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Australian Ambassador to the USA**

**ANZAC Speech  
at the  
Washington National Cathedral**

**Tuesday 26 April 2011**

Writing home after the first ANZAC Day commemoration march in Egypt on 25 April 1916, General John Monash, a brigade commander in Gallipoli, to become the Australian Imperial Force's peerless commander in France, said, "This famous day ... our day." He had just witnessed the first parade of Gallipoli veterans. A blue ribbon on their right breast signified the fact. A red ribbon in addition signified presence at the landing. Later those who went on to serve in other theatres were entitled to wear an 'A' on their right shoulders.

This was not an event graced by government but the servicemen and veterans themselves. Their advocacy in Australia and New Zealand forced governments in the 1920s to recognise its symbolism with a holiday. It became for both of us our great national day.

Yesterday tens of thousands of Australians and New Zealanders attended dawn services and veterans and service marches across our nations, the events marked by the youth of much of the crowds. They recognised not only the long gone warriors of Gallipoli but all who have served in our many wars. Our allies, including those from the United States and Britain, would have been honoured and some veterans from allied nations would have marched. Battle honours paraded would commemorate far more successful engagements. Wars remembered including the Second World War, commemorate battlefields much closer to home with special gratitude to the US and our World War II generation who were totally mobilized then for national defence. Both genders and all races had their contribution recognized.

ANZAC Day has become more than a celebration of manly virtues among the independent Britons of the southern sun. It is a statement of our nationhood inclusive of all of us. Our enemies of the time will have been there too. I have even seen Wehrmacht veterans at local gatherings. A special place is there for the Turks – allies in Korea, enemies in Gallipoli. The many Turkish Australians will feel no discomfort. They are honoured for their stand at Gallipoli, always have been. There is gratitude for the post-war generosity of spirit of their great commander at Gallipoli, Mustafa Kemal, Kemal Attaturk. He of the famous order to his troops to block the advance of the initial landing: "I do not order you to attack, I order you to die." Gratitude too for the welcoming attitude of the Turks to the many who visit the sites.

It is not festive. The only levity is the "two-up" games, legalized for the day at the myriad RSL-RSA clubs across the countries as the veterans gather after the marches to drink to and remember old mates. My counterpart, the American Ambassador to Australia, described his first ANZAC Day as "sombre". As a boy, my father would take me to the marches; my mother would always stay home. She was always quiet this day. She would

try to imagine her father, who joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse in Egypt, in replacements for those lost on Gallipoli. He was invalided out, dying of his war illnesses when she was two years old. She was the beneficiary of her mother's War Widows Pension and the nurturing of her Legacy father. Legacy, established by ex-servicemen the year her father died, in 1923. Legacy, pre-eminent among the organisations established by veterans to support each other as they lived with the ghosts of their dead mates, and the many who joined them in death as a result of war service, in the subsequent decade.

But those crowds in Australia and New Zealand were matched by the crowds in Gallipoli at the services there. Those crowds are marked by their youth. Aussies and Kiwis in their thousands make the pilgrimage to this accommodation-challenged, remote part of Turkey. Most will have slept out the night before among the graves of their ancestors, forever young. While it is still dark they gather at ANZAC Cove, Ari Burnu, for the dawn service. They then divide. The Australians go to Lone Pine Cemetery for the morning service. They are at the centre of the many famous points among Australian objectives on Gallipoli. The Kiwis go to Chanuk Bair, high point of the battlefield, seized briefly by them on 8 August. There a specially-calibrated gap in the memorial sees the sun that day shine a light on the names of the honoured dead.

These days they are joined by hundreds of Turks. I have been privileged to be there on ANZAC Day three times: the first for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1990, then the 85<sup>th</sup> in 2000 and the 90<sup>th</sup> in 2005. The 75<sup>th</sup> was made most memorable by the presence of around 100 veterans, spritely men in their late 90s and a few centenarians. They were wonderful human time-capsules with their archaic Australianisms – “cobbers” was heard more often than “mates”. The government worried lest they saw the precautionary coffins being loaded onto the charter flight. Many however hoped they would die there. None did. Instead they met with aged Turkish counterparts. They talked for hours as soldiers can despite mutual incomprehension of the languages. They were gone by the later commemorations. Newly at the later commemorations were the hundreds of Turks, reflecting a burgeoning fascination with a part of their own national story.

