

KING'S COLLEGE ANZAC DAY SPEECH 2016: KEITH MILLER

The area occupied by the New Zealanders and Australians at ANZAC was tiny – less than six square kilometres. At its furthest point, the distance between the front line and the beach was just over 900 metres. Conditions were harsh.

Whenever possible, whether in the line or out of it, a man paired off with a mate and established a 'bivvy'. This was a structure of a very primitive sort. With pick and shovel a cut was made in a slope that gave protection from the bullets of the snipers, and if possible from the bursts of shrapnel. A couple of salvaged oil sheets pinned across with salvaged bayonets made a roof that would keep out the dew at night and the sun glare by day. Furnishings consisted of commandeered sandbags or old overcoats for softening the hardness of the baked floor, a cut down petrol tin for a 'bath' and a whole one for storing water. As soon as the work was finished the flies and the lice – the permanent residents – took up their abode, while the casual boarders such as centipedes and soldiers strayed in from time to time as opportunity offered...

Ormond Burton, *The Silent Division*, 1935

For my part, I endured no such extreme hardship; certainly life on operations was not comfortable, especially when on patrol and close to

the enemy. It must be said that the enemy during my service was less defined; Taliban, Shia/Sunni extremists, Serbian Militia and Army, or Irish Republican Army (IRA and RIRA). My 'opposition' didn't sit along a trench line with the machinery of War supporting it from all directions. My father in Vietnam experienced a similar perspective where the enemy could stand as the protagonist by holding a weapon, or equally swap it for a shovel or farming implement and blend into the population at a moment's notice.

I have often been asked 'do you think you achieved anything, or did you do some good'? This particular question featured a lot following my tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. My answer invariably focussed on what I saw first-hand having spoken with the local people on the ground.

Almost to a person they said they welcomed stability, the freedom to live without fear, and the right to experience the benefits of a peaceful culture. To achieve this it takes an enormous investment from all Nations – the most precious commodity provided is manpower and boots on the ground. This commitment comes with physical danger.

In the heat of battle, soldiers on operations experience differing viewpoints at different times. Prior to deployment and during the initial moves we are fuelled by the excitement of finally 'doing what you have trained for', and are full of the strategic views of why we are deploying.

Once on the ground the reality of war soon hits home. I have spent too many hours paying tribute to fallen soldiers on operations as they take their final journey from the battlefield in coffins draped with the Union Jack onto the plane heading back to the United Kingdom. I have watched Fijian Soldiers cry as their mates pass on, and seen the strength in their singing and Haka's on the dusty airstrip in central Helmond in Afghanistan. During my last tour my Brigade lost 79 men and woman, with a further 412 injured in just over a 6 month period. It's during such times that the soldier resorts to his comrades in all that they do, just as they did in Gallipoli 100 years ago. Reliance and trust in the man or woman at your side to help you through it.

I recall my own reliance on those around me. With my back pressed against a mud built wall, I watched as an Apache Gun ship fired missiles over my head towards the Taliban Insurgents. Rifle rounds jumped around me and the crack of their flight sounded above my head and the dust crept around the floor. Looking across to my left I saw a young rifleman, who mustn't have been more than 19 or 20, pushed up against the other end of the wall with a lit cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth. I felt encouraged by the sense of not being in this alone; Apache Gunships are good for morale (if you own them) and a young fit soldier ready for action is worth their weight in gold.

He looked across at me, acknowledged me with a quick thrust upwards of his head, and then spoke ... "this is great isn't it Boss!" I remember thinking that at 39 years old, children at home, and a realisation that normal life was actually pretty good in the UK, that things weren't 'great' as he put it. That said, I had trust in him and those around me, and an utter belief that although things would never always work out for all of us, that with such people around me we would ultimately prevail. Our soldiers at Gallipoli and around the world in subsequent Campaigns experienced the same comradeship and reliance on each other. A huge component of this is the belief that we are appreciated at home by those who love us, and that the Nation supports us unequivocally. This National Identity through adversity is paramount to the ANZAC spirit – New Zealanders together.

So, what was the same? What unites soldiers past and present, and why do we stand here today in commemoration to the serving, served and fallen? I ask this because 27 years ago I once sat where you sit today; sometimes interested - depending on the style and effervescence of the speaker - sometimes not. I've never been called effervescent, so perhaps by keeping it short, and ensuring that you all leave with a firm message is the order of the day.

One hundred years ago we saw New Zealand's first ANZAC Services held on April 25, 1916, following calls for a day to honour those lost at Gallipoli. As a country of barely one million people at the time, New Zealand was profoundly affected by the First World War. The price we paid was a high one. More than 18,000 New Zealanders lost their lives, leaving few families unaffected.

For younger generations, it is sometimes difficult to understand why it is with gratitude that we should remember, but we have enjoyed the benefits of the peace and easy existence, which was purchased at the cost of many lives. Few of us have ever had to risk everything ourselves, or chance our loved ones to the dangers of war. But, for older generations of New Zealander's, remembering such things is easier. War and death came far too frequently into their lives as, in the past, the men and women of our armed forces saw active service in places such as Belgium, Borneo, France, Korea, Malaya, the Middle East, New Guinea, Palestine, Turkey, and Vietnam.

Today, a new generation of our soldiers, airmen and sailors are serving in troubled locations, including Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, Egypt, Iraq, the Middle East, Sudan and the Solomon Islands. It is now a long standing tradition that on ANZAC Day we all pause to remember those that offered up their life in the defence of their nation and community, which

is the greatest contribution any citizen can make. This tradition is as relevant today as it was when our troops landed on the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915. We only have to recall those New Zealander's that have died or been injured in recent years on operations overseas and within New Zealand to protect New Zealand and its national interests.

There is something very Kiwi in coming together for such a cause. As we have over recent years with numerous natural disasters. Our natural disposition is to stick together in adversity and support each other. I like to think that this flows from the deepest springs of our national character and a belief that happiness is the right of all people in this country.

Future generations need to be reminded that happiness has a price. We should be grateful to those that have helped preserve our nation and way of life through their sacrifice. In doing so, we keep bright the memory of those lives. It is in the remembrance of these things that communities across the nation come together on this day.

We remember those that have served for a belief in the common good. For freedom, and the support of those unable to fight against oppression in whatever form that takes. That freedom comes often at a very high price – the ultimate price. And it is not therefore right to judge the soldier's work against a held view of whether the Nation should be

participating in a conflict or not. It is for us to support those selfless men and women and 'nod' our respect to their valour and courage to pursue peace.

Duty, patriotism, individual sacrifice, and the affirmation of the New Zealanders and Australian relationship are the enduring legacies of Gallipoli and all subsequent conflicts involving our two nations.

The men and women who forged the ANZAC spirit made sure that those who led them earned their respect. They all understood the values of independence, freedom and fairness and - above all - possessed a willingness to defend these things if need be. Because freedom only survives as long as people are willing to defend it.

That is the spirit ANZAC handed down to us. If we lose that ANZAC spirit, we lose all.

So here we stand today, along with thousands of others to honour great men and women and a great tradition. We gather, as we shall always gather, not to glorify war, but to remind ourselves that we value who we are and the freedoms we possess, and to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of those Old Collegians and New Zealanders who contributed

so much in shaping the identity of this proud nation, and those that continue to serve.

Ka maumahara tonu tātou ki a rātou – we will remember them.