



ANZAC Day in Afghanistan

Allies Gather to Remember

■ by MAJ (GBR A) Christopher Tom Sargent

The stories of the bravery of the ANZAC troops in Gallipoli are legion and over the years have passed down the generations. ANZAC Day to Australia is sacred, and seen by many Australians to be the day that marks their birth as a nation. The day marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War on the beaches and cliffs of the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915.

To this day the celebration continues long after the last veteran has passed away, it is a day to celebrate, a day to reflect and a day to remember those who have died in war in service of Australia and New Zealand. It is also a day when old enemies come together to remember but at the same time to forgive.

Every year on the 25th April the ANZAC Day Remembrance Service takes place at dawn. Despite a busy day on another operation thousands of miles and 95 years away from the original battlefield, members of the NRDC-ITA personnel currently deployed in Afghanistan joined their Australian and New Zealand colleagues and representatives from 42 different nations to mark the occasion. Time is a great healer and those who were enemies once, on and above the Gallipoli coastline stood together to remember.

At the Headquarters of the ISAF mission in Kabul, 200 members of the Headquarters met at 0430hrs to remember those who had given their lives at Gallipoli and on other battlefields in the years since. Looking across the sea of faces in the early morning light one could see all nations represented, the differences in nation, language and culture put aside and all joined to remember.

The service of remembrance started with an introduction from both countries explaining the importance of the day. Prayers and readings were said and the last post played. As the sun rose over the mountains surrounding Kabul it was difficult not to wonder how the ANZACS who gave their lives in the trenches of Gallipoli would view their ancestors now fighting a very different war in Afghanistan. The nature of warfare has changed but the people who fight them are very similar in mind, in body and in ethos.

Once the service was over, all those who had attended were invited to an “Aussie style Brekker” in the cookhouse accompanied by the notorious but strangely edible Anzac biscuits. “It was a privilege to be a part of the Australian Contingents act of Remembrance”, said Colonel Steve Williamson the NRDC-Italy’s Senior UK Officer in Kabul. “It is a very moving ceremony and very similar to our own Remembrance Day back home. What struck me as I watched the parade and service was the diversity of those who attended; former enemies who not so long ago faced each other at Gallipoli, now serving together in pursuit of success out here in Afghanistan. That is progress and that demonstrates a common bond that ties us all so closely together in our endeavours”.

The day ended with the reading of Laurence Binyon’s poem For the Fallen, well known to all soldiers, world over and especially in these turbulent times in which we now exist.

“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning. We will remember them”. ■