot and bayoneted.

I'm not trying to tell you a potted history of the Australian military campaign in East Timor. My point is, at the end of the first part of my story, Archie Campbell was absolutely devastated by the fact that the lives of 14 young men, for whom *he* was responsible, had been snuffed out.

For the second part of my story, I crank the time machine forward to 1963. I was two years old.

The significance of Archie Campbell to all of this is that, largely as a result of his incredibly awful wartime experience, Archie devoted much of his life to Legacy, an organisation that helps the wives and children of deceased servicemen.

I learned from my father's medical records that he was a sniper in the 2/2. It was obvious without looking at his medical records that he was even more traumatised by the war than Archie was. After returning from the war, my father worked as a shearer, but he was in and out of psychiatric wards. He died in 1963, completely penniless, leaving a wife and five children.

We lived in a succession of State Housing Commission houses. I remember that my mum was on a widow's pension. In 1966, when decimal currency came in, the pension for my mum and the five children was \$20 a week, and we survived, with help from Legacy and grandparents.

I found out later that, in about 1963, my mother was diagnosed as having leukaemia. We knew that she was taking iron tablets, but I didn't know much more than that at the time. When I was in year 2 at school, Mum was taken off to hospital in an ambulance, and we went to live with relatives for a while. For a few months, my brother and I went to stay with an uncle and aunt, and the three girls went to stay at the Queens Hotel in Beaufort Street which was then managed by my grandparents.

In September 1968, all five children were moved into a Legacy Hostel in South Perth, called Craig House. Although it was called a hostel, it seemed more like an orphanage because many of the children there had no surviving parents.

Mum died two days before Christmas in 1968, when I was seven, and Craig House became our home.

This place was at 43 The Esplanade, South Perth, prime riverside real estate, immediately opposite the city. Legacy, being a charity, couldn't afford to keep the place, and Craig House was closed down at the end of 1972, after I finished year 6 at South Perth Primary School.

My eldest sister, Sue, had already left school by the time Craig House closed. There then came the question of what to do with the other four Crossing children.

I found out many years later that Archie Campbell, who had been our family's Legatee all the time since my father's death, had met with the late Peter Moyes, the headmaster of Christ Church Grammar School.

I am told that Archie explained to Mr Moyes that he had these two orphan boys in his care, and that if the school would reduce its fees by one third, the boy's pensions would pay one third, and he, Archie Campbell, would pay the remaining one third of the fees for the boys to attend the school as boarders.

I am told that Peter Moyes agreed to this proposal, and my brother Ralph and I started at Christ Church as boarders in 1973. I was a boarder there for six years, and Archie continued to be our Legatee, overseeing our care, during that time.

In the same way, Archie Campbell and his wife, May, arranged for my sisters, Sally and Barbara, to be boarders at St Mary's in Karrinyup.

Had it not been for Archie Campbell's horrific experience and the generosity of Archie and May, and of Legacy, of Christ Church and of others, I would have been a ward of the State, and I think things would have been very grim indeed.

This brings me to the third part of my story, and that is the present and the future.

The present: This is the 61<sup>st</sup> time that this gathering has been held. Today we commemorate the deeds of the men of the 2/2 Independent Company, later known as the 2/2 Commando Squadron. We also acknowledge the support they were given by the East Timorese people and their Portuguese administrators.

Many books have been written about the 2/2, but most who know anything about Australian military history agree that the story is not as well known as it should be.

There's a book by Peter Brune about the role of Australian troops in Papua. It's called "A Bastard of a Place." It's a good read and speaks with some

authority, but I was disappointed to read *his* claim that the first contact between Australian troops and the Japanese was with B Company of the 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the Kokoda Track on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1942.

Others have had a better grasp of the facts and the significance of the achievements of the 2/2, and everyone has different take on it or sees things from a different point of view. There are some who criticise individuals or the command structure for the way things were done or not done in Australia, in East Timor, New Guinea or New Britain. I suggest that you read the lot and form your own view, but, having read all the books I can find, I prefer to take away points like these:

This is from the Prologue to Archie Campbell's "The Double Reds of Timor:"

During its controversial presence in Timor, and with an effective fighting force of less than 300, the 2/2 contained up to 15,000 Japanese troops for nearly a year. Having rejected the surrender option, the unit's subsequent performance and survival prompted Churchill to declare in a forceful speech: "Little known but great in significance are the men of the 2/2 Independent Company in Timor. They alone of all the troops in the Pacific did not surrender."

In the foreword to Cyril Ayris's book "All The Bull's Men," Lieutenant General John Sanderson AC, at that time the Governor Western Australia said this:

This story ... is one of the most dramatic examples of leadership, courage, steadfastness and loyalty in the pantheon of Australia's remarkable military history. The 2/2 probably had the most experience of close-quarter fighting of any unit of the Australian Army during the Second World War. Constantly adapting to circumstance, it was able to survive, while at the same time taking a terrible toll on some of Japan's best troops.

A decision has been made to wind up the Association, but that does not mean that these commemorations will stop.

The present sees us commemorate the men of the 2/2 on days like the third Sunday in November, on Remembrance Day and Anzac Day. Those commemorations will continue. In the 80's some people confused this – the commemoration of those who fought and lost their lives – with the glorification of war. That silliness has subsided and the participation of the public in memorial services has grown hugely in the last 30 years.

Any service of commemoration, as important as they are for acknowledging sacrifice and coming to terms with grief, is not the same as the memories we carry in our hearts, the sort of spontaneous remembrance that Mr Binyon was talking about when he said “At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.”

The future is this. We will remember them. Perhaps not literally every morning and every evening, but that's OK.

I like one of the other verses of Mr Binyon's poem. It's the last verse in the poem and it refers to the fallen soldiers as stars in the sky, as if to say there are many of them, but each one is important and the memory, like the stars, will always be there.

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,

Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;

As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,

To the end, to the end, they remain.

Thank you.

Rob Crossing