ANZAC Day Address

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It is 101 years since the dawn landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, then part of the Ottoman Empire, on the 25th April, 1915. This military campaign during the Great War has assumed a central place in the memories of Australians, New Zealanders, and of course the Turkish people who defended their country in 1915 and 1916. Here in Dublin on this ANZAC Day it is also appropriate to remember and acknowledge the Irish soldiers in the British Army who were a part of their own landings on the 25th April at Cape Helles, south of the ANZAC position.

The ANZAC campaign was a bold though misconceived attempt to create a new front against Germany and her allies including the Ottoman Empire. A naval attack to force the Straits of Marmara, and sail directly to Istanbul was unsuccessful and had the effect of providing ample warning of an impending landing. For new societies like Australia and New Zealand, whose troops had gathered in Egypt for training, the campaign was widely anticipated. The assembled force of Australian and New Zealand divisions was soon named for brevity 'ANZAC' – the Australian New Zealand Army Corp. The former colonies had gained a measure of sovereignty but were keen to prove themselves as worthy members of the British Empire. Contemporary opinion at that time strongly indicated that a trial of war was the ideal way to show just how worthy a nation was.

It is 100 years ago today that the first ANZAC Day was being commemorated by troops on leave in London, and in informal ceremonies throughout Australia and New Zealand. Just as these first commemorative efforts were beginning, their format yet to be codified, men and women in Dublin associated with the Republican cause sought to establish military control over the capital and usher in a new Irish state. The ANZAC experience and the Easter Rising might not initially seem to be related but they were part of a wider set of events brought about by The Great War. The War brought down old empires, challenged and re-arranged the borders of others. The Rising put Ireland on the path to independence just as it reinforced the emerging national identities of Australia and New Zealand. This was also true of the Ottoman Empire where the successful repulse of the Allied attacks in 1915 was one factor that helped forged a new Turkish nationalism. War was a catalyst for change whether it was in Melbourne, Dublin or Istanbul.

ANZAC has proven to be an adaptable myth, and the Day itself has evolved as Australia and New Zealand have changed. The earliest versions of ANZAC were informal spontaneous moments to remember lost mates. Towards the end of the war the idea of ANZAC was utilised to campaign for military conscription.

From the 1920s and 1930s, ANZAC Day expressed national grief for the lost generation and those who were left behind. This was embodied in buildings like Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance and Auckland's War Memorial Museum, but also in smaller town and community-based memorials which are dotted throughout both countries. Subsequent servicemen and women have been incorporated into the ANZAC spirit, and a long list of subsequent conflicts has been added to the ANZAC idea and that originating Gallipoli campaign. Servicemen and women of later wars are termed 'ANZACS', and they too are remembered on ANZAC Day, including now those who have served in humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. Whenever there are active deployments of military personnel ANZAC Day takes on a particular significance for those troops and their families.

Moving away from its politicised roots during and after the war, ANZAC Day changed to address the widespread community grief that attached to the loss of so many from these small settler societies. An annual service at dawn held in every town, large and small, could bring to mind those who served and died, and those who were buried on a foreign shore. It is this tradition that we seek to carry on here in Dublin.

ANZAC Day and the Easter Rising now carry the heavy burden of nation-building; the events framed for the newly-emerging or soon to emerge nation-states which were desperate to create an historical lineage to their political and cultural identities. Typical of modern 'total wars' of the twentieth century these conflicts encompassed civilians, whether it was as family members worrying or mourning from afar, villagers displaced by battle, or city dwellers in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Yet beneath the national meanings of ANZAC and indeed the Rising were complex personal and family stories. Irish men who enlisted in the British Army, or even in the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF). ANZACS on leave in Dublin who fired at the rebels from positions at Trinity College. Many of these Australian soldiers had Irish ancestry and chose Ireland for leave to re-connect with old relatives and friends. Families here in Dublin who had men in both the rebel forces and in the regular army. History places people in all sorts of locations in bewilderingly random and paradoxical ways. The same is true for the soldiers of the Ottoman Empire whose successful defence of the Gallipoli peninsula became a well-spring for a newly-formed Turkish state after the war. These men, much less all of the others cited above, had no idea how history would play out; how their experiences would be rendered and framed according to wider agendas. Men were placed by circumstance or accident of birth either storming the heights of Anzac Cove or defending them.

What all of them soon learnt was the terrible cost of war. Whether it was ducking a spray of shrapnel or tending to the first boatloads of wounded men, the Australian and NZ nurses on the hospital ship *Gascon* soon understood the cost of war. Whether it was advancing on the 1st and 2nd ridges at Anzac Cove on the 25th April or defending those heights the men of the AIF and Ottoman armies soon understood the cost of war.

Almost 1,000 Australians and New Zealanders, and more than 1,000 Turkish soldiers were killed on that first day. Of the 80 Turkish soldiers from the 8th Company of the 27th regiment who were initially defending the ridges at Anzac Cove that morning only 3 survived the day. (www.turkeyswar.com/campaigns.gallipoli) Ari Burnu, the site where the Anzacs landed and where the initial battles were fought, was generously renamed 'ANZAC Cove' by the Turkish Government in 1985.

ANZAC Day can be a moment where we reflect and remember. It can be a day where former enemies now share, and commemorate, a history and a tradition with goodwill. In this century-long tradition we might also begin to understand how war can soon lead to respect and reconciliation.

ANZAC Day can also be a moment where our personal reflections, our family and community stories, can be recalled and commemorated: an important thing in times where reflection is scarce or even exceptional, where time is short and the tide of events and history washes away our memories.

So 101 years after the 25th April we remember ANZAC soldiers and nurses; we remember all soldiers and civilians, friend and foe alike, who lost their lives or who experienced great trauma in war. We remember this through the lens of ANZAC. And here in Ireland we remember those of Irish ancestry who served in the AIF, some of whom rest here in this place.