



## Anzac Day 2016

UP to 1000 people crowded around the Pakenham Cenotaph at dawn on Monday to hear Pakenham RSL member Major Guy Warnock's reflections on Australian service and sacrifice over the past 100 years. This is an edited extract of his address.

# Light in the darkness

THE year 2016 will begin a period where we, as a nation, will shine a light into the dark place that is the worst period in our nation's history: the years of 1916-'17.

Historians of today will not have to sugar coat it for us to digest, as they did back then: much of what we perceive about Gallipoli - and later the Western Front - was formed in the propaganda, censorship and nationalistic fever of the First World War and it seems we have never been able to shake it off since.

Many Gallipoli veterans returning wounded in Australia as early as July 1915 could not believe how ignorant the Australian people were to the conditions suffered by the troops and the poor progress of the campaign.

Many more veterans of later fighting in France and Belgium openly refer to Gallipoli as being a walk in the park compared to the Western Front.

The author G.D. Mitchell MC DCM who, in 1937, published *Backs To The Wall - A Larrikin On The Western Front* - which I consider to be the premier first-hand account of the Australian experience on the Western Front - was one of only a handful of his battalion to survive Gallipoli from the landing until the evacuation (and every major battle in between) without being killed, wounded or evacuated sick, yet dedicated only one single sentence in his book to Gallipoli - describing it as a sideshow.

It most certainly would not have seemed like a sideshow to the Pakenham mother and family of one of the Gallipoli fallen listed on the Pakenham war memorial - Private Norcliffe Esca Gabbett of the 23rd Battalion. He died of wounds less than a month before the evacuation in November 1915 and was laid to rest in Ari Burnu cemetery on the edge of Anzac Cove and it was where my family and I found him, bunched together with some of his comrades, in August of last year.

Private Tom Bryan of the 6th Battalion is also on the cenotaph before you today and he, too, was killed at Gallipoli - at Lone Pine in June 1915. His family eventually received his meagre possessions - but his friend, a Miss Kitty Fogarty, also wrote to the authorities, seeking the return of letters she had written to Tom. Today, in our times of interdependent relationships and blended families, we can reflect and speculate on the nature of their relationship and what became of the broken hearted Kitty - but it is unlikely that her request was fulfilled.

This 'sideshow' of Gallipoli ended up costing the lives of 10,000 Anzacs, 10,000 Frenchmen, 34,000 British and other Commonwealth troops and an estimated 80,000 Ottoman lives.

The 'sideshow' tag doesn't detract from the sacrifice of Gallipoli but instead speaks volumes about the industrial slaughter underway for 18 months in Europe at the time - 10,000 Frenchmen may have died at Gallipoli but by war's end over one million other French soldiers would have died defending their country and Belgium ... and the Anzacs were about to be dropped right in the middle of it.

On 25 April 1916, units who had evacuated Gallipoli just before Christmas 1915 were in Egypt recuperating, reorganising and reinforcing



Dawn Service MC and guest speaker Major Guy Warnock with army cadets, from left, Cody Layton, Brendan Mirabito, Carl Harris, Cameron Rue, Riley Davis and Ethan Coulon. 153328



Young participants in the Pakenham Dawn Service, from left, Pakenham Secondary College captains Tyler Jamieson, Kyal Mason and Jamie Brady, Emma Marson from Pakenham, who sang the national anthem, and Michelle Murphy from Pakenham Girl Guides. The school captains and Guides read extracts from the diaries of young children during the Great War. 153328



Bass MP Brian Paynter and Pakenham Secondary College principal Ray Squires. Mr Paynter spoke of the World War II service of his great uncles in Ambon.

ing - gathering their strength for what many knew was coming next - a boat and train trip to the killing fields of the Western Front.

There was no Dawn Service then but reveille would have sounded at dawn and those troops from the 1st, 2nd and 5th Divisions would have, instead, held a church parade at 9am, followed by an inspection by the commanding General and a series of sports carnivals in the afternoon, including a massed swimming event with some 14,000 Australians along both banks of the Suez Canal.

Just over a 100 years ago today was also when other units of the Australian Imperial Force became the first Anzacs to move into the trenches of the Western Front - into what they called 'the Nursery Sector', where they could learn the survival skills needed for more dangerous parts of the line.

By June, Australian troops were conducting their first trench raids on the German lines designed to gather prisoners and other intelligence of their opponents opposite, to keep

the enemy guessing and forcing them to be on the constant lookout for attack.

Soon we will commemorate the centenary of Australia's first major engagement of the Western Front at Fromelles and two weeks later at Pozieres; both just a few weeks after the start of the disastrous Battle of The Somme in which nearly 20,000 British troops died on the first day.

At Fromelles in Northern France, not far from Belgium, the Australian 5th Division would suffer the second worst casualty figures for any British Commonwealth Division in the war - but the worst was suffered over six days whilst the 5th Division experience at Fromelles was set over an 18-hour period.

Not long after this and further south, three of the remaining four Australian Divisions would suffer more casualties in six weeks at Pozieres than the entire eight months of the Gallipoli campaign.

The Australians were a victim of their own success: they captured

Pozieres and held it but in doing so made a salient - a bulge a few kilometres across in the German front-line - that allowed the Germans to turn their artillery inwards on three sides. The shelling was the worst experienced by Australians during the war and war correspondent Charles Bean described the area as being "... more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth".

On 25 April 1966 it was the 50th anniversary of the first observance of Anzac Day and a few months later in July and August services would be held by many hundreds of First World War veterans all over Australia and in France to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Fromelles and Pozieres.

At this very time, in South Vietnam, Australian troops were about to fight the battle with the most Australian casualties of this war: The Battle of Long Tan, on 18 August 1966.

A small force of 108 Australians were pitted against 2500 Viet Cong

in pouring rain and in fading light. Hundreds of Vietnamese and 18 Australians would die and hundreds more on both sides were wounded.

Several of those Australians killed were conscripted for two years' compulsory military service - including one year on active service in South Vietnam - under the National Service scheme and after their ballot number, based on their birthday, was selected from a lottery drawn on live TV.

By the end of the Vietnam war some 40 per cent - or over 200 - of those Australians killed there were National Servicemen.

In this centenary of Anzac it is important to reflect on the events and mourning of an entire nation some 100 years ago but it is also important that we recognise, remember and reflect on the service of our veterans of other wars - many of whom are here today - and talk to them; thank them; look after them; but in particular do so while they are still with us and not long faded from our memory and existing only in history books.