



Ambassador John Berry – RSL and SCA Annual Conference

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**Ambassador Berry's Keynote Address to the  
Returned and Services League and Services Clubs Association  
14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

*(As prepared for delivery, August 26, 2015)*

As we mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Allied victory in the Pacific this month, it is a tremendous privilege to be able to speak before you today. One of my greatest honors during my time as Ambassador has been meeting Australian veterans of the Second World War.

These men and women are inevitably humble in their demeanor and in their recounting of their role in the war. They would probably be embarrassed to be called heroes, but that is exactly who they – and hundreds of thousands of others of their generation are: heroes. Our nations and nations around the world owe these veterans and veterans since an enormous debt of gratitude for their service, dedication, and sacrifice.

This month also marks the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal, widely regarded as the turning point in the land war in the Pacific. My father fought in that battle. I grew up learning about World War II and about Australia from my father.

Recently, Mr. Gordon Johnson, a veteran of the Battle of the Coral Sea who lives here in Canberra, gave me wartime footage he captured when he served as a telegraph operator aboard the HMAS Hobart. His video shows Australian navy ships escorting the U.S. Marine Corps' 1<sup>st</sup> Division to Guadalcanal in preparation for the coming battle. These images are rare treasures. They can help translate the significance and realities of that war to the next generation – the children and grandchildren who will carry forward the U.S.-Australia alliance.

Seeing this, for me, was like seeing the world through my father's eyes. This clip here shows Australian sailors on the HMAS Hobart and U.S. marines on the USS Cimarron exchanging cigarettes, uniforms, souvenirs – tokens of mateship – between the ships during a refueling. There was a friendship forged in battle before the signing of the ANZUS Treaty. Americans and Australians were mates long before becoming allies.

After surviving Guadalcanal, my father traveled to Australia to rest and recuperate. He and his fellow Marines camped at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. While he was in Melbourne, he visited your war memorial. My father told me about the warmth, generosity, and goodness of the Australians he met. A trolley car driver remarked that my father looked like he needed a good meal, and invited him home to join his family for dinner, despite rationing and shortages.



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The generosity of Australians reminded my father of what we were fighting for and why it was important to keep going even against seemingly insurmountable odds. In fact, after six months on Guadalcanal, my father wondered if there was any good left in the world. The welcome he received was so warm and so true that it reminded him and the whole Division that not only was there good left in the world – but it was also damned worth fighting for!

That Australian trolley driver and his family did more than help replace the 45 lbs my dad had had lost – they restored my father’s faith in the human spirit. He and his mates continued the fight for freedom in battles all across the Pacific. They drew strength for the fight not only from their friends and families back home in the United States, but also from memories of Australia.

When the war in the Pacific ended 70 years ago, the U.S.-Australian alliance was still just an idea. The alliance born of this idea – based on shared experiences, shared values, and a shared sense of destiny – laid the foundation for over half a century of peace and security in the Asia Pacific.

The stability wrought by the U.S.-Australia friendship and later alliance enabled the rise of this region as an economic powerhouse and a driver of global progress.

Our alliance today is strong. It is enduring. And the United States has no better friend than Australia.

We are not allies because of geography.

We are not allies because it is convenient.

We are not allies out of obligation.

We are allies because we share the common foundational values of liberty, justice, democracy, and respect for human dignity and freedom.

We are allies because neither one of us walks away from our friends. In our darkest days, we have always stood together – and we always will.

President John F. Kennedy once said, “Lofty words cannot construct an alliance or maintain it – only concrete deeds can do that.”

Our deeds together during World War I are inscribed on the walls of our war memorials.

And, those deeds continued during World War II, Korea and Vietnam, in the Persian Gulf and in Somalia.



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Today, we stand together in Afghanistan, and we stand together in Iraq; allies side by side – come what may.

In fact, the United States and Australia have stood side by side to face every challenge of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries – wars in Asia and in the Middle East, terrorism, and natural disasters.

Our modern alliance has also grown with cooperation between our two countries leading to tremendous advancements in space exploration, technological innovation, and regional peace and security.

Just last month, scientists here in Canberra at the Deep Space Communication Complex were the first to see pictures of Pluto recorded by the New Horizons mission. Just like the images of Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon – the images came first to Australia and then to the United States and across the globe and will help researchers unlock the secrets of the universe.

In the Asia-Pacific, more than six decades of U.S.-Australia cooperation has served as the bedrock for unprecedented stability and economic prosperity. As Pacific powers, we lead the way to even greater growth through regional institutions, cooperation, and trade. We have demonstrated over the past 40 years through our leadership and example that disputes can be resolved peacefully, without the use of force or coercion.

Security cooperation has always been a cornerstone of our alliance. It will continue to be so.

Last month, the United States and Australia conducted the sixth Talisman Sabre joint military exercise. It involved more than 33,000 personnel, 200 aircraft, and 20 vessels conducting air, sea, and land operations in Australia; with virtual forces in Hawaii, San Diego, and South Korea.

This biennial event tests the ability of U.S. and Australian troops to work together in battle. This year's exercise notably included two other regional partners – Japan and New Zealand. The exercise also focused on the role of civil society and post-conflict reconstruction. Thanks to joint exercises like Talisman Sabre, we know that should adversity or crisis come to pass, we will stand ready to tackle it together.

But security today means so much more than the actions of our armed forces.

