



ANZAC DAY Speech for use by an Ex-Service Organisation Version 6

Time dims the memory of ordinary events, but not great events. In a nation's history, great events - whether in peace or war - live in our memories regardless of time. They are deemed great not necessarily for what they achieve, nor for whether they are reckoned to be victories or successes.

Rather, the great events are distinguished by the quality of the human endeavour they call upon, by the examples they create for ordinary men and women, and by the legends they inspire.

So it is with ANZAC day.

On 25th April 1915, 16000 New Zealanders and Australians surged ashore at the foot of rugged cliffs on the Dardanelles peninsula, in Turkey, to open a campaign intended to give allied shipping access to the black sea, bring help to Russia, and perhaps force Turkey out of the war.

It was - historians say - an ill-conceived campaign in pursuit of a vague objective, premised on an under-estimation of the military prowess and character of the Turkish soldiers, and of the tactical advantages they held.

But the cream of the New Zealand and Australian armies - volunteers all - committed themselves with no hesitation about the nobility of their cause, and fought with great courage, skill and audacity.

In the eight months which followed their first landing, some 50,000 ANZACs were committed to the battlefield, alongside 36,000 British, French and Indian comrades. When the last of them was withdrawn as winter set in, more than 11,000 New Zealanders and Australians lay dead, and with them many more allied and Turkish soldiers.

Gallipoli was a tactical defeat, but the New Zealanders and the Australians' withdrawal was a sort of tactical victory before the enemy realised what had happened.

But the achievements of the ANZACs were to be measured other than on the battlefield. It was not just that New Zealanders and Australians were serving overseas in the name of their fledgling nations for the first time. By their commitment, their courage and their comradeship, the ANZACs set standards that inspired their countrymen for generations to come. The legends they established gave fresh voice to new feelings of national pride in both young nations, and the news of their suffering, on reaching the homes of anxiously awaiting families, brought people together in ways they had not known before.

For New Zealanders and Australians, ANZAC is our own day.

It is a day on which we mark the deeds of men and women who had come to see themselves as New Zealanders and Australians, and who were mourned by people who regarded themselves as New Zealanders and Australians.

The names on the public memorials existing on virtually all our towns and cities are important and regular reminders of the losses our nations felt in those darker days.

The first ANZACs indeed command and deserve the respect and remembrance of present and future generations of all New Zealanders and Australians, regardless of race, colour or creed.

On every 25th of April since 1915, New Zealanders and Australians at home and abroad have gathered to commemorate not just those ANZACs who died on that day, but every one of our service men and women who has died in war or as a result of it since then.

We remember on this day those who fell in both world wars, in conflicts in Korea, Malaya, Borneo, and Vietnam since then, and while on service with international peacekeeping forces wherever they were.

But it was Gallipoli which gave us pride, not in war, but in the knowledge that New Zealanders and Australians, put to the test, would not fail. That spirit and tradition sustained our forces in many later battles and trials, and in many ways, sustains us now.

And tradition is important. Suppose our troops had performed badly at Gallipoli, lost their nerve and their morale? How much more difficult would it have been for those who followed. The Gallipoli tradition laid down the rules and still helps us today to face new challenges.

Duty, patriotism, individual sacrifice, and the affirmation of the New Zealanders and Australian relationship are the enduring legacies of Gallipoli and all subsequent conflicts involving our two nations.

The men and women who forged the ANZAC spirit made sure that those who led them earned their respect. They all understood the values of independence, freedom and fairness and - above all - possessed a willingness to defend these things if need be. Because freedom only survives as long as people are willing to defend it.

That is the spirit ANZAC handed down to us. If we lose that ANZAC spirit, we lose all.

So here we stand today, along with thousands of others in cities and townships throughout New Zealand and Australia, to honour great men and women and a great tradition. We gather, as we shall always gather, not to glorify war, but to remind ourselves that we value who we are and the freedoms we possess, and to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of those who contributed so much in shaping the identity of this proud nation.