

Wivenhoe Village ANZAC Service Speech  
by Tanya Harding - Elizabeth Macarthur High School

Firstly, I would like to recognise that we meet here today, not to glorify war or praise victors, but to remember those who have served our country during times of conflict and crisis, and to reflect upon their sacrifice.

I believe ANZAC spirit is the embodiment of the values and attributes exemplified by the ANZACs over in Gallipoli. This includes courage, integrity, teamwork, respect, sacrifice, I could go on. To keep the spirit of the ANZACs alive today is imperative in continuing a legacy that we can be proud of as a nation.

It is heartening to see the increasing number of people attending these dawn services and the ANZAC day marches. I find it especially significant seeing the number of small children being brought, knowing that they are being exposed to something that they may not even understand yet, but that they are being taught something Australia holds very close to its heart. It reminds me of how I, like millions of other Australians, were first introduced to ANZAC day.

I remember my mother dragging my siblings and I out of bed before dawn on ANZAC day each year, and her explaining to us every year who the ANZACs were, and why it was still important 100 years later for us to go to dawn services. As a small child I couldn't comprehend it; I had never been exposed to anything related to war before. I just remember the sound of the bugles, the solemn tone of the occasion, the service men and women in uniform, and at the end of each ceremony, the rising sun.

Since then, as I have grown, my exposure to the effects of war has grown; through the memories of my own family, the stories of service men and women who I have met, and other families who have lost loved ones. I don't think I ever grasped the gravity of war as heavily or as graphically until my visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum when I was 14, where I saw the remaining evidence of the aftermath of the atomic bombing there. I remember how sick I felt taking everything in, and I remember watching 2-300 Japanese kindergarteners walk through the museum on a school trip, probably not comprehending that part of their history at that age either.

It made me think about Australia's history. That young Australian men and women had experienced the indescribable in Gallipoli, as well as the many other wars Australia has participated in. I thought about the memories that my grandfather doesn't share with us from his time in Vietnam, and even parts of my father's career that my mother says he doesn't talk about.

It made me think about Ted Matthews, one of the last surviving ANZACs, who died at age 101, 82 years after Gallipoli. Ted Matthews was the oldest surviving out of those in the first Gallipoli landing on April 25th, and he was one of the last evacuated on December 20th, 1915. He was nearly one of the first casualties, on that first day when a hunk of Turkish shrapnel hit him in the chest upon landing. Fortunately, a thick notebook in his pocket that his mother had given him saved his life. Before he passed away in 1997, he gave an interview showing his justifiable anger regarding Gallipoli, and the circumstances that put himself and his mates on that beach that day. He warned young Australians to never romanticise or glorify war, and that it is a terrible thing that should be avoided at all costs.

I would also like to acknowledge the children that served, because we know many of them lied about their age. One of the children who became the last surviving ANZAC was Alec William Campbell, who was 16 years and 4 months of age when he signed up. Unlike Ted Matthews, Gallipoli was the only place Alec fought, as he was discharged after Gallipoli due to medical conditions from the varying illnesses he had acquired during his time served. He was one of the few children that served that came back to his parents in one piece, and lived a long life before dying at the age of 103.

I am 17, almost 18. To me these aren't old men, or men who have passed away. Most of them were kids my age, who had no idea what they were going into. I cannot imagine an Australia where my classmates or my siblings, even myself, are being sent off to war, and much of my privilege is thanks to the men and women that served, and are still serving.

As one of the many people today that recognise the sacrifices made by those who came before us, I feel inclined to honour their memory, and their time served. My fellow cadets felt the same way, many of them going on or aspiring to become members of the ADF themselves. I'm proud to say that my friend and classmate Emiley also here with me today is on the path to becoming a member of the Australian Army next year.

I believe it's important that the spirit of the ANZACs be continued to younger generations of Australians. I'm proud to see Australian peers of mine, even those who were born and raised overseas, now identifying with the legacy left behind for our young people, and the meaning of remembrance. Whether they fulfil this legacy by serving in the future themselves, or by serving the people of this country in a non-military path, it is heartening to see that the ANZACs will not be forgotten, and I truly believe their memory will be honoured in the years to come.