Our partnership with Australia increasingly is about our relationships with countries throughout the region, including with China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

Our goal has been, and continues to be, to promote a stable, transparent, and rules-based order that will encourage cooperation among all Asia Pacific countries. This approach has a proven



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track record over the past 40 years which has seen peace and economic dynamism throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

This is why Australia, the United States, and 10 other countries are in the final stages of concluding the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The agreement, when concluded, will establish high standards for protecting labor and the environment, and will expand trade among the member countries, which represent more than 40% of global GDP.

Security also means human security – the provision of food, water, shelter, and the protection of human rights. It means preventing the spread of disease. It means conserving resources for future generations.

It means cybersecurity. It means protecting satellites in orbit.

It means opening the doors to innovation and investment.

Our partnership is not limited to the Asia-Pacific region. Australia and the United States are committed to addressing challenges and threats to our national security emanating from around the world.

Threats to democracy. Threats to the environment. Threats to the economy. Threats to global health.

Threats to our shared future. Such as terrorism.

The scourge of ISIL and its hateful ideology can only be eradicated through concerted action by the United States, Australia, and other countries that share our values and our commitment. This, of course, is not just a military effort, but will require a whole-of-society approach as well as international cooperation to stop the flow of money and recruits to ISIL and prevent the radicalization of individuals.

Australia has played a key role in countering ISIL and in the work to counter violent extremism, and we greatly appreciate Australia's leadership in these efforts.

The modern alliance forged by the United States and Australia tackles all these threats and more. From the Ukraine, to Syria, to West Africa. From the halls of the United Nations to the deserts of the Middle East. America and Australia have stood together because of our shared interests and our shared values.

In Afghanistan and Iraq – places some of you know all too well – we are working together to bring peace, to take the fight against aggression and terror to its home base.



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The thousands of Americans and Australians who have fallen, have not done so in vain. The peace and security that has fostered prosperity in our countries and in our homelands and regions was paid for by the sacrifice of our brave compatriots.

Our countries are grateful to all fighting men and women who have faced hardships and adversity in service to their nations.

I want to thank each and every person in this room for your service and your sacrifice.

It is hard to return home from war. Veterans struggle with homelessness, joblessness, and physical and mental readjustment. I was heartened to learn that your Chief of Defence Forces, Air Chief Marshall Mark Binskin identified mental health as a key issue, along with major topics such as the Force Posture Review and the Defense White Paper. CDF Binskin said the Australian Defence Force is the Australian government's leading investor in mental health research, and would be making their research results available to the whole of Australia.

As your Prime Minister and Defense Minister said earlier this year: "Their mission is over, but our mission to stand with the veterans continues."

Veterans bring invaluable skills and traits to the workforce; such as, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, critical thinking.

Your government and mine must honor veterans' service by fulfilling their promises and commitments to veterans. With education, with employment, and with opportunity.

American veterans returning from World War II – from the Battle of Guadalcanal and other battlefields across the Pacific – used the G.I. Bill to go to university, to start businesses, buy homes, and to grow the American middle class and the American economy. These men and women, the Greatest Generation, made America the superpower it is today.

I am proud that when I was the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, the U.S. government's hiring of veterans reached record highs. Our civilian government is now all the stronger for it.

But it is not just the government that veterans turn to for support. I commend organizations such as your own and many others here in Australia and in the United States that serve the men and women who served their countries.

Let's return to the historic Battle of Guadalcanal. Flying over Guadalcanal was an American flag. The flag went ashore with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division on August 7, 1942. It was likely the first



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flag flown in combat during the Guadalcanal campaign. And it survived. In 1957, Colonel H.A. Cavanaugh presented this same flag to the RSL in Ivanhoe, Victoria. The RSL in Ivanhoe has served as caretaker of his important piece of U.S.-Australian history for over 50 years. I am pleased to announce today that the U.S. embassy will be assisting the RSL to restore, conserve, and display this flag. This symbol of the alliance between the United States and Australia will teach future generations about the sacrifices made to secure our freedom.

My father told me that the Marines landed on Guadalcanal with few supplies, and received little more due to the Japanese naval blockade. They were short of food and ammunition. They lived in foxholes and dugouts. But they were Marines, and like many of you here, were imbued with that fighting “digger” tenacity, so they held.

They endured hard mornings on Guadalcanal when they were waiting for resupply. They knew it would be a bad day when – more than once after night time naval battles – they looked out at the ocean and saw that all the ships were flying the Rising Sun. And they knew that help was not coming anytime soon. But they were Marines, so they held.

They fought in mud and rain and heat. They suffered from malaria and malnutrition. They endured continual assault, and were hit by some of the heaviest naval barrages of the war. But those Marines held that rock. And, in doing so, they helped turn the tide of the war – and of history.

In conditions like those – after six months of hard fighting – it would be incredibly easy to lose hope. It would be easy to give up. But the Marines – my father among them – were lucky enough to come to Australia to rest their minds and bodies and regenerate their spirits. After the hell of Guadalcanal, Australia must have seemed like a paradise.

When the ships came to Australia, there was a band there to meet them on the docks of Melbourne, playing “Waltzing Matilda.” The commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Marines, General Vandegrift, reportedly remarked that it was the sweetest sound he had ever heard. And, my dad would add – though no one would admit it – there wasn’t a dry eye on that ship. So important was this event, that since that time, for 73 years – wherever and whenever the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division ships out, anywhere in the world – they do so to the strains of Waltzing Matilda. It is their battle song. It is and always will be the sound of liberty and freedom. Long may its chords nourish our alliance now and for generations to come.

God Bless each of you for your service and may God continue to bless the United States and Australia.