

CENTENARY OF ANZAC SPEECH 2 November 2013
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Welcome to the story of why we are celebrating the Centenary of Anzac.

BACKGROUND TO THE GREAT WAR

The reason for the Great War was not, what I was often told, that a mad Serb shot the heir to the Austrian throne. That was simply the final act in a long drawn out drama.

At the beginning of the 20th Century Europe and Asia could not have been more unstable. Countries had their own agendas and were so taken up with them that they did not seek to understand where they might finally lead.

Britain was a case in point. King Edward VII was a great peace maker, he travelled widely forming ententes However each friendship made tended to create one or more enemies. They caused a shift in the balance of power and Germany in particular saw them specifically designed against it. The Emperor of Germany, who had embraced militarism as a solution to his own insecurity, believed that his British uncle Edward was plotting Germany's encirclement. To the contrary, as Barbara Tuchman wrote in *The Guns of August* : Germany might have had an English entente for herself had not her leaders, suspecting English motives, rebuffed the overtures of Britain's Joseph Chamberlain'. As Tuchman added, they were not 'quite sure what they suspected England of but they were certain it was something perfidious'.

The number of revolts and wars in the years prior to the Great War reached double figures. There were also religious tensions and, in 1912, 400,000 Muslims were forced to flee from the Balkans to Turkey.

But it was Germany which actually caused the war. It was lusting for power and was building its navy and army, which were already able to dominate any country in Europe. However it saw Russia as a growing colossus which would be a future threat. It needed to be cut down without delay and, on a minor pretext declared war on Russia. France had a Treaty with Russia so Germany also declared war on France.

Fortunately Sir Edward Grey as Britain's foreign secretary furthered relations with France which developed into specific planning for Britain to join France in the event of a war.

AUSTRALIA'S POSITION

For many years Britain had tried to draw its dominions into a Great Britain led empire army. This was a concept that was rejected time and time again, not that it was always formally put.

Australia was adamant that its army was for the defence of Australia and, following Federation its new Defence Act specifically precluded its army (including many conscripted to complete their national service obligations) from being sent overseas; however it did permit volunteers being formed into an army which could be sent overseas,

Australia stood fast by these principles when they travelled to London for Imperial Conferences; however, at the 1907 conference there was agreement for common military practices within the Empire and for an Imperial General Staff. As a consequence in 1909 General Bridges went to London as Australia's representative on the staff.

The 1911 conference was next and was timed to coincide with the coronation of King George V, ensuring the attendance of the Australian prime Minister and his ministers for External Affairs and Defence. British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey provided a summary of European affairs which could not have been more revealing, and the Secretary of State for War, Viscount Haldane, spoke openly about a British Expeditionary Force being planned to go to the continent.

Australia's representatives left completely convinced that a European war was inevitable in the next few years and that it would be Britain and France against Germany. There was also a recognition that in these circumstances there would be a mass volunteering for overseas service by Australians. This forced the realisation that Australia would have to complete its planning and necessary arrangements before that occurred.

On 24 October the Australian Prime Minister sent a telegram to the New Zealand Prime Minister suggesting that his Chief of the General Staff meet with the Australian Chief of the General Staff regarding the formation of a combined expeditionary force. They met on 18 November and things started to happen.

- Australia's initial contribution was set at an infantry division and a light horse brigade.
- In a clean sweep the new British rifle was chosen - the .303 inch short magazine Lee Enfield Mark 3. This was a splendid rifle which lasted until 1960.
- A factory was established at Lithgow and in 1912 began manufacturing small arms including the new rifle.
- A Commonwealth cordite factory was charged with providing small arms ammunition.
- Uniforms prior to the Great War varied greatly and some like those in Scottish garb were very costly. This presented the opportunity to have a common uniform specially designed for use in the field and not on the Parade ground.

- Factories were set up to meet many requirements and at peak of production the commonwealth clothing Factory worked from 08:00 until 22:00 h.
- The defence vote was markedly increased so that in 1913/14 it was three times higher than four years earlier.

War came on 4 August 1914 and Rudyard Kipling put it very simply :

Our world has passed away in wantonness overthrown. There is nothing left today but steel and fire and stone.

As expected, Australians thronged to enlist and it was obvious that Australia's small military staff had performed miracles. Bean wrote : 'it was commonly said that no troops ever went to the front more generously equipped than this first Australia contingent'.

The result was that the Rabaul Force was able to leave on 18 August (i.e. within a fortnight) and the first AIF contingent left Australia on 1 November. In fact the AIF was ready to leave much earlier but fears of German raiders caused significant delays.

