

Opening address speech notes for

The Hon Bruce Billson MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence

at the opening of the
Peacekeeping Conference
Force for Good?
60 Years of Australian Peacekeeping

Australian War Memorial
Wednesday 12 September 2007
5.45pm

Acknowledgements

- Air Marshal Geoffrey Shepherd AO, Chief of Air Force
- Brigadier Paul Symons AM, Representing Chief of Army
- Lieutenant General John Sanderson AC (Retd), Patron of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project Committee
- Major General Tim Ford AO (Retd), Chairman of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project Committee
- Mr Paul Copeland, National President, Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
- Mr Gordon Traill, National Vice President, Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
- Ms Janine Murphy, Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Australian Mint
- Mr Ian Mansfield, Operations Director of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
- Professor David Horner, AWM Peacekeeping & Recent Conflicts Official Historian, Official Historian and Professor of Australian Defence History Australian National University

Good evening,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here this evening to the Australian War Memorial and the opening of the Memorial's 2007 history conference; *Force for Good? 60 Years of Australian Peacekeeping 1947 – 2007.*

The conference brings together a distinguished list of speakers who, during the next two days, will address many facets of peace operations and Australia's role in this important world-wide responsibility.

We have a proud record in peacekeeping and, on Friday, will mark exactly 60 years since Australians first began serving as peacekeepers. They extend our nation's hand in friendship and support to provide some relief to those that have been affected by conflict.

Australian peacekeepers are moved by compassion for people they see suffering and are highly motivated to assist in often very simple and practical ways that can make a world of difference.

They become part of the lives of the people they help, and are the human face of our national desire to aid those in need.

More than 30,000 Australians have served as peacekeepers, in most parts of the world. They have come from all parts of the defence force, federal, state and territory police forces, and Australian Government agencies such as the Australian Electoral Commission, AusAID, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Australians have contributed to peacekeeping at many levels, including command. Today is an opportunity to remember Lieutenant General Robert Nimmo, who commanded the United Nations' observers in Kashmir for an astonishing 15 years from 1950 until his death – at the age of 72 – in January 1966.

We are honoured to have former commanders of multinational operations here with us today: Lieutenant General John Sanderson, who led the United Nations' forces in Cambodia with such distinction in 1992 and 1993.

And, of course, Major General Tim Ford, who commanded the military observers in the Middle East from 1998 to 2000, and then was so highly thought of that he was appointed Military Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York.

Peacekeeping has become a very important part of our military heritage, and Australia now recognises this. We provided the first United Nations peacekeepers, and now we are the first nation in the world to set out to write a complete, multi-volume history of its peacekeeping.

The Australian Government was very pleased in 2004 to appoint one of this country's most distinguished military historians, Professor David Horner, to carry out this important work. He follows in the footsteps of Charles Bean, Gavin Long, Robert

O'Neill and Peter Edwards, as the fifth Official Historian. Professor Horner has assembled a very fine team of historians and researchers to write what will now be a series of five volumes: four on peacekeeping and other post–Cold War operations, and a fifth on overseas humanitarian operations by the ADF and police. I wish the team well with this very important project, and look forward to reading the volumes as they are written.

As you have heard from Major General Tim Ford, in response to representations, the Australian Government agreed that the time was right to commemorate our peacekeeping service in another traditional Australian way, with a dedicated national memorial.

Peacekeeping has become an intrinsic part of what Australia does on the world stage. We are fortunate that only a small number of Australians have died as peacekeepers, which is testament to the skill, training and discipline of our servicemen and women.

These deaths and the service of over 30,000 peacekeepers in more than fifty missions around the world is most deserving of its place alongside our other national memorials. The memorials that line Anzac Parade serve as an important element of our national military commemoration.

Earlier this year the Australian Government provided Major General Ford and his Peacekeeping Memorial Project Committee with the sum of \$200,000 under its *Saluting Their Service* commemorations program to begin the design process and assist fundraising for the peacekeeping memorial. Here tonight, I have the privilege of announcing the official launch of the national design competition for the memorial.

Peacekeeping is so varied in its nature that it will be a challenge to come up with a symbolic design that captures the service of those early observers in Indonesia, in Kashmir, then in the Middle East, Zimbabwe, East Timor, Rwanda, and Cambodia as well as police peacekeepers in Cyprus – and on so many more operations around the globe.

There is also the challenge of conveying the friendship and support that we have provided through our peacekeeping to those affected by conflict.

Australian peacekeepers are moved by compassion for people they see suffering and are highly motivated to assist in often very simple and practical ways that can make a world of difference. They become part of the lives of the people they help, and are the human face of our national desire to aid those in need.

Australian peacekeeping has a rich history, and it will need an imaginative monument to provide a fitting commemoration.

The design and construction of a national memorial is no mean feat. The Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project Committee has a challenging job ahead to raise the funds that are needed. To assist with their efforts I am very pleased to make another important announcement on behalf of the Australian Government – the Royal Australian Mint has produced a commemorative \$1 coin to mark the 60th

anniversary of peacekeeping. Proceeds from every coin sold will go towards the memorial. The design of this coin symbolises the essence of peacekeeping, with the outstretched hands that denotes the desire to help and support a weary global community, while the dove reminds us of the aspiration for peace.

Earlier this year my Department honoured the contribution of our peacekeepers through its 2007 calendar and Anzac Day poster. And our peacekeepers are further honoured with *Saluting Their Service* funding of \$25,000 towards this conference.

I commend the Australian War Memorial, and its Official History team, for hosting this important conference. I do hope that over the next two days we will all have an opportunity to broaden our understanding of Australia's role in peacekeeping, our peacekeeping history and the challenges we face in the future.