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ANZAC day is a day of great significance for all Australians. It is one of the few public holidays that is celebrated on the same date throughout the country. It is treated with an amount of respect and reverence not given to many other occasions. Why is this so? Why is an event that occurred so many years ago still so important to us?

To answer this, we need to look beyond the facts of what happened on this day in 1915. We need to look further than the tragedy of errors in planning and implementation. The ANZACs had a grim landing with men dying in the boats, in the water and on the narrow beach. As the sun rose, the ANZACs stormed upwards into Turkish machine guns, but the absence of landmarks and the steep cliffs made organisation and progress extremely difficult.

The Australians who landed at Gallipoli were, for the most part, not highly trained or experienced soldiers. On the Peninsula, the illness and misery experienced by these men was profound. Gallipoli was a defeat. It was neither the best display of Australian military prowess during the Great War, nor was it the worst fighting, and it did not produce the most casualties. It was however, the first major test of Australians in battle. It marks the emergence of Australia as a social and constitutional federation. It is seen to be the first time that Australians had a real sense of belonging to a nation. It was our "coming of age" in the eyes of the world.

In the years between landing at Gallipoli in 1915, and armistice in 1918, more than 300 thousand Australian men and women served overseas in some of the worst conditions ever faced by soldiers in the history of warfare. One in five would never return home, and almost half were wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner. Despite the appalling conditions, the ANZAC spirit shone through. Australia's official war historian, Charles Bean wrote of the ANZAC spirit:

"Anzac stood, and still stands, for reckless valor in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship, and endurance that will never own defeat."

It was these qualities that saw the Australians excel in battle, so much so that on the Western Front the Germans put great effort into finding out which trenches had Aussie troops, and avoided them at all costs. I'm proud to say the reputation forged by these men over 100 years ago has been preserved by generations of men and women in the Australian Defence Force in over a dozen conflicts, and we are still widely regarded as one of the finest militaries in the world today.

As we are now commemorating over 100 years since Australia's involvement in the Great War, we are at a historical fork in the road as a nation, do we continue to hold Anzac Day as one of the most sacred occasions in the calendar? Or do we move on, and treat it as just

another reminder of the terrible mistakes made throughout the 20th Century? While an increasingly vocal minority support the latter option, to me, Anzac day is as relevant to Australian society today as ever before. While some debate the subjects of our flag and our constitutional monarchy, the ability of Anzac Day to unite the nation remains constant. Not only are we giving thanks for, and honouring those Australians that have fallen in war, and those that have passed away since. Not only are we paying tribute to those service men and women who are with us today. We are also celebrating the uniquely Australian identity they have won for us. The mateship, courage, determination and selflessness that they demonstrated to protect our way of life, is the Anzac tradition.

And it is their example that must inspire us to battle the more subtle enemies many of us face every day, such as poor economic times, unemployment and natural disasters. With such inspiration, Australia will continue to be the best country in the world in which to live, where we may enjoy the lifestyle and freedom that so many of our countrymen and women have given their lives to protect.