

Anzac Day Speech
Lenah Valley RSL
Monday 25 April 2005

Today we commemorate a sacrifice made long ago.

A sacrifice made for many reasons, by many Tasmanian men on the shores of a foreign land.

April 25 1915 saw thousands of soldiers land on a beach in Turkey – a place as far away from Tasmania at that time as the moon.

By 30 April 1915 23,292 ANZACs had landed at Gallipoli.

Some 5,000 Australians were dead or wounded and the Turks still held the high ground above what has become known as ANZAC Cove.

What had been planned as a surprise attack had in practice been far from it.

The army of the Ottoman Empire was waiting and well-armed...More than 60,000 troops stood in defence of the 'surprise' attack...But, our men dug in and they fought with honour and valour.

What had been planned as a **quick** attack, instead became *quickly* a stalemate...

It was 90 years ago today that this battle began, and we still gather to reflect on those men who died.

We still gather to acknowledge their deeds and to celebrate their courage.

Why?

Why celebrate the deeds of soldiers fighting on a Turkish beach?... Why celebrate the loss of Australian life and blood on foreign shores?

In the 90 years since this fateful day, historians have cemented the image of the ANZAC in the Australian psyche.

They have argued that what was a great sacrifice was simultaneously a gift of national identity... A moment where a nation conceived just 14 years earlier put its stamp of courage, respect for equality and culture of mateship on the world stage...

They are right... this much we know is true.

We are gathered here today not just to celebrate the deeds of valiant men on a battlefield far away... we are not just here to celebrate death...

We are **here** to celebrate birth... the birth of a nation... the birth of a national identity.

Of the some 50,000 Australians who fought at Gallipoli, 8,709 were killed and 18,235 wounded.

That is the rare gift of those who died to those who live now and in the future.

We should never forget this gift... we should never take for granted their deeds.

I have been heartened in recent years to see the turnouts at ANZAC day events increasing.

I have been heartened to see the young turn up to wave and cheer in the places left by those older Tasmanians now since departed through age.

I have been proud to see the children and grandchildren of our war dead and living marching in the places of their departed parents or grandparents... or with them.

They are not forgetting...

Nor should they forget...

For while we celebrate this day... while we commemorate these deeds... we practice the legacy of those who fought and died in the name of this country and its allies.

In this day we celebrate not just that loss, but the national identity defined and the freedom hard one by those who fought and those who died.

This is best defined for me in a poem by one of the most recognisable poets of the First World War, Wilfred Owen - *Anthem for Doomed Youth*.

Although Owen's portrayal of the futility of war is particularly poignant, it is the last line that leaves the question that, I think, signals the hope that was defined in the actions of the ANZACS 90 years ago.

I close with a reading of it:

“What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
- Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, -
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in The hands of boys but in their eyes
Shall shine The holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,

And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.”

And each slow dusk... a drawing down of blinds...

And when they opened again, at the dawn of that moment... a nation was born.