

Anzac

WHAT DOES THIS WORD CONJURE UP IN YOUR MIND?

I guess I could say that I have grown up with the anzac spirit all around me. My gt G/Father came out to NZ with the 65th regiment in 1846 he was actually born in the army as his father was serving in Ireland at that time. My G/Father was not a soldier but my father certainly was he went off as a lad to the first world war and performed with distinction being awarded the distinguished service medal. He would never talk about that time in his life, but I remember hearing at one time a story of a child asking "Father what did you do in the great world war? he replied with a choice description starting off with – I learned to hunt for vermin in the lining of my shirt to squeeze them with my finger nails and feel the beggars squirt –

There were other such descriptive things but it gave an insight into the life the soldiers bore in those trenches we read about but – we can't begin to imagine what life was like out there in that foreign land in those conditions, - there were rats, mud, glorious mud and a can of bullybeef if you were lucky– but – that is where our nations forbears forged connections with the Aussies that eventually saw the name ANZAC emerge.

It was apparently an accident, nobody knows how the name emerged, but most likely a clerk in the forces at Birdwoods hq, thought of it for use on a rubber stamp, ANZAC was convenient shorthand FOR Australia and New Zealand Army corps. Later it was used as their telegraph code. The Anzacs first saw action at Gallipoli. The small cove where they landed was soon dubbed Anzac cove and soon the word was being used to describe any NZer or Aussie.

It reminds us of a very important date in our Nations history. Great suffering was caused to our small country by the loss of so many of our young men,

But - the battles that ensued showcased attitudes and bravery, tenacity, ingenuity, loyalty to King and Comrades that helped NZ define itself as a nation even though it fought unquestioningly on the other side of the world in the name of the British Empire. NZ earned a greater confidence in its distinct identity, and a greater pride in the international contribution it could make. The mutual respect earned during the fighting formed the basis of the close ties with AUSTRALIA THAT ARE STILL IN PLACE TODAY.

ANZAC DAY AS WE KNOW IT, BEGAN TO TAKE SHAPE ALMOST AS SOON AS NEWS REACHED NZ OF THE LANDING OF SOLDIERS ON THE GALLIPOLI PENINSULA ON 25TH APRIL WITHIN A FEW YEARS CORE ELEMENTS OF THE DAY WERE SET AND THE ANZAC STORY AND SACREDNESS OF THE COMMEMORATION ENSHRINED,.

FROM THE OUTSET PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE LANDINGS EVOKED NATIONAL PRIDE. THE EVENTUAL FAILURE OF THE GALLIPOLI OPERATION ENHANCED THE SANCTITY FOR MANY, THERE MAY HAVE BEEN NO MILITARY VICTORY BUT THERE WAS A VICTORY OF SPIRITS AS NZ SOLDIERS SHOWED COURAGE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY AND SACRIFICE.

THESE SOLDIERS, AND LATER CONTINGENTS CONTINUED TO SERVE AND WERE FURTHER ENTRENCHED AS THEY WENDED THEIR WAY THROUGH TO FRANCE AND BELGIUM, WHERE CONDITIONS WERE VERY SIMILAR TO THOSE THEY HAD LEFT BEHIND IN GALLIPOLI, PLENTY OF MUD, VERMIN ETC TO CONTEND WITH AS WELL AS THE ENEMY.

WE ALL KNOW THE RESULTS OF THESE BATTLES BUT PERHAPS YOU ARE NOT AWARE OF HOW THE POPPY CAME TO BE A SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE, TO ALL NATIONS AFTER THE WAR.

THE RED POPPY HAS BEEN LINKED WITH THE BATTLEFIELD DEATHS SINCE THE TIME OF THE GREAT WAR BECAUSE IT WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PLANTS TO GROW AND BLOOM IN THE MUD AND SOIL OF FLANDERS FEILDS.

THE CONNECTION WAS MADE, MOST FAMOUSLY BY LT.COL. JOHN MCRAE IN HIS POEM IN FLANDERS FEILDS.

IN FLANDERS FEILDS THE POPPIES BLOW BETWEEN THE CROSSES ROW ON ROW, THAT MARK OUR PLACE, AND IN THE SKY THE LARKS, STILL BRAVELY SINGING FLY SCARCE HEARD AMID THE GUNS BELOW WE ARE THE DEAD. SHORT DAYS AGO WE LIVED, FELT DAWN, SAW SUNSET GLOW LOVED AND WERE LOVED AND NOW WE LIE IN FLANDERS FEILDS. TAKE UP OUR QUARREL WITH THE FOE, TO YOU FROM FAILING HANDS WE THROW THE TORCH, BE YOURS HOLD IT HIGH, IF YE BREAK FAITH WITH US WHO DIE WE SHALL NOT SLEEP THOUGH POPPIES GROW IN FLANDERS FEILDS.

MANY PEOPLE WERE MOVED BY THE PATHOS OF THE POEM AMONG THEM TWO WOMEN ONE IN FRANCE THE OTHER IN AMERICA,. WHO SET THEMSELVES A MISSION TO HAVE THE RED POPPY ADOPTED BY THE UNITED STATES AS A NATIONAL SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE. THE AMERICAN LEGION ADOPTED IT IN 1920 AND FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS THEY APPROACHED MANY VETERANS GROUPS IN MANY COUNTRIES URGING THEM TO ADOPT THE POPPY AS A SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE. ALSO EXPLAINING THAT BY MAKING AND SELLING POPPIES THEY COULD USE THE PROCEEDS AS A WELFARE FUND TO HELP VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

NZ WAS ONE OF THOSE COUNTRIES CONTACTED, THE IDEA WAS SUGGESTED TO OUR RSA IN 1921 AND THEY PLACED AN ORDER FOR 350000 SMALL AND 16000 LARGE SILK POPPIES, THEY PLANNED TO HOLD THEIR FIRST POPPY DAY APPEAL AROUND ARMISTICE DAY AS OTHER COUNTRIES WERE DOING BUT THE SHIP

CARRYING THE POPPIES FROM FRANCE WAS TOO LATE FOR THE SCHEME TO BE
ADVERTISED AND SO THEY DECIDED TO WAIT AND USE THEM FOR ANZAC DAY AND
SO OUR FIRST OFFICIAL ANZAC DAY WAS HELD IN APRIL 1922

THE POPPY, TODAY CONTINUES TO BE THE SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE THE WORLD OVER.

AND WE REMEMBER OUR FORBEARS AND GIVE THANKS THAT WE ARE ABLE TO LIVE THE
LIVES WE DO BECAUSE OF THIER SACRIFICE.

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD AS WE WHO ARE LEFT GROW OLD

AGE SHALL NOT WEARY THEM, NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN

AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

LEST WE FORGET.