

ANZAC DAY

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls; we are gathered here today to honour, remember, and give thanks for services rendered by thousands of soldiers, sailors and airmen, and service-women who paid the supreme sacrifice for their country, Australia.

Whilst the campaign on the Gallipoli peninsular, of which today, the 25th April, is the commemoration of that never-to-be-forgotten landing in 1915, ultimately ended in withdrawal, the bond established among the men of the 1st A.I.F. during those horrific days of battle forged the chains of comradeship which has endured down through following generations who fought in subsequent conflicts, and strengthened the foundation of Australia's sense of national identity.

Probably almost everybody here today has a connection, through their family, with an Anzac who served on Gallipoli ninety years ago. I would like to tell you the story of one of those Anzacs who gave his life and now eternally rests in the soil of Gallipoli.

Although married with a small family this soldier volunteered for service with the Victorian Mounted Rifles during the Boer War in South Africa. On returning to Australia he took a strong interest in the then Citizen Army, and became an Instructor for the School Cadet Corps then operating.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 he was a Company Sergeant Major in the 6th Battalion, and his H.Q. was a Drill Hall at the corner of Punt Road and Commercial Road, Prahran, next to the Alfred Hospital. He volunteered for the 1st A.I.F., and eventually left Australia as a C.S.M. in the 6th Battalion.

Before 7 a.m. on 25th April, 1915 the 6th Battalion were ashore in Shrapnel Gully, ultimately reaching Pine Ridge, where many brave men died that first day.

On 6th May the 2nd Brigade, which included the 6th Battalion, was transferred by sea to Cape Helles, a two hour trip, to reinforce the British and French troops on their attack on Achi Baba. Our C.S.M. was commissioned in the field as a Lieutenant due to the loss of many officers during the fighting at Helles. On 15th May 1915, he fell and died in battle.

Back in Australia his grieving widow was left with six children – two working, the remaining four all under fourteen and at school. The eldest boy, aged 20, was apprenticed as a baker and pastry-cook. At the conclusion of his apprenticeship some months after his father's death, he asked his mother's permission to enlist, which was given, and he joined the A.I.F., eventually serving with the 5th Division Army Service Corps for three years in France. When on leave in London he met, and eventually married a Welsh girl, a nurse in a London Hospital, and in 1919 he returned to Australia with his wife and first-born son.

The City of Prahran decided to build a group of 16 homes for war widows with families, and the widow of our Anzac hero was placed in the first house built in Victory Square, Armadale. She became the Honorary Treasurer of the newly formed War Widows' Association of Victoria, and in 1923 several members of Legacy visited her and the other widows in Victory Square, and from that visit the aim of Legacy was established – to support the widows and children of those men who had given their lives for their country.

Shortly after the dedication of the Shrine of Remembrance the widow died. Her wish was that her ashes be scattered from the Shrine. The War Widows' Assoc. approached the Shrine Trustees and permission was granted. On the day appointed over 400 War Widows gathered to farewell their friend.

At the top of the Shrine is a small square with a chest high balustrade, on which 6 to 8 persons could gather. The Trustee on duty escorted half a dozen widows up a very narrow interior staircase, and in a short ceremony on the square the widow's ashes were scattered to the four winds. The Trustee reported to the next Trustees' meeting, and it was recommended that no further similar ceremonies be permitted, as the narrow stairway etc. was impractical, and even dangerous. So our war widow has the unique distinction of being the only person to have had her ashes scattered from the top of the Shrine of Remembrance.

How do I know the details of this story? The soldier killed on Gallipoli was Lieutenant William Edwin Davis – my grand-father - and the war widow, Mrs. Maud Davis was my grand-mother. The eldest son, who served in France, was my father.

The four youngest children were three boys and one girl. The oldest of the three boys ran away at the age of 16 and enlisted in the 1st A.I.F. He reached England, was retrieved from his unit, and returned to Australia before his 17th birthday. The other two boys served in Army Units during the Second World War, as I did also.

We have seen, and are experiencing, the effects that Anzac Day has upon us all. May the deeds of our war heroes never be forgotten and their example of comradeship, endurance, and courage continue to imbue in all Australians now and in the future the will to emulate these virtues from generation to generation.

Given by A.D.W. Davis at the Glenburn Hall, Anzac Day, 2005.