

**Chief of Navy's Speech  
Commemoration Day for  
Tasmanian National Service Association  
Longford Tasmania**

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentleman.

On behalf of the Chief of the Defence Force, and all men and women serving in the ADF, I congratulate those who have planned and organized this annual Tasmanian national service commemoration.

I am privileged to have the opportunity to address you.

None of what I am about to say will be unknown to those former national servicemen on parade today, but it may be new information for those of us too young to remember the two periods of National Service 1951-59 and 1964-72.

There is a saying that, "*the past is another country; they do things differently there.*" Certainly that is true for Australia in 1964, the year when our government re introduced a compulsory selective National Service scheme.

Only 19 years after the end of the Pacific War Australian Government policy was to seek security *from Asia* rather than security *in Asia*, as we do today.

In 1964 many Australian middle aged men had served overseas in World War II as sailors, soldiers and airmen.

This was true of male parliamentarians, town councilors, community leaders, judges, senior public servants, school teachers, clergymen, postmen, shopkeepers and probably the family doctor.

Consequently collective community recollection of early 1942 and the fear that Australia would be invaded remained very fresh in the national consciousness.

Not surprisingly, given the experience of the recruitment of a citizen army for the 1939-45 war, most adults were supportive in principle of national military service

for young men. It provided a way of building character, new skills and military discipline for young men.

There was also widespread national concern that Australia was vulnerable and most people thought that a larger and therefore more capable army was necessary for national defence.

In announcing the legislation to bring in National Service to Parliament, Prime Minister Robert Menzies referred to 'aggressive Communism' in Asia.

The Government had concluded that Australia had inadequate Defence manpower and aimed to increase the strength of the Army to 33,000 by the end of 1966. The fast way to do this was to introduce selective compulsory service.

The RAN and the RAAF received national servicemen but in much smaller numbers than the army.

The *National Service Act 1964*, passed on 24 November 1964, required 20 year old males, if selected, to serve for a period of twenty four months of continuous service, followed by three years in the Reserve.

The Defence Act was amended in May 1965 with the provision that conscripts could be obliged to serve overseas.

In March 1966, Prime Minister Harold Holt announced that National Servicemen would be sent to Vietnam to serve in units of the Australian Regular Army.

Between 1965 and December 1972 over 800,000 men registered for National Service. Some 63,000 were selected and over 19,000 served in Vietnam.

Two ballots were conducted each year, which randomly selected dates in a six month period and all males with corresponding birthdays were called up for military training.

There were a number of ways those selected could defer or cancel their call up.

Those on parade today, and those you served with, chose not to take any of those options and you made your contribution when Australia had need of your youth, your commitment and willingness to give national service.

The modern ADF stands on the shoulders of all those citizens who put on uniform from the time of Federation through the World Wars and all the post 1945 operations in Korea, Malaya and Borneo; through the long years in Vietnam and the recent decade in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It includes those deployed today in the Middle East at sea and ashore.

That proud record of service includes the contribution by our National Servicemen.

On behalf of all those of us in uniform I thank you for your service. We are your heirs and acknowledge the hardships you went through and your contribution to the spirit of the ADF.

That ADF is now a highly specialized and technologically sophisticated and increasingly integrated force.

We are equipped with weapons systems and sensors undreamed of in 1972 when the last National Service intake went into training.

But what has not changed is that young sailors, soldiers and airmen, both men and women, still need to put “service above self.” That is true for every generation.

The Navy that I lead is being recapitalized with new ships for the maritime century which lies ahead.

Soon Navy will be operating again as an Australian Task Force with our two new versatile *Canberra* class amphibious ships at the heart of our ability to conduct blue water and inshore operations.

This capability has not been available to us since the 1970s. The ADF is operating army and navy helicopters from our new flight decks.

Army and the RAAF are also receiving the new equipment they need to ensure that Australia's ability to deter and defend in our region continue to be understood and respected in our region.

The whole ADF, not just the Navy, is gaining new and more powerful weapons suited to the time and place in which we are operating.

Whenever asked to do so by the Government the ADF will use our capabilities as a "force for good" particularly to alleviate suffering caused by natural disasters at home or overseas.

But that is not why we possess an ADF. It exists to ensure that our national defence is secured. That has not changed and nor will it do so.

Our national freedom of action in the world and in our region is the outcome of each generation of Australians investment in defence capability.

We now remember those whose contribution was much greater than the rest of us. I speak of those of whom it can be said, "all they had they gave."

We are gathered at this cenotaph to remember those National Servicemen who lost their lives while serving Australia. That is our purpose in being here - to honour their memory.

The Australian War Memorial in Canberra remembers on its Roll of Honour one hundred and forty three national servicemen who were killed in action in Vietnam, ten more who died in accidents, twenty eight who died later of their wounds received in battle, three more who died from illness and one more who remains "missing presumed killed." <sup>1</sup>

We also remember at this cenotaph all those former national servicemen who have died in the years since they gave their service. They are not forgotten by their family, their comrades in arms, by the ADF, or by Australia.

The wreaths we now lay will be in recollection of them all. We remember those 185 who died as very young men far from home, and those thousands who came

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/vietnam/statistics/>

back to Australia and led lives of achievement and distinction in service to their families, their community and the nation.

Their duty is done and they now rest in peace.

The Last Post sounds for them all.

Lest we forget.