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Remembering the brave ANZAC troops

By Thomas Manning
For the Herald

“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old... Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn”.

These poignant words are from ‘For the Fallen’, a poem by Laurence Binyon eulogising the soldiers who died in the First World War.

Binyon’s poem forms an integral part of ANZAC Day commemoration services held on the 25th of April every year by Australians and New Zealanders as they honour their countrymen who have died in war.

The day of commemoration is named after the Australia & New Zealand Army Corp (ANZAC) which landed in a small cove on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey on the 25th of April 1915 as part of amphibious invasion of the Dardanelles, then part of the Ottoman Empire, by British Empire forces.

The ANZAC troops fought bravely but were ultimately repulsed by the Turks who were equally brave and under the brilliant leadership of Colonel Mustafa Kemal Atatürk whose success in defeating the British invaders was the first of many victories leading to his founding the Republic of Turkey of which he was its first president.

The British generals lounging in the opulent wardrooms of warships moored safely off the coast and impervious to the huge and rapidly mounting death-toll kept ordering their troops to attack as they drank champagne and ate delicacies bought in from Paris.

The Gallipoli generals’ callous attitudes were typical of the class-ridden times and indeed their peers on the Western Front similarly sated themselves on the finer things of life at a safe distance from the action while they too kept ordering their men to blindly charge into death’s jaws despite the obvious and utter futility of it all.

The Dardanelles campaign is known to this day as “Churchill’s Folly” as it was masterminded by the then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, who resigned when the British forces were ultimately forced by their dreadful losses to withdraw.

By the time the campaign ended more than 130,000 men had died (87,000 Ottoman soldiers and 44,000 Allied soldiers including more than 8700 Australians and 2779 New Zealanders) and more than 350,000 troops has been wounded.

In their valiant attempts to storm the heights at Gallipoli the ANZAC troops displayed such bravery that they earned the enduring respect of the Turkish defenders.

The respect of the Turks was such that after the war Australian and New Zealand authorities were allowed to establish formal cemeteries at “ANZAC Cove” as the area colloquially became known.

In 1985 the Turkish Government officially recognized the colloquial name and renamed the bay ‘ANZAC Cove’ which in Turkish is “Anzak Koyu”.

ANZAC Cove is now the setting every 25th of April for solemn commemoration services honouring the troops of Australia, New Zealand and Turkey and thousands of Australians and New Zealanders travel from all over the world to attend.

Back in Australia and New Zealand millions attend ANZAC dawn services as do expatriates in foreign cities. ANZAC Day does not celebrate military victories (ANZAC forces certainly have plenty of those to their credit, Gallipoli aside) but instead commemorates the Australians and New Zealanders who have served and died in all conflicts.

Also importantly, the defeat at Gallipoli was the catalyst for Australia's and New Zealand's evolution from British dominions to independent nations.

On a percentage of population basis far more Australian and New Zealand troops died and were wounded at Gallipoli and in other First World War battles than the losses suffered by the British Army.

After the carnage at Gallipoli the people of Australia and New Zealand started asking why their governments had so blindly allowed the British to sacrifice so many of their men as it was crystal clear from the very first day of the invasion (except to Churchill and his generals) that the Turks had an impregnable position above the beaches and, as proved to be the case, could not be dislodged.

Because of the Gallipoli fiasco the governments of Australia and New Zealand refused to allow their troops to ever be under the command of a foreign government again (particularly the British) and in this insistence on sovereign rights started shedding their colonial yokes and all the blind forelock-tugging that went with it.

ANZAC Day is also honoured every year in Buenos Aires and on 25 April last a moving Commemoration Service was held at the Australian Embassy at which the ambassadors of Australia and New Zealand officiated in the presence of their compatriots and invited guests.

In accordance with the mutual respect between Australia, New Zealand and Turkey Taner Karakas, the Turkish ambassador, took part in the service and read from the words of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who wrote in part as follows about the ANZAC troops who died and are buried at ANZAC Cove:

“Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives.... You are now lying in a friendly country... Lying in our bosom now,,, And having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well”.

Australian ambassador Noel Campbell read a Requiem which traversed the sacrifices made by ANZAC troops at Gallipoli, the Second World War, Korea, Vietnam and in later conflicts and peacekeeping duties.

New Zealand ambassador Raylene Liufalani spoke about the sacrifices made by the peoples of the Pacific Islands particularly those of the Cook Islands and Niue, the land of her birth, and she saluted those peoples' unstinting contribution to the ANZAC forces and the many who perished in preserving the freedoms Australian, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands enjoy today.

Both ambassadors laid wreaths in memory of the dead ANZAC soldiers as the Last Post sounded and a minute's silence was observed.

The final words here, as with the first, must go to Laurence Binyon: *“At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them”.*

