

Today I would like to speak for a few minutes about the meaning of Anzac Day, and specifically the Anzac Spirit.

The Anzac Spirit is something to be proud of.

Australia was a young country when it joined Allied Forces in an attempt to capture Gallipoli in 1915.

Australian troops joined with those of New Zealand forming the Anzacs who would fight alongside the Allied forces in Europe.

The history is well known, 8000 young men died wearing the Anzac uniform in a failed campaign that lasted months.

The Anzacs fought in many more battles in the First World War, notably the Battle Of The Somme in 1916.

Over 30,000 Australian and New Zealand troops died in the bloodiest battle in human history with over a million casualties in total.

The Anzac name was dropped in 1918, the year the first world war came to an end.

The English poet Wilfred Owen wrote about the conditions of this War while serving on the front lines.

In his poem “Dulce Et Decorum Est” written in 1917 which describes the sort of conditions the young Anzacs fought in.

After graphic descriptions of the horror of war he challenges the reader;

**“My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.”**

That last line means “It is sweet and becoming to die for one's country.”

That is a lie and always will be.

He was saying that no-one should be happy about fighting in a war.

The Anzacs knew the danger of the situation, they knew that many of them would not come home.

But they showed a spirit that was something other than courage, even though they were undoubtedly courageous.

They showed a simple resourcefulness, remained positive and did their bit when it was required.

There is no glory in fighting a war, but the Anzac Spirit is about HOW those troops fought that war.

It is about how we as individuals live our lives.

There is a very famous quote;

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Some clever folks say “those that cannot write their own quotes are condemned to repeat those of others.”

Of that I am indeed guilty.

It usually refers to mistakes that are made, and of a desire not to repeat them.

We should not repeat the mistakes made in any of the wars that our troops or the troops of any country have fought in.

But Anzac day is not about remembering mistakes.

It is not about winning or losing.

And the Anzac Spirit is not about denying the horror of the situation.

To me it means keeping your chin up.

When your team is 100 points down at the end of the 4th quarter, it is the spirit that keeps you trying to kick a goal until the siren sounds.

Always try to win but if you do lose, lose trying as hard as you can as a team.

But it's about also about doing your personal best, not being beaten down by the sheer magnitude or inevitability of a situation.

Writers of the day described the Anzac troops leaping off boats, wading to shore and getting on with it.

Quickly that became known as the Anzac spirit, and became part of reputation that the soldiers carried with them into battle.

Today we can embrace that spirit if we choose to.

It is not bravery, nor is it recklessness.

It is about knowing that there is a job to be done, rolling up your sleeves and doing it without complaining.

It's about being part of something bigger than you, and accepting that.

It's about helping your mate, even if it slows you down.

It's about doing the right thing even if that's the hard thing.

It's also about breaking a few rules from time to time and having a laugh, but that probably won't stand up as a defence if you are carpeted by the principal.

It has become part of Australia's image of itself and is literally an example of building character.

The first Anzac Day holiday happened within a few days of the landings at Gallipoli.

As soon as news reached home that the troops had arrived a half-day holiday was declared.

Those left at home knew that there was a lot of work to be done on the beaches.

The holiday was declared to allow them to get together and think about what was ahead.

To me, that symbolises the meaning of the Anzac Spirit, the meaning of Anzac Day.

From the beginning it was about the job ahead.

It was also about unity and being part of a community.

We should never forget what those soldiers gave for their country.

We should also take the time to think of our soldiers currently overseas in conflicts around the world.

But we should also look within.

Within ourselves, our communities, our towns, cities and our country.

We should look for the strength to do our bit, to follow the hard path if we have to.

To find a smile even when the going is tough.

The Anzac spirit is alive and well and I hope you find it with yourselves when you need it most.