1915
GALLIPOLI &
LIQUOR REFERENDUM

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Gallipoli - Birth of a legend

As war clouds gathered ominously over Europe in mid-1914, Prime Minister Joseph Cook, in the midst of a Federal election campaign, told a public meeting at Colac, Victoria: 'I hope that the negotiations going on will result in peace in that troubled theatre; but if it is to be war, if the Armageddon is to come, you and I shall be in it. It is no use to blink our obligations. If the old country is at war, so are we.'

The previous day, 31 July, in the same town, Labor Opposition leader Andrew Fisher had made a similar pledge: should war break out, 'Australians will stand beside our own and defend her to our last man and our last shilling'.

On 4 August 1914 the German invasion of Belgium caused Britain to declare war on the aggressor. The following day Joseph Cook formally announced that 'Australia is now at war'.

Patriotic fervour swept the Commonwealth: although few understood the underlying causes of the conflict, in the first five months 50 000 volunteers rushed to enlist in the newly-formed Australian Imperial Force.

On 1 November the first A.I.F. division, accompanied by a New Zealand contingent, sailed from Western Australia and arrived in Egypt early the following month to begin training.

Here, in the shadow of the pyramids, General W. R. Birdwood put together the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. It soon became known as 'Anzac', from the abbreviation on a rubber stamp used by clerks at corps headquarters.

It was a name which became synonymous with bravery, guts, and determination on a rocky Dardanelles peninsula called Gallipoli.

On 25 April 1915 the Anzacs and other Allied troops were landed on the peninsula as part of a master plan by Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, to force open a sea route to Russia and relieve Turkish pressure on Tsarist troops in the Caucasus.

Accompanying the Anzacs was Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, a British war correspondent, whose report on the landing at Gaba Tepe, on the western shore of the peninsula, was published in the Melbourne *Argus* on 8 May.

The Australians, who were about to go into action for the first time in trying circumstances, were cheerful, quiet, and confident. There was no sign of nerves nor of excitement.

As the moon waned, the boats were swung out, the Australians received their last instructions, and men who six months ago had been living peaceful civilian lives had begun to disembark on a strange and unknown shore in a strange land to attack an enemy of a different race.

The boats had almost reached the beach, when a party of Turks, entrenched ashore, opened a terrible fusillade with rifles and a Maxim. Fortunately, the majority of the bullets went high.

The Australians rose to the occasion. Not waiting for orders, or for the boats to reach the beach, they sprang into the sea, and, forming a sort of rough line, rushed at the enemy's trenches.

Their magazines were not charged, so they just went in with cold steel.

It was over in a minute. The Turks in the first trench were either bayoneted or they ran away, and their Maxim was captured.

Then the Australians found themselves facing an almost perpendicular cliff of loose sandstone, covered with thick shrubbery. Somewhere, half, way up, the enemy had a second trench, strongly held, from which they poured a terrible fire on the troops below and the boats pulling back to the destroyers for the second landing party.

Here was a tough proposition to tackle in the darkness, but those colonials, practical above all else, went about it in a practical way.

They stopped for a few minutes to pull themselves together, got rid of their packs, and charged their magazines.

Then this race of athletes proceeded to scale the cliffs without responding to the enemy's fire. They lost some men, but did not worry. In less than a quarter of an hour the Turks were out of their second position, either bayoneted or fleeing.

But then the Australasians, whose blood was up, instead of entrenching, rushed northwards and eastwards, searching for fresh enemies to bayonet. It was difficult country in which to entrench. Therefore they preferred to advance.

The Turks only had a weak force actually holding the beach. They relied on the difficult ground and the snipers to delay the advance until their reinforcements came up.

Some of the Australasians who pushed inland were counter-attacked, and almost outflanked by the oncoming reserves. They had to fall back after having suffered heavy losses.

These counter-attacks were continued by the Turks throughout the afternoon, but the Australasians did not yield a foot on the main ridge.

Some idea of the difficulty may be gathered when it is remembered that every round of ammunition and all water and stores had to be landed on a narrow beach and carried up pathless hills and valleys several hundred feet high to the firing line.

The whole mass of our troops was concentrated in a very small area, and was unable to reply when exposed to a relentless and incessant shrapnel fire which swept every yard of ground.

