

The ANZAC story begins at dawn on 25 April 1915. 30,000 New Zealand and Australian young men found themselves landing on Turkish shores, at a small cove that bears their name to this day. On the anniversary of that day we Australians and New Zealanders, wherever we may have roamed, gather to honour our past, reflect on the present and look to the future.

The young men from NZ and Australia, far-flung outposts of Empire, enlisted in 1914 imagining that they were going to fight the 'hun' – the Imperial German Army - in France or in Belgium, with British victory inevitable. Turkey was not at war; no one had heard of a place called Gallipoli.

The men who landed there could not have foreseen how that time and that place would become embedded in the consciousness of their nations. Year after year, Australians and New Zealanders reflect on the sacrifice of our servicemen and try to make sense of that piece of history.

We remember it was a time when the profound regard for and affinity between Australia and New Zealand was born out of shared sacrifice. Australians and New Zealanders fought side by side, their units inextricably mixed in the trenches on those distant and daunting hillsides.

Gallipoli became the most famous First World War battlefield outside the Western Front. It was a costly failure. Half of the nearly one million men who fought there on both sides – British, French, Indian as well as Australian and New Zealand and Turkish - were killed or wounded.

Later in the campaign, in the Pyrrhic victory and subsequent defeat that made its futility apparent; of the 760 men of the New Zealanders' Wellington Battalion who reached the summit of Chunuk Bair, 711 were casualties.

Both New Zealand and Australia made enormous contribution to the First World War; for Australia, 400,000 men from a population with fewer than 3 million men; for New Zealand, 100,000 men, one in five served. For both countries casualties

were amongst the highest of any country; about half the Australians and 58% of the New Zealanders who fought were killed or wounded.

We live here in a country of 300 million people; that would be more than 5 million dead, more people than live in Greater Boston, and another 12 million killed or wounded, together more people than live in New England.

It may seem strange that a military defeat should play such a large part in the history of two countries. But while this was a disastrous campaign, we remember also as a time of unforgettable bravery, a time when a sense of national identity was born on the beaches, the gullies and the hills of Gallipoli.

In reality it also played a huge part in the history of a third nation; it provided the impetus for the Turkish War of Independence and the foundation of the Turkish Republic eight years later under Atatürk, himself one of the Turkish commanders at Gallipoli.

But the Gallipoli experience has other meanings for us too. It is now widely recognized as a “coming of age” for Australia and New Zealand, a trial by fire in which two distant Dominions of Great Britain discovered their own mettle, sowing the seeds of their own distinct national identities.

My European ancestors departed England and Wales and Scotland and Portugal in the late eighteenth century, at about the same time another nation was being born. Here in New England, and living as I do in Concord, Massachusetts, I am always struck by the juxtaposition of dates and the importance of a particular battle in defining nationhood. For Americans, the battle of Concord and Lexington, for Australians and New Zealanders, another April day far away on Turkish shores. While 140 years and many thousands of miles may separate them in time and space, they both occupy much the same place in men’s hearts. They both now symbolize the transition to independent, self-assured nationhood.

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s words could almost apply as well to Gallipoli as to Concord:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,

*Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.*

Ironically at Gallipoli, the evacuation was the greatest Allied success of the campaign. Suvla and Anzac were evacuated in late December, the last troops leaving before dawn on 20 December 1915.

The evacuation also provided some interesting early examples of Australian cunning, and Kiwi ingenuity. While it was taking place, the ANZACs would maintain utter silence for an hour or more until curious Turks ventured out to reconnoitre, whereupon the ANZACs would open fire. As the numbers in the trenches thinned, rifles were rigged to fire by water dripped into a pan attached by wire to the trigger. Amazingly, only two troops were lost during the evacuation despite the prior warnings of 50% casualties from the British high command.

I want to conclude with the opening lines of the poem 'Good-Bye', written by Gunner F.E. Westbrook of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, who took ashore the first field gun during the Gallipoli Landings in 1915.

Good-Bye

*It has come to the last and its good-bye, Bill,
I'm sick at heart and sad
To leave you sleeping, old cobber, the best
That ever a squaddie had.*

*Somebody's bungled the job, it is said,
Who, it isn't for me to know,
But leaving the place where you fought and died,
Is stabbing my heart to go.*

*The lanes of mounds on the beach and hills,
In the spots that we fought to win,
The pledges of victories tardily won,
The graves of an Empires kin.*

*We're going, but over Australia way
They will speak with a welling pride
Of sons who answered the call to arms
From the city and countryside.*

*And whether we leaving or whether we stay
It is much in the way the same,
For deep in the side of the green tree –Fame –
Is bitten Australia's name.*