THE ANZAC STORY

It was decided that the Australians would receive training in Egypt. During that period Turkey joined Germany and attacked Russia.- Russia asked the Allies for help and Britain's Lord Kitchener suggested the Dardanelles as the best site for it to be provided. A plan was developed for the Navy to force the Dardanelles and compel Turkey to surrender. However, the navy suffered heavy losses and was unsuccessful, and an army invasion of the Dardanelles was substituted - the French on the east bank, the British at the foot of the Gallipoli Peninsula and the Australians and New Zealanders at Anzac Cove. The landings took place in darkness on the morning of 25 April 1915 and all achieved a foothold.

The Australians' foothold was so small that it was a remarkable achievement for the Australians to hang on, particularly when in May the Turks mounted a huge counter-attack intended to force the Australians back into the sea. The Australians killed so many Turks there was a day's truce in order to bury their dead. In August it was the Australians' turn to attack and at the timber-covered Turkish trenches at Lone Pine hand-to-hand fighting ensued for three days before success was achieved.

There were many other notable battles and no one who was there will forget the Australians' 1st Light Horse attack on Bloody Angle when they continued singing *Australia Will Be There* while suffering heavy casualties. Also the Battle of The Nek will live forever as an incredible disciplined performance by the 10th Light Horse who knowingly went to their death.

The 2nd Division arrived in August in time for more furious fighting.

Conditions were appalling with sickness and disease exacting a dreadful toll so that by the end of the year hope of success had been abandoned and the Anzac troops evacuated. Australian casualties totalled 28,150 - a staggering figure in relation to Australia's small population and one which resonated throughout the nation with scarcely a hamlet left grieving.

THE ANZAC LEGEND

Can you imagine what it is to lose a son or a husband in such circumstances in a country you don't know. There was no grave on which grief could be focused, no funeral to attend when a family could share each others grief; no closure.

Those grieving had to find something to hold on to and it was provided to them by the reports coming back from the front. The first dispatch to come to Australia by the British war correspondent, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, extolled the Anzacs to a remarkable degree.

There is not time for me to read that dispatch to you but English papers and journals gave it prominence. *Town and Country* did so adding :

THE AUSTRALIANS' SPLENDID BEGINNING

Mr Ashmead-Bartlett's graphic account of the glorious deeds of Australians' in the Gallipoli Peninsula has sent a thrill of pride throughout the whole Commonwealth. General Birdwood said he could not sufficiently praise their courage, endurance and soldierly qualities.

With virtually all Australians hanging on to every word they were able to find solace in pride. The rest of the world absorbed the same information and Australia was promoted on to the world's stage.

THE WESTERN FRONT

Leaving the Light Horse behind to become a powerful instrument in the army which conquered the Middle East, the AIF, which eventually grew to five divisions, proceeded to the Western Front. They were still singing, and their singing as they crossed France was such that the French papers published a translation of *Australia Will Be There*.

There on the Western Front they earned undying fame and cemented the Anzac legend with unique exploits :

- In the Battle of the Somme they rose above the carnage and captured Pozieres - the most successful part of the British Army's offensive in the area.

- In April 1918 the Australians were ordered to advance when others were retreating and to hold the thrust of the great German spring offensive. In doing so they saved Amiens and the British and French
- armies from a catastrophic reverse.
- On Anzac Day 1918 when the Germans recaptured Villers Brettoneux the Australians were again summoned and in a two brigade night bayonet attack put the Germans to flight and again saved Amiens.
- Also during 1918 Australians were injected into the Flanders front where their dominance over the Germans saved the Channel Ports.
- The Canadians and Australians spearheaded the Allied advance which finished with the Germans' surrender and the end of the war.

There were many others. St Quentin, Peronne, Le Hamel.

Little wonder that we are celebrating their Centenary.

CONCLUSION

I take great satisfaction that we of the 2nd AIF did not let the Anzacs down.

I have one regret about the Centenary of Anzac. They won't be here to witness the homage that they so richly deserve. Perhaps they may be looking down in which case I bet they are still singing. C.J. Dennis wrote :

They was singin' on the troopship, they was singin' in the train;
 When they left their their land be'ind 'um they wus shoutin' a refrain,
 An' I'll bet they 'ave a chorus, gay an' glad in greetin' for us,
 When their bit uv scrappin's over, an' they lob back 'ome again,
 An' the blokes that ain't returnin' - blokes that's paid the biggest price,
 They'll go singin', singin' singin'to the Gates uv Paradise.