

ANZAC DAY 2020 REFLECTION  
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, HOBART, 25 APRIL 2020

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

This year, 2020, we are experiencing an Anzac Day like no other. The first Anzac Day commemoration was held in 1916 to honour the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought in the Gallipoli Campaign the previous year. From then it gradually grew into the traditional Anzac Day rituals that we recognise. And it has become a day to honour those who have fought, assisted and suffered in all of Australia's wars.

Even during the Second World War Anzac Day ceremonies were held, although, in 1942, for example, at the recently completed War Memorial in Canberra, the commemoration was a small one because large public gatherings had been prohibited in case of a Japanese air attack and so there was neither a march nor a memorial service. This year, 2020, the threat is a different one. It's the threat of spreading the COVID-19 virus which is preventing traditional Anzac Day commemorations being held.

So, the commemoration this year is a different one. A quieter and more reflective one. It can provide the opportunity to read and learn about different aspects of Australia's wars. Or to research our family history in relation to those wars. My maternal grandmother's family history has prompted me to explore what happened to her family during World War I. Grandma's South Australian family, the Beck family, were of German descent and I knew that, at some stage, the family anglicised their name, changing it from Bach to Beck.

There were two waves of German immigrants to South Australia in the nineteenth century. The first began with the arrival in 1838 of groups of Lutheran farming communities from the eastern provinces of Prussia. Their first villages, Hahndorf and Klemzig, 'served as a point of attraction that was to bring many more immigrants to the Barossa Valley',<sup>1</sup> and lay the foundations of South

---

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Fischer, 'German experience in Australia during WWI damaged road to multiculturalism' *The Conversation*, 22 April, 2015.

Australia's wine industry. A second smaller wave followed the failure of the German revolution of 1848. These were 'urban professionals and intellectuals, outspoken democrats and liberals who were dissatisfied with the lack of political reform in Germany'.<sup>2</sup> My German ancestors arrived in one of these two waves of immigration, probably the first.

At the time of the First World War, ten per cent of South Australians were of German descent. By then there had been a well-established German-Australian community for many decades. In Adelaide, it was possible to spend the day without needing to speak English: whether shopping, keeping dentist's and doctor's appointments, reading the *Australische Zeitung* in a Konditorei or dining at the King of Hanover or the Hamburg Hotel in Rundle Street.<sup>3</sup>

At the outbreak of war, Germans old enough to join the army were sent into internment camps around the country. Many Germans lost their jobs and businesses. Their schools and churches were closed and as anti-German sentiments intensified, the German community was demonised. In 1914, Hermann Heinicke, a teacher at the Conservatorium of Music at Adelaide University, was assaulted and the Union Jack was painted on his bald head. He later resigned, left his grand Medindie home and with his family went to live on a poultry farm.<sup>4</sup>

German place names were changed to British ones: in South Australia, Blumberg became Birdwood, Germanton Holbrook and Hahndorf Ambleside. Hahndorf's name was restored in 1935 but many towns lost their German names permanently.

In Tasmania, German Australians and Austrians were interned, first, at Claremont and then at the Quarantine Station on Bruny Island, which was used after the war to quarantine returning soldiers as a measure to combat the Spanish influenza pandemic. The town of Bismarck was renamed Collinsvale and here, as elsewhere, Tasmanians of German descent were persecuted. Gustav Weindorfer, of Cradle Mountain fame, was accused of being a German spy and

---

<sup>2</sup> Fischer, n 1.

<sup>3</sup> Fischer, n 1; AdelaideAZ, German, 'South Australian German Influence' <https://adelaideaz.com/german> accessed 17 April, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Joyce Gibberd, 'Heinicke, August Moritz Hermann (1863-1949)', Australian Dictionary of Biography.

of using his chalet at Cradle Mountain as a radio station to contact German ships. He was expelled from the Ulverstone Club and his dog was poisoned.<sup>5</sup>

Sustained scrutiny, persecution and rumour meant that for German Australians, the war was a particularly difficult time even if you were not interned. But many were, including those who were Australian by birth and sometimes second or even third generation Australians of German ancestry.<sup>6</sup> It has been claimed that 'nearly all traces of the Australian-German community were erased from the cultural landscape in a hysteric ethnic purge'.<sup>7</sup> However, the German influence did survive.<sup>8</sup> It is understandable that families changed their names and, clandestinely, the spelling of their names.

So what of my South Australian family? I think they may have anglicised their surname before my grandmother's birth in 1899. My Great Uncle Gus enlisted in the First World War in 1914 at the age of nineteen. Using Trove, the Australian National Library digital newspaper collection, I discovered a letter written by him, describing his experience of Gallipoli. It had been written to his friends at Payneham, an Adelaide suburb, and was published under the headline 'Charging the Craggs' in an Adelaide newspaper in June 1915. It was dated May 15 and addressed from the Military Hospital, Palace Hotel, Heliopolis, and I will quote parts of it:

I have been in the firing line at last, and am well satisfied that I came. I think we have made a bit of a name for Australia, don't you? ... A sniper got me while we were down in a gully resting. It was just like a hit in the jaw with a stick. It was very painful, but might have been worse. If my teeth had not turned the bullet it would have gone right through my head. As it was it knocked all my bottom teeth out of my mouth. I expect to be all right again in a couple of weeks, and back at them again.

I was in the trenches for five days without coming out once. Things were hot at times, with shrapnel and bullets whizzing all around. The Turks attacked our trenches twice, but we easily kept them off. ... We were brought out of the trenches last Friday night for a spell, and rested all day Saturday and Sunday.

