

What Courage - Fine Tasmanians

ANZAC day address by Guy Barnett

Cedar Creek, Launceston, Tasmania

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What Courage.

Ordinary seaman Teddy Sheean served on the HMAS Armidale and when attacked by Japanese fighter planes on 1 December 1942 and ordered to abandon ship he returned to his anti-aircraft gun and fired at the enemy aircraft to protect his mates being strafed in the water. Teddy Sheean did this in total disregard for his own safety and life, and was seen continuing to fire as the ship went down. Although to date Teddy Sheean's heroic actions have not been deemed worthy of a Victoria Cross, his story and that of other fine Tasmanians is worthy of sharing this ANZAC day.

Teddy Sheean and over 102,000 other Australians have fought and died, so we might live in peace and freedom. We hold their service and sacrifice with pride and gratitude in our hearts.

As we reflect on the Gallipoli landings at dawn on 25 April 1915 we remember the courage, endurance mateship and sacrifice demonstrated by all our returned and currently serving defence personnel. It is said that Australia became a nation during that failed 8 month military campaign that cost 8709 Australian lives and that our CHARACTER as a nation was forged on that Turkish soil nearly 100 years ago. The ANZAC story has been told a thousand times over in the lives of our past and current service men and women. But the ANZAC spirit is demonstrated in different ways even today, by fine Tasmanians.

For example today is special for a group of local Launcestonians who are commemorating ANZAC day on the Kokoda track in PNG at the conclusion of their gruelling 96 km walk. Our Governor General Quentin Bryce is today speaking at the Bomana war cemetery in PNG to remember the service of our Kokoda veterans. I walked Kokoda 96km track with Tasmanians and others in memory of our diggers and to raise funds for type one diabetes research in April 2008. During the Kokoda campaign to thwart the Japanese push south just months before the Armidale went down and Teddy Sheean lost his life, more than 600 Australians and many more PNG nationals, known as 'fuzzy wuzzy angels' lost their lives-**again for us and for our sake so we could live in freedom.**

Tasmania has a rich heritage of military service hosting 13 of Australia's 99 Victoria Cross recipients with the most highly decorated Australian soldier being Harry Murray VC. Tasmania punches way above its weight when it comes to military service. The **Victoria Cross** is the highest award for bravery in the face of the enemy to be awarded in war time. Murray was born and raised at Evandale, educated in Launceston and was a gunner with the Launceston artillery for 6 years before he moved to Western Australia and then embarked for Gallipoli.

Harry Murray was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal at Pope's hill, Gallipoli for courage demonstrated during a machine gun battle. Both Kate and I visited Gallipoli with then Prime Minister Hon John Howard in 2005. Murray was wounded sent to the hospital ship and requested

to take the next ship back to Australia. He did recover enough health and strength to say he would not go home, but back to the trenches to fight with his mates. Following Gallipoli he fought on the western front in France in the most horrid conditions and it was on 4 and 5 February 1917 that Murray won the Victoria Cross. The citation is paraphrased as follows: “during action which lasted 48 hours at Gueudecourt Murray lead a force of 140 men in an assault on a position known as Stormy Ridge. During the battle he distinguished himself by encouraging his men, setting an example, leading hand-grenade bombing parties, leading bayonet charges, rescuing the wounded and carrying them to safety, crawling out in no-mans-land on reconnaissance, rallying his men and saving the situation by sheer valour. They were forced to withdraw due to the overwhelming enemy firepower, and only 48 of the 140 survived.

Harry Murray VC has a statue built in his honour in Evandale, and he features in my book “Our Heroes, Tasmania’s Victoria Cross recipients” (now in its 3rd edition and sold out) which was produced with the support of the Tasmanian RSL.

The first Australian born soldiers to receive the Victoria Cross were **Trooper John Bisdee and Lieutenant Guy Wylly**, Tasmanians, for their service as Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen on 1 September 1900 in the Transvaal during the Boer war.

Alec Campbell born in Launceston was the last surviving Gallipoli veteran who died aged 103 years on 16 May 2002. I was granted special leave of the Senate and attended his funeral as a mark of respect. He enlisted without his father’s consent at age 16 years lying about his age to do so. Campbell served briefly was wounded and was one of the youngest Gallipoli veterans at 17 years.

Today is also an important occasion to remember the family of Launceston’s own **Corporal Richard Atkinson** who at age 22 years was killed in February 2011 in Afghanistan- one of 39 Australians who have made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan.

Today is a special day to remember the current and past service men and women who have fought and died so that we may live in peace security and freedom. We also remember with gratitude the families and friends of all our service personnel past and present.

Jesus Christ said greater love hath no man than this than he who lay down his life for a friend. Of course Jesus as son of God sacrificed His own life for **all** of us so that we might live in eternity with our creator God.

As we reflect on our ANZAC memories we can see the demonstration of the service mateship and sacrifice during times of crisis and tragedy in Tasmania for example in response to the recent Dunalley bush fires, the Beaconsfield mine disaster and times of drought. Our emergency service personnel, police fire and ambulance demonstrate it consistently and daily and likewise our volunteers do so in many different ways. ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ is the motto of our volunteers. We do not celebrate war but commemorate the service and sacrifice and urge peace,-peace between nations and peace in our hearts and in our relations with one another.

On ANZAC day it is appropriate to ask ourselves how we should respond to our ANZAC history and heritage.

Lest we forget.