



AMBASSADOR

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY
STOCKHOLM

To the Organising Committee of the Helsinki Anzac Day Seminar

It was with great appreciation that I learned of the initiative taken by the League of Finnish-Australian Societies and New Zealand Friendship Society to organise an Anzac Day Seminar in Helsinki on Friday 24 April 2015.

Anzac Day, the 25th of April, is the day we remember all Australians and New Zealanders who served in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations. It is considered by many Australians to be more important than our national day celebrated on the 26th of January.

Anzac Day takes on added significance in 2015 as we mark the 100th anniversary to the day that the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps landed on Gallipoli Peninsula and commenced World War I hostilities against Turkey. Over 120,000 men were killed during the nine-month campaign, including 8,700 Australians and nearly 3,000 New Zealanders.

The term Anzac is credited to General Birdwood, Commander of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps during the Gallipoli campaign. An Australian or New Zealander who fought at Gallipoli became known as an Anzac. The beach on which they first landed at Gallipoli became known as Anzac beach, and, later, Turkey officially renamed the cove where the Australians and New Zealanders landed as Anzac Cove.

The human qualities demonstrated by the Anzacs at Gallipoli became a symbol for what we view today as key elements of the Australian and New Zealand character: resourcefulness, courage, endurance; loyal and caring mateship; and a warm-hearted, soul-saving humor.

Anzac became a metaphor for nationhood and has had relevance to Australia's and New Zealand's national identity ever since. In Australia's case, this has to be seen in the context of Australia having only been established as an independent country in 1901. World War I (WWI) had an enormous impact in shaping our identity. At the time, Australia's total population was around five million and from that, 420,000 Australian men enlisted to participate in the Great War. It represented a coming of age and a loss of innocence.

The first Anzac Day was marked on 25 April 1916 and has been marked ever since. The intension is not to glorify war. On the contrary, Anzac Day highlights the horrors of war. It is a day to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice. It is a time to hope for peace.

I feel sure participants at the Seminar on 24 April will find it interesting and I wish the League of Finnish-Australian Societies and NZ Friendship Society success in organising it.

Gerald Thomson
Ambassador of Australia to Finland