

Speech by Nick Deane
Anzac Day Reflection
Richardson's Lookout – Marrickville Peace Park
April 25, 2025

As we have gathered here for several years now, since the centenary of WW1, so it's appropriate to ask why we keep doing this and whether we will continue.

To answer the first question 'Why do we do it?', I offer my personal view.

I am here because I question what might be called the 'official' narrative of ANZAC Day – the story that says that the nation's character was formed during that ill-advised, costly and disastrous military adventure, in Gallipoli; the story of valour under fire; of mateship, sacrifice and suffering – all necessary, we are told, for the defence of Australia. Questioning all that, explains why we, who think differently, gather to offer an alternative narrative.

Now, I don't dispute that the Gallipoli campaign, like any other military action for that matter, brought out positive, human qualities. I admire the bravery of soldiers. I honour those killed in war (including the civilians). I acknowledge the value and importance of the mateship generated in dangerous situations. I am very much aware of the suffering and misery caused by all wars. Much of the ANZAC narrative resonates with me.

However, the mateship attributed to ANZAC can be found within any ship's company or on any building site. Real bravery will be found within every emergency response team. The victims of road traffic disasters and their families probably suffer as much as the war-wounded.

The national focus on military prowess and the elevation of military service to a high order of nobility are, I think, misplaced and misdirected. For what official ANZAC Day does is it orients the nation towards war. It raises war's profile and tells us that we should always and forever be prepared to go to war. It normalises war.

Today I say that war has proved itself to be a failure – of no practical benefit to mankind whatever. It is time to turn our faces away from war and bring into focus the enormous benefits of living in peace. We need to imagine a world beyond war and make peace the normal or 'default' situation.

And when it comes to the idea that fighting in wars in distant lands is equivalent to defending Australia, I am incredulous. Turkey was never any threat to Australia. Why ever did we join the attack on that country? And the same can be said for Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. None of these nations was even capable of threatening, let alone attacking, much less invading, Australia. Even Japan, at the height of its military power, contrary to widespread belief, although it came close to our shores, was never considering an invasion.

Australia, because of its geography, is a uniquely safe place. The logistical difficulties of invading it would be enormous and, in current times and conditions, probably insurmountable. Reflect on how long it took the British to dominate the continent. I firmly believe that the nation can be adequately defended without assistance from the UK or the USA and without resort to top-end weaponry such as AUKUS nuclear submarines. I would like Australia to rid itself of the fear of invasion that underlies the national obsession with militarism that is so central to the ANZAC narrative.

It is true to say that only once has Australia actually defended itself against invasion – and that was during the Frontier Wars. So it is appropriate that on this day, while ‘they’ recall Gallipoli, we should recall this truth. The very ground on which we stand was owned by the First Nation. Although “owned” is not quite the right word - for the land owns its people, not the other way round. But, whatever word is used, there is no escaping the fact that this land was invaded and siezed through violence – including military violence.

On ANZAC Day you will hear nothing about the bravery of the original, true defenders of Australia. For example, you will not find the name of Pemulwuy mentioned in any of the official commemorations today – yet here was a warrior who did, truly, fight in Australia’s defence. Today is a good day to remind ourselves of this truth and also remember that First Nations people have always been part of Australia’s defence forces.

One final point, my second question was will we continue with this sort of event. I believe we should and will – with one condition. If you, too, would like us to continue and you are not yet involved in the organising, please step up and make yourself known to us organisers, because some of us are tired and we a looking for fresh blood to continue the work of the Marrickville Peace Group.