

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

ANNOUNCER:

This is the Australian Broadcasting Commission, relaying to national stations, a farewell address by Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood, to his comrades in Australia, on the eve of his departure for England. Ladies and Gentlemen, Sir William Birdwood.

SIR WILLIAM BIRDWOOD

By the courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Commission I am able to send a few words of farewell to my old comrades of the AIF and the NZTF. All throughout the war we were one force in spirit and brotherhood.

It seems only yesterday I was sitting drinking on my arrival from the old country, and as times go, it was only yesterday. I should like to repeat, to the great regret of my wife and myself, that the very shortness of our time in this country has, of necessity, prevented us from visiting states other than Western Australia, or from (inaudible) to New Zealand as we would dearly loved to have done.

I have, however, been most fortunate. In my time in Western Australia I've been able to see a great many of my comrades here. Twenty-three years have passed since we first served together at the beginning of the war, and seventeen years since I was able to pay a visit to all states and New Zealand - a long time indeed, and it would not, and could not, be at all surprising, perhaps rather natural, if, with so much that has happened since then, I should find that I must leave (inaudible) always forgotten.

I wish I could express something of what my feelings are, and realising that this is not only (inaudible) but as time goes on, the bonds that brought us all together, and kept us together - bonds of common loyalty, determination of each of us to do our utmost for the cause for which we've fought, and, as far as I am concerned, for a feeling of affection and pride in my comrades - have drawn much pleasure as the years pass by.

The reception given to me in Perth by the very large number of my old AIF comrades can leave no doubt in the mind of anyone as to the fact that at home everyone's not forgotten, and we can each of us feel that we are still members of that band of brothers which I believe we all hope ourselves to be at ANZAC.

It has been a delight to me to meet so many, and am able to say with pride, one of the old original landings, [Angelo], that so many of these [are still well accomplished]. The long forgotten memories revived in me and together fought our battles over again - incidentally, perhaps, revived by my recent visit to the Peninsula - have indeed been wonderful, and have often brought back, so clearly, thoughts of the gallantry among our bravest, who are now no longer with us.

In addition to seeing large numbers at Perth, I am glad to say I've also naturally been delighted to meet large gatherings at Collie, Broome, Geraldton and elsewhere, and everywhere I have lived, just that same great (inaudible) that actuates all throughout the world, and, I report, known so well that it is just the same generous spirit that I (inaudible) everywhere, have the fortune of (inaudible).

I still well remember saying at the end of the war that I was absolutely confident that the men of our defence forces would prove themselves to be such brave fighters in times of war, could be relied upon to prove themselves to be among the best and most desirable citizens in peace.

(Break in recording)

After seeing all that I have during my sojourns in Australia, there could not be anything but real satisfaction for me to know of (inaudible). My returned comrades, officers and men, have proved themselves to be the best of (inaudible).

I might perhaps mention the proof of this, that when I recently had the honour of being received by the President of the Legislative Council of Perth to meet ex-AIF members who now sit in both houses of the Western Australian Parliament, I found not only that we were represented by the speaker, the leader of the opposition, the deputy leader of the National Party, and the deputy president of the Legislative Council, but of one third of the members of the lower house were old comrades.

I would like to add, I found no-one more wholeheartedly sympathetic to the interests of ex-servicemen than Mr Wilcox, the present Premier of this state. Amongst others whom I have been able to visit, are the comparatively large numbers who, I am sorry to say, are still in hospital. It must sound paradoxical to say that I have been both glad and sorry to see them; really deeply sorry that after all these years there should still be men suffering as a result of wounds, gas and TB, but proud and glad to see the really wonderful way in which, without exception, their suffering is being faced and cheerfully born. Indeed, the bearing of these men can be a lesson to every one of us. It most certainly gave me a feeling of humiliation and pride as I went from bed to bed and heard what each man had to tell me, every one of them as brave and cheerful as is possible. Among those to whom my sympathies most immediately went out were those who had lost their sight, never a grumble from any one of them, always the most cheerful and happy as possible in their very difficult and trying circumstances.

Yesterday, by the courtesy and consideration of the Repatriation Minister, Mr Hughes, with whom I am so glad to have worked throughout the war, when I commanded the AIF and he proved himself to be such a fearless wartime prime minister, I was able to declare open new wards which had been added to the Edward Milne Home here in which so many of our men, suffering from TB, had been so excellently looked after in past years.

During my visit to Western Australia nothing has given me more pleasure than being able to visit the Fairbridge Farm School at Pinjarra, and nowhere could one possibly hope to find a happier or more contented lot of children who just revelled in the sun of Australia and the free, open-air, healthy life they now live. I could not find a child who was not all smiles and the chaplain told me that during his four months he had never seen a child crying. That rather speaks for itself. I feel absolutely sure these children will prove themselves to be among the best of Australian citizens in years to come.

My visit to the Farm School, and to Geraldton, synchronised with the arrival of the best rainfall yet received in this state, and I do indeed trust that this, which has brought life and hope to all those working in the wheat belt, means also the advent of a period of real prosperity is coming for them.

(Break in recording)

I am glad to say I, today, have been able to attend the service in memory of Mons, and to review the fine body of ex-Imperial Services men now at Perth.

(Break in recording)

It is certainly very good to know how, since the war, many men and women from the old country have made these lands under the Southern Cross their home, and where, being happy, they are naturally proving themselves good citizens, and, let us hope, that those of our race will always prove themselves to be.

Before sailing tomorrow I shall be meeting a large number of old comrades and AIF men, together with the Mayor and citizens of Fremantle. From experience, ever since we first landed there in 1919, we know so well that they yield to none in their devotion and loyalty to King and Country.

Before I leave I would like to advance a suggestion to the executive and members of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers League. At present, as we all know, only those are eligible for membership of the League who actually served in some branch of our defence forces during the war. At the termination of the war this proviso seemed only right and natural, hence the title 'Returned'; but, as the years go on, a number of returned soldiers must gradually decrease, and with increasing proportion in later years. But I'm sure there cannot be one of us who does not hope that the League should live on forever. We cannot want the seed to fade away as we die. I would suggest for consideration, first, that every single member of the AIF should be urged to join the League, and further, that the League should be open to all members of the defence forces, nearly all of whom were too young to play their part in the war. If, however, such men can join the League now, while it is still full of the older men who took their part in the war, they will, I hope, be able to feel more the great tradition and spirit of the AIF and so never let the League, as we know it now, to die.

Ex-Imperial Service men are consequently eligible to join the League, and I am glad to have found many of them in various branches in Western Australia. I trust that every one of them will join the Returned Sailors and Soldiers League of Australia as soon as they can. I can assure them that they will always be most warmly welcomed in the League in this country where, in more than one branch, I have found ex-Imperial Services men as secretaries and devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the interests of their comrades.

I fear I have already been much too long, so goodbye old comrades, God guard you all.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A - END OF MESSAGE

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