

ANZAC DAY ADDRESS

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Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen - good morning.

Before dawn on 25th April 1915, ninety-nine years ago today, the first waves of Australian and New Zealander soldiers assembled in small boats to mount an amphibious assault upon the beaches, and ultimately upon entrenched troops atop the jagged cliffs and narrow ridgelines, of the Gallipoli Peninsula in the European part of what is now modern Turkey.

This relatively small invasion force was not intended to hold or occupy the ground, but rather to be a rapid cross-country assault that would open the narrow strip of water named the Dardanelles to allied shipping, through which a naval assault would be mounted upon Constantinople, now called Istanbul. The campaign was intended to divert Germany and Turkey – as its recent ally – from the war in Western Europe. In the days, weeks, and ultimately the eight months that followed on the Gallipoli Peninsula, the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF), supported by many further waves of reinforcements, and including New Zealander, British, Canadian, French and Indian land forces, allied shipping, and the first flimsy experiments in military aviation, forged a story that defines modern Australia.

ANZAC Day means many things to each and every one of us, but today as we remember those who gave their lives, we celebrate the birth of a national spirit. We do not glorify war, nor do we merely remember one or two horrendous battles or the recipients of medals. Today we remember the men and women who did not come home from all wars, conflicts, lands, seas and skies to which Australia has devoted an operational military presence. We also remember those who were fortunate to return, but who – no matter what their state of physical health – carry with them the horrific scars of war and other traumas.

ANZAC Day is about valour, sacrifice, mateship, idealism, freedom and pride. It is Australia's only completely national day for remembering a common experience that has been shared by many Australian men and women, and for remembering the price paid by them for our modern way of life.

In the eight months the First AIF spent at ANZAC Cove and along the Gallipoli ridgelines, those original ANZACs fought with great determination under very difficult conditions. The common hardship and hourly risk of death forged an enduring ethic which the soldiers called 'mateship'. It was this mateship that was to see some of them through the worst experiences of their young lives. Many never saw it through but were comforted in their last hours by their mates as they thought of family, lost love and the great homeland they would not see again.

Prior to the Gallipoli landings, many Australians had served under colonial colours in South Africa and various other far flung corners of the world. Federation united the colonies and the fledgling-nation's military forces served under a new banner at Gallipoli, the flag that we hold here today. The Gallipoli experience introduced the world to Australians. In turn it introduced Australia to the world. In the words of one contemporary newspaper column, the ANZAC contribution to the Gallipoli campaign placed Australia "at one bound alongside the other nations of the world ... fighting for liberty and in the interests of civilisation". Through their actions and at great human cost a layer was woven into the fabric that has become the "Australian Legend".

Looking around at the faces here today, I observe that Australia has gained a lot from its European heritage and as a result of migration from many other lands. But, Australian families have paid a terrible price to preserve the freedoms that continue to make Australia such a wonderful homeland. The young Australian nation bore the highest casualty rate of any countries involved in the First World War: over forty thousand Australian servicemen were killed in Europe alone. Scarcely a family was untouched by the personal tragedy of a war that was supposed "to end all wars". The skies and seas, and land-wars on other continents have born their own terrible toll.

Today we gather near this old Aussie, a simple but timeless reminder of the durability and strength of the Australian character, and a symbol of Australia's deep and enduring roots in Europe. Those roots are also characterised by a further terrible war experience from 1939-1945 and in contributions to military interventions in several modern European nations since.

The ANZAC Spirit has been displayed in countless other countries and campaigns. Men and women prepared to chance their lives for the cause of freedom and for the Australian way of life. The Australian Legend includes numerous stories of soldiers, sailors, airmen and women in France, Germany, Britain, Southern Europe and North Africa, The Middle East, Burma and in South-East Asia; at Tobruk, throughout the Pacific Islands, on vast oceans and seas, in the skies, along Kokoda; in contributions to the efforts of the Allies and the United Nations in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, and in response to both natural and manmade disasters in places such as the Sahara, Israel, Cambodia, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Sudan, Indonesia; very recently in the Philippines; within our own territories, and in numerous other locations throughout the world.

Many of us have close friends and colleagues who continue to serve in harm's way. Those people continue to do what we both celebrate and remember here today having volunteered for a set of values, for good, and to help someone they probably do not know in a far-away land. Not questioning the nature of the task, but getting on with the job in the same spirit that has been woven into the Australian Legend since that first day at ANZAC Cove, 99 years ago.

Sixty-six Australians are known to have served in the Spanish Civil War. Most of them independently travelled to Spain and enlisted within the International Brigades. At least 14 of them did not survive.

We also acknowledge the bravery and commitment of those who served with other nations, whether friend or foe at the time, but who are united with us today in a common bond that seeks freedom and joy for the people of all nations, cultures, religions and creeds.

So we are gathered here in this early morning sunrise to remember all those men and women who have paid the supreme sacrifice and who – through their Great Deeds – achieved so much to ensure that Australia can prosper in a free and democratic world. Today we salute them, pay tribute to them, thank them, and in so doing we celebrate the enduring victory of the ANZAC Spirit. It behoves us all to ensure that this spirit continues to be part of the Australian Legend both at home and as ambassadors abroad.

Through our own dedication and commitment the ANZAC Spirit will continue to be cherished and remembered, and our young people will also understand and pay tribute to the price that has been paid by so many for the freedoms they enjoy.

Lest We Forget