

**ANZAC DAY ADDRESS  
BY THE CHIEF OF AIR FORCE  
AIR MARSHAL GEOFF BROWN, AO  
AT HELLFIRE PASS, THAILAND  
ON 25 APRIL 2015**

We gather here, before the dawn, to remember the actions of young Australians who have made this day sacred to all of us. There is a quality to the actions of those young men that is beyond mere words to adequately commemorate.

The historical facts are bleak. An army corps comprising young men from two tiny, young nations stormed ashore on the Gallipoli Peninsula. They encountered a tough enemy and even tougher terrain and conditions. They suffered and died for eight months before conceding defeat. They endured terrible hardship through a hot summer and withdrew amid snow and storms. They left thousands of their dead behind in shallow, improvised graves.

On the face of it, that narrative does not seem to provide rich material for forging a national myth. Nor does it explain why—one hundred years later—Australians regardless of age, colour or creed, gather before the dawn, whether at home or abroad, to commemorate that morning. Yet we do.

Later today as dawn breaks over what the journalist Chris Masters termed our “Fatal Shore’ at Gallipoli, thousands of Australians will gather to pay homage to

those young men of the ANZAC Corps. Already, back home in small towns and every major city, hundreds of thousands of our people have gathered in the morning chill to renew the pledge that we made to never forget them.

These ceremonies are eloquent in their simplicity. The silence and the lone, mournful bugle say more than any words we try to formulate. The inadequacy of words to truly express what Anzac is about, explains why it continues to grow in significance with the elapse of time.

There is an imperishable quality to the actions of those young men. And those actions were inspired by values that never lose their currency—courage, resilience, self-sacrifice and love of one's mates and one's country. Their actions and values transcended chaos and defeat.

I will leave it to the scholars and commentators to explain why the phenomenon of Anzac endures and grows. But to me, it is simple—values such as courage and sacrifice never go out of fashion. And the hardships endured by those young men with bravery, dignity and even good humour, will always unify and inspire Australians.

Contemporary accounts reveal that the Anzacs were acutely aware that their efforts had given birth to a distinctive Australian national identity. Yet I doubt they would ever have dreamt that one hundred years later their conduct in that doomed campaign would have become synonymous with it means to be an Australian. But Gallipoli and Anzac have become central to our

sense of who we are as a people. That Anzac has almost become the foundational myth of our nation tells us a lot about Australia.

We do not glorify war. If we did there are so many other battles and campaigns which would have held us, especially our younger generations, in thrall. Our military history is rich in stirring victories. Any of them would provide a more appropriate occasion for national commemoration than a costly defeat in faraway Turkey.

Like those original Anzacs, the men who made this place an Australian sacred site knew the pain of defeat. They became prisoners of war. Their captors treated them with brutality. Yet neither defeat nor depravity robbed them of their human decency. In their most dire peril, they drew on the values of Anzac. Even in captivity they gathered to remember the first Anzacs. One of them – William Webb – recorded the event in his memoirs.

‘Just before dawn a few shadowy forms gathered on the road [at 75-kilometre camp Burma]...The still solemnity of this Anzac morning—their day since 1915—garbed their emaciated forms with imagined uniforms...[they marched] to where a large wooden cross had been erected. A wreath of timid jungle flowers and ferns were reverently laid before this simple shrine, in memory, not only of the fallen of 1914-18 and of this last war, but also of the all too many mates, whose resting places were marked by an almost endless chain of pitiful crosses on this trail of tribulation.’

Like the original Anzacs, I doubt that the men who suffered and died here would have imagined that their descendants would be gathering decades later to pay tribute to them. Yet their link to the original Anzac legend is very tangible and direct.

Outside the Australian War Memorial in Canberra two figures stand permanent silent vigil. Lonely sentinels who embody everything that Australians revere in their fighting men and women and in one another. They are John Kirkpatrick Simpson and Edward 'Weary' Dunlop. One was an original Anzac and the other toiled on the Thai-Burma Railway. One was a medic who moved casualties on a donkey. The other was a doctor who tended to the wounded in the most ghastly of conditions.

If you look closely at the statue of Weary it bears the most benign smile. That expression captures the compassion of a man who had seen too much death and too much cruelty but who had been ennobled, not diminished, by it. Our most important national monument is flanked by two men who spent their war trying to save lives rather than take them. That says a lot about Australia. It says everything about the true meaning of Anzac.

Today we pause to mourn those who died in every war and conflict in which Australia has engaged. Their names are all inscribed on the panels of our War Memorial. Each one left a grieving family. Each one represents a life extinguished far too early.

Of course our remembrance is made even more poignant given that this is the centenary of the Anzac landing. Adding to the significance of this day is the fact that as we gather today, young Australians and New Zealanders are on the ground in the Middle East again following in the footsteps of their forebears.

We need to pause to reflect on their courage and their willingness to leave home and loved ones behind to ensure the security of Australia and our way of life. And as Chief of Air Force, I am incredibly proud of the men and women of our Air Task Group who have been in that same theatre since last September. They and the land component are fitting heirs to the legacy of those original Anzacs. We all offer thoughts and prayers for all of them and their families on this day.

As is the custom wherever Australians gather on this day, I commend the deeds of all Australians who have served their nation especially those who did not return.

Lest we forget.