Those who go marvel at the impossibility of the battlefield. It is a myriad of sharp ravines and ridges, an appalling killing ground. Every part of it has a Turkish name but the names that resonate for us are drawn from the ANZACs' experiences in Egypt and the South African war and those of commanders and soldiers in the fight. Plugges Plateau, Sphinx, the Nek, Monash Valley, Johnstons Jolly, Lone Pine, Bolton's Ridge, Baby 700, Courtney, Steeles and Quinns Post. Occasionally Turkish – Gaba Tepe, Chanuk Bair. They walk the trenches, they seek memorabilia long ago policed out but bits of brass can still be found.

When the soldiers left in the one entirely successful large-scale military manoeuvre of the campaign, they left behind their mates – some, a minority buried in lovingly tended graveyards, most still on the field, some to be recovered at war's end. When I went in 1990, one family had researched the position on the field of one unburied relative, calculating water flows. They found him in one of the many unmarked gullies of this extraordinary terrain. Leaving mates behind was the hardest thing for the extracted soldiers. Sergeant Alfred Guppy of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote:

“Sleep sound old friends – the keenest part. Which more than failure, wounds the heart. Is thus to leave you, thus to part.”

They were conscious of the rationale of the campaign. Even more concerned to prove the valour of their untested nations.

A 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion officer, Alan Henderson, wrote his wife just before the landing:

“At last we make our final move and very soon we will have started to do what we came away for and have waited so long to do. While you are in church tomorrow thinking of us, we may be needing all your prayers ... but everything is ready and everyone quietly confident of success. It is going to be Australia’s chance and she makes a tradition out of this that she must always look back on. God grant that it will be a great one. The importance of this alone seems stupendous to Australia, while the effect of success on the war itself will be even greater.”

It was not successful militarily. However, as Henderson hoped, it cemented a reputation for valour, loyalty, support for one’s mates, initiative and stoicism.

Australia and New Zealand went on to fight even more bloody battles in France and the Middle East. Some were similar failures; more were successes. By 1918 they were at the spearhead of the very successful British army in France, Palestine and Syria. In 1918 a metric of German intelligence was, if you find Australians on your front, you can expect to be attacked within 48 hours. The war saw Australians and Americans fight together for the first time in General Monash’s successful experimental combined arms assault on Hamel, 1,000 Americans from the Illinois 33 Division – the Prairie Division.

Fifty per cent of eligible Australians volunteered. Even greater numbers in percentage terms of Kiwis served. They had conscription. Of the 330,000 Australians who served in the army and 90,000 more in the navy, 60,000 were killed. Casualties among soldiers stood at 68%. Another 60,000 died in the decade after, of war-caused injuries and illnesses. New Zealand casualties were slightly higher.

In Australia one in two extended families experienced a loved-one lost or injured. The effect on the national imagination is incalculable now. Something might be gleaned from the march of 10,000 widows in Sydney dressed in black from the domain to the point of embarkation at war’s end to lay wreaths.

Of human consequences, I want to give the last word to a pre-battle letter written by the commander of the Wellington battalion, New Zealander Lt. Col. William Malone, before the 8 August assault on Chanuk Bair:

“I know you will never forget or let the dear children do so. I am prepared for death and hope that God will have forgiven me all my sins. My desire for life – so that I may see and be with you again – could not be greater but I have only done what every man was bound to do in our country’s need. It has been a great consolation to me that you approved my action; the sacrifice was really yours. May you be consoled and rewarded by our dear Lord.”

Seven-hundred and sixty members of the battalion engaged in the successful assault. When relieved, 70 walked back. Colonel Malone was not one of them.