

ANZAC Address

At dawn on the morning of the 25th April 1915, the 3rd Brigade of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps made their ill-fated landing on the Gallipoli peninsula. There, stranded between ocean and sheer cliff faces, they were met by an onslaught of rifle rounds and shells from the Turkish defenders. Over the next eight months the Anzac's fought a grueling campaign resulting in the loss of 8709 Australian men during what was to become the most infamous battle in Australian military history. The Australians who fought at Gallipoli and at subsequent campaigns along the Western Front soon gained a reputation for courage, determination, dedication and mateship that has become a reflection of what it means to be an Australian today.

At the commencement of the First World War Australia had been federated for just thirteen years and had not yet had a chance to prove itself as a nation. The war was the first opportunity Australia had to perform on the world stage. It was because of this chance – a chance to prove our worth and to show other nations what we were made of - that the war was met with such enthusiasm. From a population of less than 5 million, over 416 000 volunteered their lives for their country, unaware of the fate that awaited them on distant shores. Whether this dedication stemmed from a sense of adventure, obligation or just wanting to be involved, the Anzac's sheer determination in battle, their raw courage, and their self-sacrifice in the face of death itself was driven by those closest to them: their family and their mates. It is on values such as these – courage, determination, dedication, mateship, loyalty and sacrifice – that we continue to pride ourselves on as Australians today and on which the Anzac legend itself was forged.

Qualities such as larrikinism, teamwork and a sense of acting upon what is conscientiously right, even if it means disregarding authority in some cases, have made the Australian soldier a figure of legend. However, this legend, which emerged from the war, is a story not of sweeping military victories but of triumphs against overwhelming odds, of courage and ingenuity in the face of adversity. It is a legend of free and independent men whose discipline derived not from military authority but from the bonds of mateship and the demands of necessity. What is at the heart of the Anzac story is best summarized by the former Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, who said that:

“Real nobility and grandeur belongs not to empires and nations but to the people on whom they, in the last resort, always depend”.

The enormity of the ANZAC sacrifice is one that we can hardly comprehend. It was in the horror of warfare, where lives are destroyed and dreams are forever lost, that the ANZAC's valiantly fought for our freedom and safety, and subsequently forged our national identity. Sir Colin Hines, President of the R.S.L. said:

“We do not glorify war on Anzac Day. Far from it. We remember the dreadful loss of lives in the many gallant battles fought by those brave young men who stepped forward when called upon to serve their country. Nor are we aggressive, but we believe in showing the future enemy that we are so determined to defend our shores that he should think twice before taking on the Sons of Anzac!”

On ANZAC day, we are reminded that war is destructive, that combat is devastating, and that humans are affected physically, emotionally and spiritually in many different ways. The essence of ANZAC day 93 years later lies in showing those who gave their lives and fought for our freedom and safety – for what was right – our utmost respect and appreciation. We can undertake this, not just by remembering and honouring them, but by committing ourselves to following their example and this is the challenge that lies before all of us and to future generations.

I now ask that you join me in 2 minutes silence following the Ode, commemorating those who have given their lives so that we today may live in peace, liberty and prosperity.

“They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the Sun and in the morning we will remember them”