

AUCKLAND GRAMMAR SCHOOL

ANZAC DAY 2007

The men were heavily loaded. Each had 200 rounds of .303 ammunition, rifle and bayonet, an entrenching tool with two empty sandbags wrapped around it, a heavy backpack and two white bags containing two days' extra rations which included a can of bully beef, biscuits and sugar.

“It was just breaking dawn and, as we looked towards the sound of the firing, we were faced by almost perpendicular cliffs about 200 feet above sea level, and as we were of the opinion that most of the fire was coming from this quarter, it was evident that this was the direction of our attack.”¹

For one man that was the opening at Gallipoli of the first Anzac Day: the bloody campaign between on one side Turkish forces and on the other New Zealanders and other British, as we were then. This day marks the point at which New Zealand came of age. It is about the human spirit, courage, and self-sacrifice.

Warfare has been a constant theme of this school's history, beginning with the Land wars associated with our founder, Sir George Grey, whose coat of arms you see behind me. Successive generations of Old Boys, many of your age, fought in the Boer War, the First World War which contained Gallipoli, and the Second World War. The names of those who were killed appear on the War Memorial; the names of others who, and whose families, were also grievously damaged by war do not.

Its horror can lead us to depersonalise it. But it concerns real people. My father's contemporary Murray Speight, whose name you see on the honours board, was to go to Balliol College Oxford to read classics as a Rhodes Scholar. Instead he was serving in Italy with his brother, my former senior partner Sir Graham Speight, and was killed at Cassino near Rome. His name appears on the memorial outside and also on two in Oxford next to Adam von Trott zu Soltz, the German patriot hanged on piano wire after the failure of the plot against Hitler in July 1944. Their families still bear the scars; the loss of the opportunity of their adult lives impoverishes all of us, on both sides of the world.

¹ Les Carlyon “Gallipoli” (MacMillan 2001) p 138.

In recent wars millions of young men have perished for what they believed was right. Today's challenges are no less. The nuclear threat and the doctrine of mutually assured destruction which has hung over the world for most of my life has modified the pattern of conventional war. But it has not mitigated, but intensified, the need to strive, not simply for peace at any price, but for removal of the causes of war.

That is not something we can simply delegate to our politicians or our armed forces. It is the responsibility of every member of our society and especially you who are the minds and consciences of the future.

A consequence of its small size, because we present no threat of over-bearing, is that New Zealand has a tremendous capacity for contributing to the international effort that must be made to achieve and preserve the conditions that secure peace. And you are the ones who can make that happen.

Young New Zealanders have been serving not only as peace-keepers in our back yard, including East Timor and the Solomons, but with the UN in Angola, Cambodia, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Sir Kenneth Keith, whom I first met in a scrum on the lower ground where the motorway now runs, is now a member of the International Court of Justice; its function is to determine interstate disputes without recourse to war. He and other New Zealanders have worked through our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to strengthen our relations with other states. We are party to many international initiatives. Other New Zealand judges sit in South Pacific courts, seeking to contribute to the rule of law.

But peace is not simply a macro process, to be achieved if at all by officials, politicians and judges.

My Auckland Grammar fifth form recently had its 50th anniversary. Its members included a Vietnam veteran who had operated behind enemy lines with the help of several of his 14-odd languages, most of them oriental; one of the UK's leading

nuclear physicists; other scientists from the USA; a leading Chinese businessman; a theologian and others. For half a century they have influenced lives across the world.

The seeds of war are found in the human condition. In some forty years in the law I have prosecuted, defended and tried many who have committed terrible offences. Yet I have found that the number of those beyond redemption is simply negligible. What led other generations to fear or hate members of other races and creeds was invariably a personal failure – of nerve and imagination – to look through their eyes and acknowledge their humanity. The German or Japanese war criminal; the Irish or Muslim bomber; the American GI who loses control of himself: with rare exceptions all have potential for decency.

CH Sorley wrote in his poem “To Germany” before he was killed at 20:

You are blind like us...
But gropers both through fields of thought confined
We stumble and do not understand
...
And in each other's dearest ways we stand
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind.²

His message expresses my experience that the real contribution needed to secure peace is at the one to one personal level, of making friends across state and cultural borders. This school, like our universities, now welcomes students from a wide range of nationalities. At each stage of life, simply by meeting and befriending fellow pupils, you have the means of enriching the lives of others and of yourselves.

That simple lesson offers, in my view, the key to the problems of difference that have assumed such prominence in the Middle East, in Africa, in Asia and everywhere else, including New Zealand.

² “Marlborough and other poems” (3rd ed. Cambridge 1916) p56; also in “Up the Line to Death: the war poets 1914-1918” (Methuen 1976) p 46.

The legacy of that fateful period at Anzac Cove is that the Turks and we are literal blood brothers; you will find at Turkish airports that a New Zealand passport is welcomed ahead of those of other states. That the Western/Muslim divide can be bridged in such a manner, because of mutual respect and affection, is perhaps part of the answer to the conundrum that is of such burning concern world-wide.

This most moving event of the School year, in this great hall with its memories and legacy of achievement, the wreath soon to be carried out to the War Memorial, is an expression of effort and achievement both in the past and in the future.

The young men of Anzac Cove responded sacrificially to meet the evils of their time.

You are the leaders of the future and their heirs.

Their example, coupled with your own talents and potential, will provide you with a vision of how you may best apply your time and talents, in the myriad dimensions of your adult lives.

I wish you well.