

# Topic 3: Anzac

## Source Sheet 3B: Speech by Sir William Deane

### The Anzac Legend and Spirit

*Address on the occasion of the Dawn Service, Anzac Cove, Sunday, 25 April 1999. Available at:*

**[www.gg.gov.au/speeches/textonly/speeches/1999/990425-2.html](http://www.gg.gov.au/speeches/textonly/speeches/1999/990425-2.html)**

Just before dawn, on that first Anzac Day 84 years ago, the boats carrying the 1500 men who would make the first landing were moving through darkness towards these shores. All was silent, save for whispers of apprehension and the splash of oars.

Ahead of them, two searchlights briefly pencilled the sky, then disappeared. Still silence. The leading boats touched the beach. The first Anzacs leaped out. A yellow beacon flared to the south and a single shot was heard. Then several more. And as the boats further out came in, the fire broke upon them from the heights above us. The silence and the waiting were over. And the key, as one of the Anzacs was later to say, 'was being turned in the lock of hell'.

All the demons of war were let loose as the day wore on. Some men died in the boats and on the beaches – many more in the bitter fighting up on the ridges – through scrub and ravines towards the third ridge. There were the sounds of gun fire and of bombs. And of the screams of combat, of suffering and of death. And occasionally through it all, so we are told, there came the voices of young soldiers singing: 'Australia will be there'. And, in at least one instance, 'This bit of the world belongs to us'.

By the evening, 16,000 men of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps had landed here; of them some 2000 were dead or seriously wounded. And the Turkish defenders had forced the advance back to the second ridge – from which position, despite some small gains at huge cost, nothing essentially changed over the next eight months.

There are now no living Anzacs who were here on that first day. The last survivor, Ted Matthews, an Australian signaller, died in December 1997. There are only a few remaining of the Anzacs who subsequently served here during the Gallipoli campaign. The last New Zealander, Doug Dibley, a stretcher-bearer, died a little more than fifteen months ago. The fourth last Australian, Frank Isaacs, died in Perth only this month. So few left who experienced – who can personally recall – the long months of stalemate, of attack and counter-attack on pieces of hillside that were given soldiers' names – Plugge's Plateau (behind us), Quinn's Post, MacLaggan's Ridge, Johnston's Jolly. Yet the story of those months, and of all that they involve, lives in our national histories and collective memories.

For Anzac is not merely about loss. It is about courage, and endurance, and duty, and love of country, and mateship, and good humour and the survival of a sense of self-worth and decency in the face of dreadful odds. These were qualities and values the pioneers had discovered in

themselves in what were, for Europeans, the new lands of Australia and New Zealand. They were tested here and on the ancient battlefields of Europe for the first time in the Great War. They were not found wanting.

This was not the Anzacs' bloodiest campaign of that war. The casualties in France overwhelmed those of Gallipoli. But it was the first. And it was heroic even in failure. And what makes it unique is that it was here the people of our countries – Australia and New Zealand – found their nationhood. 'Before the war who ever heard of Anzac,' said their Commander-in-Chief, the British General Sir Ian Hamilton. 'Hereafter', he added, 'who will ever forget it?'

The campaign failed, but the men were not defeated. There is a crucial difference. In a triumph of daring and initiative, over 35,000 Anzacs were evacuated during eleven December nights, with barely a casualty. With their boots muffled, the last of them came down from the heights to the beaches on 20 December, and into the boats that took them in darkness and silence back to the waiting ships.

But their dead – our dead – remained behind. Here on the other side of the world from the lands they loved: over 2,700 New Zealanders and over 8,100 Australians. For many who were leaving that was the unbearable tragedy. In words which I quoted at Ted Matthews' funeral, one of them wrote:

'Not only muffled is our tread/To cheat the foe,  
We fear to rouse our honoured dead/To hear us go.  
Sleep sound, old friends – the keenest smart  
Which, more than failure, wounds the heart,  
Is thus to leave you – thus to part.'

Yet we are not apart. While this is Turkish land, it has become a sacred site of our nations. And we are united with those young Anzacs who were left here so long ago. Not only while we are here, honouring them and all that they bequeathed us. But also – constantly – in their and our homelands so far away. For there as well as here, their spirit walks abroad. To challenge, to guide and to inspire. For as long as we remember. For as long as our nations endure.

No one can express all that this day means to us Australians and New Zealanders. It is, said Australia's great historian Manning Clark, 'about something too deep for words'. But in the stillness of the early dawn, and in the silence that will settle once more along this shoreline, we feel it in the quiet of our hearts. The sense of great sadness. Of loss. Of gratitude. Of honour. Of national identity. Of our past. Of the spirit, the depth, the meaning, the very essence of our nations. And of the human values which those first Anzacs – and those who came after them – embodied and which we, their heirs, must cherish and pass to the future.

May they rest with God.