

# Dave Sabben MG – Warburton V V Day Address – Sun 13 Aug 2010

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Thank you all for inviting me to share this service with you.

Please forgive me for not mentioning dignitaries by name, but for the purpose of this address, I want us all to stand as equals before the memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. You'll see why as I proceed.

I'm honoured to join your group to honour the memory of the casualties of war and – today – of Viet Vets in particular.

Your organising team should be thanked

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You will note that I used the word SACRIFICE. What does that mean? After this address I hope you will look at that word in a different light.

Does "sacrifice" just mean "killed"? No – we have hundreds of people killed on our roads each year – we don't suggest they have made a sacrifice for anything. Not like soldiers. There IS a difference.

A dictionary will tell you that a "sacrifice" is "a surrender of something valuable as a means of gaining something MORE desirable [or valuable]". (Collins Concise)

What could have been more valuable to these men than life?

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95 years and 8 days ago was 7 August 1915. On Gallipoli, it was the day of the attack at The Nek.

The Nek was a ridgeline between the Australian and Turk trenches – a mere 30 yards apart across a flat area about 80 yards wide. A similar size to this Memorial Park. Imagine one line of trenches on the highway footpath and the other on the road we marched along to get here.

On either side of the flat part were steep slopes down into deep gullies.

The Australian 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Horse Brigade defended this area. An attack on the Turk positions was planned to start at 04:30 hrs.

There would be four waves, two minutes apart, each of about 150 men. The first two waves would be from the 8<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment (Victorian) and the last two waves, 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse (WA).

The group here today will represent each wave in turn. There's about 120 of you here, so each of you represents a soldier in each wave.

It's coming up to 04:30. The naval bombardment stopped some minutes ago but we haven't started yet. We can see the Turks returning to their trenches. Someone has stuffed up the timings.

Okay – first wave – that’s all of you – a nameless, faceless bunch of ANZACs.

Ready? “Go!” Over the top.....

= = P A U S E = =

The firing stopped within 30 seconds. Not a man was still standing.

When the second wave saw what had happened they sent a runner to HQ – “Stop the attack!”

The answer was “Push on”.

Okay – second wave – that’s all of you – Look around - Diggers you know from other times and places. Faces you recognise.

Ready? “Go!” Over the top.....

= = P A U S E = =

The second wave of soldiers was stopped within 30 seconds.

300 Light Horsemen from the 8<sup>th</sup> now lay out on The Nek. Dead, wounded or scratching for cover.

Now it was the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse’s turn.

The Commanding Officer of 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse went back to HQ – “Stop the slaughter!”

The answer was “Push on”.

Okay – third wave – that’s all of you – Young Light Horsemen. Your friends from your own unit – mates you’ve trained with – you know their families back home. Cobbers.

Ready? “Go!” Over the top.....

= = P A U S E = =

The third wave of soldiers was stopped within 30 seconds.

The Commanding Officer raced back to HQ – “Stop the slaughter!”

“Push on”.

Not content with this, he then sought out the Brigade Commander. “Stop this senseless slaughter”.

The Brigade Commander, new to the role and area, said “Go a different way”.

“There IS no different way”. It was a flat crest 80 yards wide and 30 yards between trenches.

As this was being explained, the time came for the fourth wave to go.

Okay – fourth wave – that’s all of you – You – it’s your turn – it is YOU about to go over the top.

It’s you who, in thirty seconds time, will be dead, wounded or scratching for cover.

Ask yourself – ARE YOU GOING TO GO?

It’s time. There’s no orders to stop. About half of you go over the top... 75 to 80 men...

= = P A U S E = =

Again, the firing stopped after only 20 or 30 seconds.

The whole thing took about six and a half minutes - less time than it has taken me to tell it today.

372 men lay dead or wounded in an area the size of this Memorial Park.

Worse, supporting attacks fared no better – 49 lost at Quinn’s Post – 65 at the Chessboard...

Why? - - - No – not “why the war?” or “why the battle?”

“Why did men go over the top, KNOWING it was futile?”

We can comment on the senselessness of war, the stupidity of the Generals, the waste of the men.

But how can we possibly understand the reason these men did what they did?

Why would a soldier go to certain death?

It wasn’t FEARLESSNESS – every one of those men would have been scared stiff.

It wasn’t their STUPIDITY – those men were the cream of the Australian Army – volunteers all.

It wasn’t BLIND OBEDIENCE – they were recruited off the land – thinking men, self-sufficient and practical – they recognised senselessness when they saw it.

And it certainly wasn’t HOPE – there was none of that in sight.

Yet they climbed out of those trenches and died.

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You have the answer – you have it in how you felt as I spoke.

Let’s review my talk:

These men had an identity – They were ANZACs, in uniform, I told you what Brigade and Regiment they belonged to and where they were from, They would have known each other – or at least their

families would have known each other. They had identity.

In my first few comments, I gave you an identity – remember? I used words like “team”, “equals”, “all of you”, “group”. You had a group identity.

At the Nek, they had their orders and their purpose – attack the Turk lines. This needed teamwork.

You had instructions. You represented a Digger. You had purpose. The purpose needed teamwork.

At the Nek, it was very personal.

I made it personal for you. We started out with the first wave – just a “wave”. Impersonal. The second wave were “soldiers” you knew something of. That was closer to home. The third wave were “young Light Horsemen” – men from your own unit - closer again.

In the fourth wave, it was you! And in your mind, you went over the top. Why?

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You each knew – because you were part of an identifiable group – that the person next to you would do it and not let YOU down. So you did it, to not let THEM down.

NOT letting your team down is a conventionally accepted standard in our society.

That standard becomes one of the moral principles to which we adhere.

The moral principles to which we adhere become our personal integrity.

Another word for “personal integrity” is HONOUR.

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If “sacrifice” is “a surrender of something valuable as a means of gaining something more desirable”, then “What could have been more valuable to these men than life?”

The answer is HONOUR.

Soldiers have a sense of HONOUR that is more important to them than death. They literally would die rather than let their mates down. And that’s why the whole nation respects the SACRIFICE of a soldier.

Where else in our society do you see such HONOUR?

Lest we forget.

(1300 words)