



GOVERNMENT HOUSE
SYDNEY

Speaking Points – FINAL

C E W Bean Foundation Dinner

Friday, 18th November 2016

Sydney Cricket Ground

FULL SPEECH

Firstly, I would like to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we gather, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and I acknowledge their Elders, past and present, and all Aboriginal people who have served our nation in time of war.

*'When all is said, the feat which will go down in history is that first Sunday's fighting when three Australian Brigades stormed, in face of a heavy fire, tier after tier of cliffs and mountains, apparently as impregnable as Govett's Leap. The sailors who saw the Third Brigade go up those heights and over successive summits like a whirligig with wild cheers, and with bayonets flashing, speak of it with tears of enthusiasm in their eyes ... Australian infantry, and especially the Third Brigade, have made a name which will never die.'*¹

With these powerful words, Australia's Official First World War Correspondent and Historian laid the foundation stone for the ANZAC legacy - a legacy that has inspired and driven successive generations of Australian servicemen and women. I am not sure whether Bean intended that outcome. His motive in writing in the manner he did was to ensure that the deeds of the 1st AIF were never forgotten. Even so, his description of how Australians fight has become the benchmark for Australians in uniform over the last 100 years.

¹ 'Gallipoli. How the Australians fought. Imperishable fame', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 May 1915, p 14

Given this, in my mind I had titled this speech 'Echoes of Bean' but echoes fade away and that cannot be said of the impact that Bean has had on Australia and its defence forces. So perhaps 'Bean's Enduring Gift' is far more appropriate.

There can be no doubt that Australia's military and naval performance and accomplishments during the Korean War further enhanced and embellished the 'Bean Gift'. For the Defence forces though this was timely, for as Professor Robert O'Neill, Australia's Official War Historian of that war explained, at the commencement of the Korean War the ANZAC legend was in abeyance.

*'The Korean War came just in time to save the Australian Army from slipping into insignificance. At the outset of the war Australia could muster about two battalions' worth of infantry, spread across three nominal units, 1, 2 and 3 RAR. The Korean War raised public consciousness of military danger to Australia and the need to strengthen the armed forces.'*²

At the time of the Korean War, the historical and geographical context had changed dramatically from the world in which Bean had written.

² War Memorial Anniversary Oration on 11 November 2003

The Cold War had replaced the war of Empires; the United Nations was evolving as an instrument of global conscience; East Asia rivalled Europe and the Middle East as a region of concern; our fledgling alliance with America was replacing our familial ties to Britain. The threat of Communism spreading throughout Asia had replaced the threat of Imperial Japan.

Sometimes called 'The Forgotten War', wedged as it was between the wholesale global bloodshed of the Second World War and the first televised war in Vietnam, the Korean War amply demonstrated the resilience and capabilities of our forces in all three Services.

If Australian war historiography has traditionally taken the view of courage and character of the ordinary soldier, which was the signature style of CEW Bean's correspondence, the Korean War provided more than enough examples of this.

Australia was the first country, following the US, to commit units of all three Services to the Korea conflict.

Two days after the UN Security Council Resolution 83 called on member states to assist South Korea in defending itself on 27th June 1950, the Australian Government placed the HMAS *Shoalhaven*, already on station in Japan, and its intended relief the *Bataan*, at the disposal of General Douglas Macarthur.³

³ Nominal roll of Australian Veterans of the Korean War: <http://www.koreanroll.gov.au/history.aspx#navy>

In addition, 77 Squadron RAAF was despatched on 30th June, and an infantry battalion, 3 RAR, from the Australian component of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan in September 1950.⁴

Little did the men of 3RAR know that within a short period of time they would be engaged in a battle in which they would display the Anzac characteristics so cherished by Bean.

In 2013, while standing to the North of Kapyong and looking at the ground from the Chinese perspective, I came to understand the enormity of the achievement of the Battle of Kapyong. Although the slopes and ridges are now much more heavily forested, it was possible to discern why some features were occupied by the companies of 3 RAR and the tactical advantage that, at that time, was sought. It helped put into better context the heroism and superb soldiering that occurred during one of the most significant battles by Australian troops in the Korean War.

The other lesson from my visit to South Korea that year was to experience the profound gratitude that the Korean people feel for the assistance and sacrifice provided by Australia during the Korean War.

⁴ <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/origins/commits/>

It is heartfelt and is the first thing mentioned when being welcomed. A visit to the Yongsan War Memorial of Korea is a sobering reminder of why this feeling runs so deep.

Most here today will know the significance of the Battle of Kapyong in blunting the Chinese Communist People's Volunteer Army Spring Offensive of 1951 which had the objective of retaking Seoul.