---

<sup>5</sup> 'The Enemy at Home: German Internees in WWI Australia', NSW Migration Heritage Centre, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/enemyathome/german-australian-community/index.html> accessed 15 April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Fischer, n 1.

<sup>7</sup> Fischer, n 1.

<sup>8</sup> AdelaideAZ, n 3.

During Sunday night we had to advance to the next hill. It was dangerous work, as we had to pass along a gully in single file, with snipers picking us off all the time. At last the order was given to charge the top of the hill. I will never forget the sight. Like one man they fixed bayonets and charged. ... Our men were falling everywhere, but still the rest kept on. The hill was very steep, and at one place I was digging a foothold when two men got shot — one each side of me. I can tell you I didn't need any foothold in that spot, but got up the hill quick and lively. When at last our boys reached the top they started singing 'It's a long way to Tipperary'.

These '16th' boys are a hard lot I can tell you. Then we dug trenches amid a hail of shrapnel, bombs, and bullets. I don't know how any of us got out of it alive. On Monday morning we were called out for another rest, and were quite willing. I never want to go through such a night again. On Tuesday I was wounded. ...

Our trip down in the hospital boat (the Union Castle liner Gloucester Castle, 7,999 tons) was fine. I shared a cabin with another, and we were very comfortable. The hospital train was also well fitted out, and we had a good ride from Alexandria to Heliopolis. We were attended to on the train by Australian nurses and Indian Red Cross attendants.

The hospital where we are is one of the finest buildings in the world. Thus you see that soldiering is not all hard knocks — it means, sometimes, living in a palace. It is lovely to lie on a nice spring mattress again after six months of mother earth for a couch. I am getting on fine now, although allowed to eat nothing but bread and milk. I have been helping the sister fix up some of the other chaps in the ward; many of them have terrible wounds.

I greatly appreciated the copies of The Observer which you sent me, as we have heard little news since we left for the front.

What happened to Private Gus Beck next? Using the National Archives of Australia's Defence War Service Records (there were 63 pages of records for him), I found that from the Palace Hotel he was sent to the Valletta Hospital in Malta and then on to the Military Hospital, Bethnal Green in London. He returned to his unit on the Gallipoli Peninsula in December 1915. From mid-1916 he served in France, and, in February 1917, he received a severe wound to his

thigh and was sent to a military hospital in Oxford. Three months later he rejoined his battalion in Belgium. After being promoted to Sergeant he was again wounded in action near Boulogne in March 1918 and was transferred to England. He returned to Australia in June 1918 having been wounded three times and having served three years and 223 days abroad.

His military record is revealing in so many ways. There are copies of telegrams to his mother Emily (his father had died when Gus, the eldest of four children, was 16) notifying her that he had been wounded. And there are letters to her about his injuries and hospital admissions, sometimes quite terse in their terms. An example is a letter from the Victoria Barracks, Melbourne informing Emily that her son had been admitted to the Royal Herbert Hospital Woolwich with a gunshot wound to the chest and adding, 'It must be clearly understood that if no further advice is forwarded [to you] this department has no information to supply'.

Reading his military record I could really appreciate what it must have been like for her waiting for news.

Despite their German background, the Beck family did not seem to suffer the demonising and persecution of so many families with a German background. But for widowed Emily Beck, with her eldest son at War, two teenage girls and a ten-year-old boy at home, life must have been a struggle. This Anzac Day, I have appreciated having the time to research and get to know my grandmother's family. And I was interested to learn more about the internment of enemy aliens during the World Wars. Australia interned 6890 people during the First World War and 8100 residents during the Second World War. The detainees in the Second World War, at least, were treated relatively well. But many lost their livelihoods, their dignity and too many lost their liberty unnecessarily, without trial and without the safety of habeas corpus.

Anzac Day is not just about commemorating the history of sacrifice in wars. It is also a time to commemorate our shared values of mateship, self-sacrifice, egalitarianism, courage, resilience and respect. This year, with this pandemic to fight, control and defeat, these values are so important. Remembering the plight of German Australians and other so-called enemy aliens during the two World Wars, we should remember that spiteful intolerance, hatred and selfishness are not far below the surface and can be sparked by fear. In the early days of this pandemic I received a very distressed letter from an International student. She explained that when on her way to volunteer with the Red Cross,

she was confronted by a middle-aged Anglo-Australian woman who gestured angrily at her. The student was dismayed and frightened and wondered how she was going to be able to shop for food with safety in our country. I am afraid that this is not the only example of harassment or abuse directed at people of Chinese background, the newspapers have reported similar incidents.

At the end of this crisis we do not want to feel shame about the way we have looked after the most vulnerable in our community, nor shame because there are people here who have been vilified or demonised because of their race. Let us remember those values of egalitarianism, respect, dignity, tolerance and unselfish service, the unselfish service we are seeing from our armed services today.

Earlier this year we saw soldiers from Tasmania assist their colleagues and communities on Kangaroo Island as they responded to Australia's bushfire crisis. More recently Tasmanian sailors, soldiers, airmen and airwomen have been actively supporting the Tasmanian Government to combat the COVID-19 virus by assisting their communities to stop its spread and to save lives. And you would all have seen the media reports last week of the significant deployment of the Australian Medical Assistance Team, supported by Australian Defence Force medical teams from New South Wales and Queensland, to open and operate the Emergency Department at the North West Regional Hospital at the request of the Tasmanian Government. These examples show that the spirit of ANZAC continues to be observed by our Defence Force personnel, as well as more widely in the Tasmanian community.

Lest we forget.