

ANZAC DAY: WHY IT STILL RESONATES



REFLECTION : BY DAVID HURLEY
24 APRIL 2013

Our history books describe the Gallipoli landing as the day Australia came of age. It was not our first foray into battle but our first as the Australian Imperial Force. Despite the devastating toll, our Diggers fought with distinction and left a deep and profound legacy.

We now commemorate Gallipoli, and Australia's subsequent wartime experiences, acknowledging how they have shaped our nation and become an integral part of describing who we are.

But on Anzac Day, even the most eloquent find it difficult to define the essence of the word "Anzac". We painstakingly search for the right words in an effort to do justice to more than 102,000 Australian lives lost.

I have been asked to present my views on why Anzac Day has re-emerged to be such a significant national occasion. I have delivered these views in many Anzac Day addresses at home and abroad.

Following the anti-war sentiment surrounding the Vietnam War, Australians drifted away from Anzac Day commemorations.

They began to return in the 1990s, driven by bipartisan support for our troops. Regardless of any political beliefs, the Australian community has shown unwavering loyalty towards the men and women deployed on operations, creating an avenue for greater public attendance and support for Anzac Day.

There are, however, many other views, so perhaps it is time to listen to some other voices. To gain a better understanding of what Anzac Day means to Australians in 2013 I turned to social media last week and sought perspectives from my Twitter and Facebook followers.

Overwhelmingly, Australians see Anzac Day as a time for reflection: to reflect on what the original Anzacs did for values of king and country that seem strange to us today, and on the work that the Australian Defence Force undertakes today to protect our way of life: "The day I ask if I would make a mark in their shoes and vow to do better with what I have" (Steve Barrett, Twitter).

We recognise the hardships our servicemen and women have endured and continue to endure today and we pay tribute to the families who support them. There is enormous pride among the descendants of our veterans and the families of Australia's current serving military personnel for their loved one's selfless work.

“... Anzac Day is not just a day for heroic deeds and bravery in light of adversity, but rather a time to appreciate those without a chest covered in medals, the ones who did their job when a job needed doing” (Jeremy Gadsden, Facebook).

We pay tribute to those who have served and to thank those who serve today. More than 3000 Australian Defence Force personnel are deployed today in Afghanistan, the Middle East and the Solomon Islands; we are on duty in the Gulf of Aden, the Indian and Pacific oceans and on border protection operations. These men and women know the challenges of active duty.

Importantly, they accept the responsibility to continue to display the Anzac spirit and, like their forebears, they demonstrate courage and compassion under the most difficult and dangerous conditions. They are heirs of the Anzac legacy and they embrace it with great respect and dignity. Some “wear their grandparents' service medals as proudly as they wear their own” (Andy Stuht, Facebook).

Anzac Day is a day to remember the strength of the human spirit.

For our former and current serving members, Anzac Day is about mateship. Those we served alongside, the mates we lost, and those who stand beside us today. We draw strength from those who have known operations or combat and celebrate the extraordinary bonds that are fundamental to our military service.

We acknowledge the battlers and the heroes and salute the hundreds of thousands of Australians who paid with their lives in the service of our nation.

A renewed appreciation for the significance of Anzac Day has led to a strong desire “to ensure our children respect the tradition and all that it stands for” (Juanita Matthews, Facebook).

In the words of one seven-year-old boy, “Anzac Day is a day everyone remembers that our Soldiers are special, because they are the brave ones who will do anything to protect their family, friends, the whole country and even me. But I remember them every day.” (Mother - Samantha Jane, Facebook).

Anzac Day is a day to acknowledge those who suffered and still suffer from the effects of war. A day to remember the strength of the human spirit and the value of mateship, but above all else, it is a time to remember those who have fallen.

Almost a century after the Gallipoli landing we need not search for more than four words to embody the spirit of Anzac – courage, endurance, mateship, sacrifice. These words have stood the test of time.

Lest we forget.

General David Hurley is the Chief of the Defence Force.

FOUR WORDS EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF ANZAC

COURAGE, ENDURANCE, MATESHIP, SACRIFICE.