The 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment was awarded the US Presidential Unit Citation for their 'extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance' of combat duties in action against the armed enemy near Kapyong, on 24 and 25 April 1951. The citation paints a strikingly vivid picture of the role of our Australian soldiers in Korea:

*'The enemy threw waves of troops at the gallant defenders ... but each time the courageous, indomitable, and determined soldiers repulsed the fanatical attacks. Ammunition ran low and there was no time for food ... they stood their ground in resolute defiance of the enemy. With serene and indefatigable persistence, the gallant soldiers held their defensive positions and took heavy tolls of the enemy. The 3rd Battalion displayed ... gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing their missions under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions ... and by their achievements they brought distinguished credit on themselves and their homelands. They snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.'*⁵

⁵ BY COMMAND OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL VAN FLEET Leven C. Allen Major General U.S. Army Chief of Staff [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Unit_Citation_\(United_States\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Unit_Citation_(United_States))

As with all wars and operations, it was the quality of the people that shone through. As both Bob Breen in his book *'The Battle of Kapyong'* and Major Ben O'Dowd, A Company state:

'When we were reinforced we got 100% ex-AIF men. When we put a section together, the problem became who to make section commander. Not because we lacked talent but because in that section we probably had an ex-sergeant major and a few ex-platoon sergeants. The talent that came forward was extremely good. The attitude was that they were all there for the sheer hell of fighting. This team had been up and down Korea together since September 1950 until April 1951 by the time they fought at Kapyong. The diggers won the Battle of Kapyong. There was nothing the officers could do. It was a matter of whether the diggers had the guts to go on with it or not. And they did.'

During those 24 hours at Chuktun-ni, which was to become the first 24 hours of the Battle of Kapyong, the men of 3 RAR upheld the fighting reputation of the Australian infantry earned in the two previous World Wars. Officers can study, graduate, train, plan and give orders but their efforts amount to little unless they are leading soldiers of courage and determination to give expression to those plans.

Steeped in the ANZAC tradition, Charles Bean's influence on these soldiers was clear:

Captain Reg Saunders, Officer Commanding, C Company, 3 RAR was said to have remarked: *“At last I felt like an Anzac, and I imagine there were 600 others like me.”*⁶

There were more echoes in this conflict - Australian infantrymen were engaged in trench warfare reminiscent of the warfare experienced by their fathers' generation in the First World War.⁷

Every one of the 18,000 Australian men and women who served in Korea, including the more than 6,000 from NSW, played an important role in the outcome of each battle, each sortie and each patrol.

Kapyong came to be one of the two most significant and important battles for Australian troops in Korea, and the reason the Battle of Kapyong holds such a place within the Australian military psyche, is the adversity that Australian forces had to overcome to succeed.

Maryang San or Hill 317 is the other battle.

On the morning of the 5th October 1951, 3RAR attacked Hill 317 (Maryang San). The Australian force approached Hill 317 through rugged countryside at 4 am, under a heavy cloak of mist. At 10 am, the mist began to lift, putting the Australian advance in danger.

⁶ <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/operations/kapyong/>

⁷ Nominal roll of Australian Veterans of the Korean War: <http://www.koreanroll.gov.au/history.aspx#navy>

The communists briefly hesitated before firing, which allowed 3RAR to capture the first line of defences in a fierce burst of fighting and drive the communist forces from their position on top of the hill.

Professor O'Neill, wrote of this battle:

*'In this action 3RAR had won one of the most impressive victories achieved by any Australian battalion. In five days of heavy fighting 3RAR dislodged a numerically superior enemy from a position of great strength. The Australians were successful in achieving surprise on 3 and 5 October, the company and platoon commanders responded skillfully to Hassett's directions, and the individual soldiers showed high courage, tenacity and morale despite some very difficult situations, such as that of D company when the mist rose on 5 October and those of B and C Companies when the weight of enemy fire threatened their isolation of Hill 317 on 7 October ... The victory of Maryang San is probably the greatest single feat of the Australian Army during the Korean War.'*⁸

The RAN and RAAF served with a similar spirit and tenacity.

When on 28 June 1950 Prime Minister Robert Menzies committed Australian forces to the Korean War, the first to serve and fight in this conflict were the Navy and Air Force who responded within a matter of days.

⁸ https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/korea/maryang_san/

This fact is sometimes overlooked. HMAS *Bataan* and HMAS *Shoalhaven* immediately left Japanese waters to escort US troop ships to Pusan.

