

ANZAC Day — the 25th of April — marks the anniversary of the landing of Australian and New Zealand troops on the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915. These young men, many barely out of school, volunteered to fight on foreign soil in what was then called the “war to end all wars.” They came ashore in the early hours, under heavy fire, climbing steep ridges and facing impossible odds.

What was born on those beaches was more than a military campaign. It was a legend.

Though the Gallipoli campaign itself was not a military success, the bravery, mateship, and perseverance of those young Australians helped forge our national identity. The ANZAC spirit came to represent the best of us: courage in the face of fear, loyalty to one another, and quiet strength in adversity.

To put the scale of the loss of life into perspective the number of men who enlisted for WW1 was equivalent to almost 40% of the fighting aged males, that’s men aged 18 to 44. And of those over 1/3 were wounded and one in seven killed. In an era with little social support, the impact of that sacrifice devastated families. *Legacy* — the charity I’m representing today — was also born from the ANZACs in WW1. On the Western Front, a dying soldier turned to his mate and asked him to look after his missus and kids. That promise has endured, and it remains our mission.

Today, we do not gather to glorify war. We gather to honour service — and to reflect on how we carry the values of the ANZACs into our lives.

I’m veteran of three deployments to Afghanistan but before then my path was quite similar to yours. At 17 I moved into a residential college at the Australian National University and I studied economics. I had an opportunity to grow up in a safe country, make lifelong friends, gain an academic education and enjoy the privilege of choosing what to do next. I chose the Royal Military College, Duntroon and became an Army Officer. Intelligence Corps because in 2008 women weren’t yet allowed to serve in combat roles.

In the Army, far from lecture halls and uni nightlife, I received a different kind of education. Through food and sleep deprivation, weeks

without showers, months away from home and long nights in close knit teams I learned the weight of responsibility for other people's lives. The importance of trust. And the true meaning of service.

In Afghanistan I saw young Australians — not unlike those at Gallipoli — face danger with courage, humour, and dignity. There were ambushes, suicide bombers, green on blue attacks, helicopter crashes, improvised explosive devices and then ramp ceremonies which are when the caskets of fallen Australian soldiers are draped with the Australian flag, carried up the ramp at the back of an Australian Airforce plane and flown home.

There I learned something vital: people don't rise to the occasion under pressure. They fall back on what they know — on their training, their preparation, their habits.

That's why what you do everyday matters. The small decisions, the standards you hold yourself to, the way you treat others — they shape your character. And your character shapes how you act when things get hard.

Not everything that happened in Afghanistan was honourable. The media and 2020 Brereton Inquiry brought to light alleged war crimes. Events like that don't come from nowhere. Bad behaviour left unchecked grows. Opportunities were missed, and now we all have a responsibility to learn the lessons.

This is where the ANZAC legacy offers us something enduring. It's more than a story of courage in war — it's a framework for ethical decision-making and leadership for all of us. The ANZAC legend epitomises the values of courage, mateship, integrity, service, and endurance, which are as relevant today in college, workplaces, politics and family and friendship groups as they were on the beaches of Gallipoli 110 years ago.

Leadership isn't about rank or medals. It's about responsibility. And each of us is a leader — in how we act, how we serve, and how we show up when it counts.

The military is good for having memorable lines to drill home a point, such as: “The standard you walk past is the standard you set”, “Choose the hard right over the easy wrong” and “bad news doesn’t get better with age.” All of this is to say, if you see something wrong you are the person to act, and if you screw up, own up to your mistake and do what you can to fix it.

ANZAC Day is a prompt to ask yourself: What do I stand for? What kind of leader do I want to be?

Let us honour the ANZACs not just in ceremony, but in how we live — with integrity, with service, and with a commitment to something greater than ourselves.

Lest we forget.