

ADDRESS BY DR BROOK BARRINGTON, NEW ZEALAND AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND, AT KANCHANABURI WAR CEMETERY ON ANZACDAY 2009.

Veterans, Families of Veterans, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning.

On ANZAC day we honour all New Zealand and Australian men and women serving in the armed forces today, and we remember with thanksgiving those who served their country in time of war, and those who died.

These are familiar words. Too familiar, perhaps. I have said them before. You have heard them before. It is a hot day, too hot for speeches. And what could I, who have never experienced war, really know of the suffering and the anguish we are commemorating here.

So let us cut to the heart of things. In this cemetery there are just under 7000 headstones. 7000 lives lost. 7000 loves lost. 7000 men, young and old, sons and fathers, artists and poets and plumbers and farmers, dead. 7000 futures gone, rubbed out. And of those who died toiling on the Thai-Burma railway, perhaps as many as 100,000. Malay. Burmese. British. Javanese. Australian. Dutch. American. And that cruellest of words: "others", including a small handful of New Zealanders.

More than 230 deaths for each day the railway was under construction. More than 240 deaths for every kilometre of track laid. And how many lives back home, how many hearts back home, were broken by the deaths of these men? A million? More, surely. Many more. A human tragedy beyond counting.

We are not here to listen to speeches. We are here to call to mind, to call to heart, the suffering of those who died and those who mourn. We are here to be counted amongst those who believe that the values of courage and loyalty and service and grit and mate-ship and honour continue to be true, continue to matter. We are here because it is the least we can do for those who sacrificed so much. We are here to remember.

On this day we remember ordinary people from many different lands, united by a most extraordinary thing: they gave up their lives, they were robbed of their promise, so that we who came after them might live in peace.

Their sacrifice stands as a silent witness to the enduring values of faith and hope and love, and to the desolation of war.

It is right indeed that we should remember them.