

Cronulla RSL Anzac Day 1996

Dawn Service Speech

Col A.C. Browne ,ED, RL

We stand here today to commemorate the events in a foreign land 81 years ago.

We should all ask ourselves "Why?" The answer has a lot to do with why we are Australians.

In 1915 Australia was very much a part of the then British Empire. There were not all that many people in Australia --between 4 and 5 million. Any threat to Empire was seen as part of a threat to what we stood for. You see in those days the concepts of freedom and democracy as we now know them were not as widely accepted as they now are. Australia was newly a free and democratic country with very strong ties to Britain, then regarded as the Motherland. A threat to Britain was indeed a very real threat to Australia.

So when war came it was inevitable that Australia would be there. The strategists of the day decided that Turkey, then an ally of Germany, should be kept out of Europe and that required a military action to occupy the Turkish Forces. It was decided that Turkey would be attacked through the Dardanelles. That that strategy would prove to be an error was not perceived and so one of the toughest battles ever fought was launched on the shores of Gallipoli.

Sometimes it is not remembered that the first Australians into action that day were from the Navy (the RAN had been operating in the South Atlantic as early as November 1914) but on April 25 1915 the first into action from Australia was the crew of the Australian submarine AE2 under Lt. Cmdr H. Stoker. It had laid in waiting outside the Dardanelles (and I suggest to the young people present you refer to your atlases) and then at 2.30 a.m. on the 25th it proceeded on the surface and wended its way through the Turkish minefields. It grounded twice.

The map will show quite clearly how difficult a task had been set. There, not so far from Ancient Troy the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps was to land on a rugged mountainous peninsula, across defended beaches and attempt to lock Turkey out of the war.

But students of military history would have immediately recognised the folly of such a plan. The Allies had already telegraphed their intentions by a naval bombardment a month earlier.

Nevertheless the landings were made. The troops who made up the assault force had been up all night. They were in the landing boats at 0230 (2.30 a.m.). Fortunately it was a flat sea and in the faint light of dawn the boats left the ships with the troops whose action we commemorate today. It was indeed a fateful shore on a very fateful Sunday. Many of the boats landing the troops were skippered by teenage midshipmen. Orders were given that no shots were to be fired before daylight.

The Turks were waiting. Some attackers died without crossing the beach but the landing was a success and the troops gained a tenuous foothold which they were to maintain for some months. Yet they had been ordered to Not shoot till daylight.

Casualties were heavy--about 40 dead and 360 wounded every day for the first week (the equivalent of about a brigade a week). The leadership was brave but perhaps a little uncautious. 50 officers were killed and 129 wounded in the first five days. As the official history relates "they were killed standing when others knelt. They were killed kneeling when others lay". And as quickly as the officers fell NCO's and privates stepped in to fill the gap.

On Day 1 of Anzac a legend was born. A legend of bravery, of self reliance and of unswerving mateship - the mark of the true Australian serviceman.

Another legend was born too - that of Simpson and his donkey. Simpson the self appointed saviour who brought out the wounded on a donkey. He acquired the Donkey on the day of the landing. A member of 3 Fd. Amb. he saw his job with an interesting perspective. Soon he acquired a second donkey. On May 19, his 25th day ashore Simpson did not return.

The great pity of it all was that in 1939-45 it all had to be done again. For me personally. I cannot forget - I lost a father and so many friends. And I know that so many others here grieve their personal losses too.

It has been my good fortune to have attended Anzac ceremonies in Japan and Korea. Just as we are here now other Australians around the country and in places like Singapore and London will be remembering.

And now I speak especially to the young amongst us -- let not the sacrifices of the men and women who gave their lives so that we can enjoy a peaceful existence be wasted. This is a wonderful country. Importantly it is your country. Make it a great place to be. That means in some way or other giving something of your life for the welfare of all --just as the ANZACS did.

To their undying memory.

Lest we forget

1996

news

Anzac dawn service



THOSE who died serving their country were remembered by the crowd which gathered for an Anzac Day dawn service in Cronulla last Thursday.

"We had a larger crowd than in previous years and this delighted the officials from Cronulla RSL," said sub-branch secretary Jim Edwards.

"Australia Remembers last year, sponsored by the Commonwealth Government, made people more aware of the importance of Anzac Day and that was reflected in the number of people in attendance."

Sacrifices made by service people and the importance of Anzac Day was the subject of an address by Colonel A.C. Browne.

Sub-branch treasurer Jack Glaves said he was surprised and gratified by the number of young people who joined the crowd of more than 200 people at the dawn service in Monro Park.

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