

Love for Those Behind Them (2017 ANZAC Service – by James Hornery Y11)

(Edited version)

102,825; the number of recorded Australian soldiers killed as a result of active service. 177,910; Australian soldiers wounded as a result of active service. 34,560; the approximate number of soldiers taken captive in the first and second world wars. Wives widowed; Children left fatherless; Mothers left without their sons and daughters.

Each year on the 25th of April men and women across Australia stagger out of bed and gather across cities, regional towns and small community meeting places. Hidden by dim light of daybreak and the cold autumn wind we gather to pay our respects to those who risked their life for those they left behind. Among us polished medals proudly sway, telling stories of sacrifice, determination and mate-ship that has come to be known as the ANZAC Spirit. We gather here to mourn our losses but also to remember the patriotism of a small island nation with a population of fewer than five million.

This year marks the 102nd anniversary of one of the biggest blunders in military history. On the 25th of April 1915 the combined Australian and New Zealand allied forces set out with the mission to capture a small Turkish peninsula known as Gallipoli. Full of pride, hope and courage our all-volunteer army began a full frontal assault in the hope of victory. Faced with almost impossible terrain and fierce resistance from the Turkish Army, it soon became clear that the mission was a stalemate. In arguably the most successfully orchestrated element of campaign, the ANZAC troops withdrew from the battle fields and evacuated the peninsula without Turkish knowledge and without further casualty. Some eight months after the first landing and 8,079 men short of the original number, the ANZACS left Gallipoli battered and deeply wounded. However, then followed the Western Front for them, a place name used in conjunction with words such as death and horror.

I've never had to witness the atrocities of war. I've never known anyone who's been on the frontline, and that's because I haven't had to. Due to the sacrifice of my fellow ANZACS I have been privileged enough to live an innocent and secluded life. I cannot empathise with what those thousands of men and women had to face on a daily basis, but I can respect and remember their courage and determination to fight for what they believed was right.

I believe a quote from English philosopher G.K Chesterton sums this up perfectly; "A true soldier fights not because he hates what's in front of him, but because he loves what's behind him".

Today we stand here as Australians, 102 years since a small, brave and newly-formed nation set out to prove its independence amongst what would become some of the fiercest and most ferocious battles the world had ever seen. Through the bloodshed and tyranny, we emerged battered and bruised, but courageous, proven and true. We stand here today as a nation of over 24 million to remember, respect and to commemorate. For those who cared more about the safety of others than they did themselves, for those who still lie among the poppies of Gallipoli and Fromelles and for those still serving today, because time dims the memory of ordinary events but never the nation building ones.

We will remember them.

Lest we forget.