The involvement of *Shoalhaven* and the *Bataan* marked the beginning of a strong Australian naval contribution to the United Nations Command, with control of the seas around the Korean peninsula in these first weeks helping to save Korea from early defeat. Operationally, throughout the war, our Navy provided invaluable support to ground operations through blockades and providing cover, bombardments of coastal targets and air strikes from aircraft carriers, including the HMAS *Sydney*, in its first combat tour, which carried three Naval Air Squadrons – No 805, 808 and 817 Squadrons.⁹

One week after the UN call to arms in Korea, on 2nd July 1950, No. 77 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Lou Spence, flew the first ground support operations over Korea, becoming the first British Commonwealth and United Nations unit to see action in the Korean War.

In September 1950, HMAS *Bataan* and HMAS *Warramunga* were part of the Commonwealth force to support the UN's daring amphibious Inchon landing, mounting a blockade and providing cover.

⁹ Nominal roll of Australian Veterans of the Korean War: <http://www.koreanroll.gov.au/history.aspx#navy>

After the success of the Inchon landing, pilots from 77 Squadron provided crucial support in relieving the pressure on ground troops, providing cover for the advancing US Eighth Army as well as making numerous bombing attacks on North Korean forces and infrastructure.

They also had to overcome the loss of their inspirational Wing Commander Lou Spence in the early days of the campaign, who was replaced by Wing Commander (WNGCDR) Richard 'Dick' Cresswell. 77 Squadron's new commander said: *"I wasn't new to operational command nor to the ground attack role except this war in Korea was a very different, and very ugly, war."*¹⁰

Cresswell demonstrated his expertise and courage by flying 4 sorties the day after he arrived, with a total of 14 for his first week, an impressive display which quickly gained the respect of the Squadron.¹¹

An RAAF Officer, who has made a study of Cresswell, comments: *'Cresswell had to surmount crucial phases, overcoming great challenges in logistics, planning and morale while maintaining the exceptionally high operational tempo of his command in an environment of strategic opaqueness.'*

¹⁰ <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/ausinkorea/raaf/>

¹¹ **WING COMMANDER 'DICK' CRESSWELL - A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP**
JB Earl, Flying Officer, Section Commander – 3 Section, 22 Squadron, 11 December 2001

*That Cresswell overcame these challenges in those circumstances is a testament to his qualities of leadership and management.'*¹²

In total, No. 77 Squadron flew 19,000 sorties against KPA forces¹³ and was highly praised for its skill and courage, earning a Presidential Unit Citation from the President of the Republic of Korea 'for exceptionally meritorious service and heroism.'

The Korean War came at a high cost to the squadron. During three years of operations, 40 pilots were killed - 30 in action, eight in accidents, and two in accidents on the ground. Six were captured and became POWs. Of the Squadron's 90 Meteors, 54 were lost.¹⁴

It may be because I attended the Centenary Commemorative Service in France this year, but in thinking about the Korean Peninsula and our sacrifice from all three Services, I am reminded of CEW Bean's often-quoted words about Pozières: *'more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than anywhere else on earth.'*¹⁵

All in all, 615 awards and decorations, recognising bravery and gallantry, were presented to Australians between 1950 and 1953,¹⁶ and the performance of our forces played a significant role leading to the signing of the ANZUS Treaty.¹⁷

¹² Ibid

¹³ <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/ausinkorea/raaf/>

¹⁴ <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/ausinkorea/raaf/>

¹⁵ CEW Bean, *ANZAC à Amiens*

¹⁶ <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/>

¹⁷ 1 September 1951

In conclusion:

What is the link between CEW Bean and Korea?

Our official war historians – CEW Bean, a correspondent who was based alongside the troops in the First World War and recorded everything he witnessed in notebooks, and Professor O’Neill who wrote about the Korean War, but was not old enough to serve in this war, (but did in the Vietnam War) – both historians have significantly shaped the way that Australians have thought about our war experiences.

They have also shaped the way we view ourselves.

From Bean’s trench view of the character of the ANZACs – eliciting the response from his English counterpart: *‘I think Bean actually counts the bullets’*¹⁸ – through to O’Neill’s academic focus on the contextual strategic and diplomatic framework, each as historians have defined important components to the war experience.

As the first and primary architect of our tradition of war histories, there can be no argument that CEW Bean stands at the pantheon of war historians whose accounts have shaped us a nation and as a people.

I would argue that it has also shaped the way the Australian Defence Force has viewed itself.

¹⁸ English correspondent, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett

In concentrating on the resilience, purpose and character displayed by the men who fought in the First World War, CEW Bean created not just an ANZAC legend, but set a standard that continues in our Australian Defence Force today.

END

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