

**ANZAC DAY SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE PETER
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I have always thought that communities gather together on ANZAC Day - usually around a war memorial or cenotaph - to do four things: The first is to remember those who died or were wounded when their country called them to serve in wars, in other violent conflicts and in peace keeping missions in which Australia has been, and still is involved. The second is to reflect upon their service to our country, and for each of us, in our own way, to solemnly honour and pay respect to their bravery and courage. The third is to think about their mental and physical suffering caused by their service and the pain, loss and suffering it caused their families and loved ones. The fourth, and perhaps the most important is, as I said last ANZAC Day, to resolve that, in the future, each of us will ask those hard questions about the meaning of wars, their causes and outcomes, in order to become resolute about peace, as well as resolute about fighting when fighting is a genuinely necessary and unavoidable act of self-protection. All our remembrances and honours are meaningless, unless we also vow to become resolute about peace because that is what those whom we remember and honour on this special day thought they were dying for.

As we think about those four things today, particularly when we pay our respects to the bravery and courage of those who died or were wounded, we must take care to avoid the glorification of war. Historian and author, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Burke OAM, wrote this about the so called spirit of ANZAC.

“On 25 April 1915 a new world was born. A new side of man's character was revealed. The Spirit of ANZAC was

kindled. It flared with a previously unknown, almost superhuman strength. There was a determination, a zest, a drive which swept up from the beaches on Gallipoli Peninsula as the ANZACs thrust forward with their torch of freedom. As they fell, they threw those following the torch so their quest would maintain its momentum. That Torch of Freedom has continually been thrown from falling hands, [and] has kindled in the catchers' souls a zeal and desire for both our individual liberty and our countries' liberty. That desire has been handed down with the memory and burns as brightly as the flame which first kindled it.”¹

Well, with great respect to retired Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Burke, he was not on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915. Now, in making that observation, I do not in any way wish to denigrate one of our very senior soldiers, nor the valuable service he has given his country, but I suggest to you that his use of that kind of rhetoric to describe the war on the Gallipoli Peninsula only serves to build a false legend of what war is like and to create a myth of super heroes that we call ANZACS.

It is difficult to imagine that, had he been at Gallipoli in 1915, sweeping up the beaches in the face of a deadly hail of machine gun bullets and shells that saw so many young men ripped apart, that he would have then described himself as “thrusting forward with the torch of freedom” and only throwing it to those who were following him as he was killed.

¹ <http://www.anzacday.org.au/spirit/spirit2.html>

As we approach the centenary of that fateful event in 1915 and the distance from Gallipoli stretches to 100 years, there is a risk that the myth will overbear the reality, especially in the minds of the younger generation, and that risk imposes on us a duty to speak the truth about what war is really like when we pay tribute to those who died, or were wounded and their families.

An American soldier in Iraq wrote this: "To kill a man ... is to kill a part of yourself... Humanity... Like that man, that part of you stops breathing and dies... There is no resurrection... Just a cold silent stillness... What is left is an animalistic will to survive... And the memory..."²

A historian wrote of the trenches in World War I: "[They] smelled bad because there were open latrines everywhere. There were bodies rotting everywhere. Nothing could be done about them. You could throw a shovel full of quick lime on them to take some of the smell away, but the odour of the trenches was appalling."³

In Vietnam a crew member of a helicopter that landed on a battlefield to evacuate the wounded wrote, with respect to their own men who were fighting the Viet Cong: "They had all turned into animals. They were stepping on each other and the wounded. They fought to get inside the small [helicopter]. All was beginning to fall apart in the Landing Zone. The pilots were trying to pull up on the collective and get some lift off the ground. However, we had dozens of men inside and more hanging onto the landing skids. More keep coming at us, until

² <http://forums.military.com/eve/forums/a/tpc/f/9351915375/m/3110049931001>

³ http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_fussell_03_trenches.html

we were completely engulfed with bodies of panicked men. It was an ugly sight. There was no way we could leave that Landing Zone. We were like a large insect being devoured by an army of hungry ants!

Meanwhile we had been on the ground long enough for [an enemy] mortar team to begin zeroing in our position. They started dropping rounds closer and closer. The rounds were hitting so close, that you could feel the impact of the explosions because they made the [helicopter] shake each time they went off. Time was critical. We had to get out of there or get out of the helicopter before a round hit it.

The pilots were shouting on the intercom to shoot these guys or do whatever it took to get them out of the aircraft. so we began kicking them and pushing them off the helicopter as the ship struggled to rise off the ground. There were so many of them and they just kept hanging on." He wrote: "They were afraid. You could see it in their eyes. Some had even pissed in their own pants. These ... troops were going to stay in that helicopter even if it meant all of us crashing into a tree top." "4

That is what war is really like and, with respect to those who have a different view, I say that is how we should tell it to our children. In war, there are few who fight without fear but many who, every moment, are terrified of being killed or maimed, but still fight on as their country has called upon them to do. They are the real heroes. They are the ones whose courage we should honour and respect. They deserve honouring

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http://history1900s.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=history1900s&cdn=education&tm=85&ggs=134_4_1120_603&f=00&tt=14&bt=7&bts=7&zu=http%3A//www.vietnamexp.com/morestories/morestories.htm

and remembering as they struggled to overcome the terror and do their duty: not the mythical tall, lean, bronzed and laconic ANZAC, enthusiastically and unflinchingly carrying the torch of freedom in the face of murderous enemy fire, nor as Lieutenant Colonel Burke wrote, the “bold, laughing soldiers” who “fought as they lived - bravely, openly, independently, and without fear.”⁵ Australia needs to drop the sentimental myths that ANZAC Day has attracted. The soldiers of Gallipoli must be respectfully, but realistically honoured and each of us must remain resolute about peace.

Lest we forget

Ten Minutes

⁵ Supra at footnote .