Fortunately much of the enemy's fire was badly aimed, and their shells burst too high.

A serious problem was getting the wounded from the shore. All those unable to hobble had to be carried from the hills on stretchers, and then their wounds hastily dressed and the men carried to the boats.

The boat parties worked unceasingly through the entire day and night.

The courage displayed by these wounded Australians will never be forgotten. Hastily placed in trawlers, lighters, and boats, they were towed to the ships, and, in spite of their sufferings, cheered on reaching the ship from which they had set out in the morning.

In fact, I have never seen anything like these wounded Australians in war before.

Though many were shot to bits, without the hope of recovery, their cheers resounded throughout the night. You could see in the midst of the mass of suffering humanity arms waving in greeting to the crews of the warships.

They were happy because they knew that they had been tried for the first time and had not been found wanting.

For fifteen mortal hours our men occupied the heights under an incessant shell fire, without the moral or material support of a single gun ashore, and they were subjected the whole time to the violent counter-attack of a brave enemy, skillfully led, with snipers deliberately picking off every officer who endeavoured to give a command or lead his men.

There has been no finer feat in this war than this sudden landing in the dark and storming the heights, above all holding on whilst the reinforcements were landing.

These raw colonial troops in these desperate hours proved worthy to fight side by side with the heroes of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres, and Neuve Chapelle.

Early in the morning of April 26 the Turks repeatedly tried to drive the colonials from their position. The colonials made local counter-attacks, and drove off the enemy at the point of the bayonet, which the Turks would never face.

It was a stirring account of raw courage, but by the time it appeared, the long casualty lists were already beginning to give Australians at home some idea of fame's bloody cost.

It soon became obvious that the campaign had no hope of success, but for eight long and hopeless months, wave after wave of Diggers were sent charging into the mouths of the well-entrenched Turkish guns.

Nine Victoria Crosses were won by Australians — but at a cost of 8587 dead and 19 367 wounded. There was only one consolation: it forged an Australian nation from the partisan alliance into which the former colonies had entered just over ten years earlier.

At Gallipoli were bred the legends that are the invisible bonds of nationhood. One was of John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who defied shrapnel and sniper alike for twenty-five days as he plodded through the carnage with his donkey to carry scores of wounded from the front lines to safety and medical care at Anzac Cove.

When a bullet finally killed him on 19 May 1915, Simpson (as he liked to be known) was only twenty-two-but already immortal. On learning of his death, Colonel (later Sir) John Monash sent the following dispatch to Anzac headquarters:

I desire to bring under special notice the case of Private Simpson. Private Simpson and his little beast earned the admiration of everyone. Simpson knew no fear and moved unconcernedly amid shrapnel and rifle fire, steadily carrying out his self-imposed task. Enquiry solicited that he had be-

longed to none of the units of this brigade. He had become separated from his own unit, and had carried on his perilous work on his own initiative.

Yet for Simpson, who saved lives instead of taking them, there was no Victoria Cross or other decoration.

The most successful part of the whole Gallipoli fiasco was the evacuation. After suffering total Allied losses of over 33 000 dead and 78 000 wounded, the withdrawal of 80 000 men and 5000 horses, together with some 200 guns, cost only six lives.

It was a skilful operation of which Australian newspapers reported in December 1915: 'The Turks were not aware that the evacuation was going on, though the great army which has been withdrawn was in the closest contact with the Turkish trenches...'

On 8 January the forces at Helles, at the toe of the peninsula, were withdrawn with similar success.

The A.I.F. went on to serve with great distinction on the Western Front, as well as in Egypt and Palestine. By the time the Armistice was signed in 1918, over 300 000 volunteers had been sent abroad, of whom about 60 000 were killed and more than 160 000 wounded or gassed-by far the highest casualty rate among all British and Empire forces.

What did survive and grow was the spirit of Anzac, summed up so well by one soldier's famous remark: 'Everyone is proud of being an Australian now...'

Liquor Referendum sees pubs shut at 6 o'clock

Australia's long-held international image as a nation of beer-swilling male chauvinists was created, ironically, by what the powerful, well-intentioned Temperance Movement hailed as perhaps its greatest victory: the compulsory closing of hotel bars at 6 o'clock in the afternoon.

To sup with the 'Demon Rum' was customary in Australia from the earliest days. Although officially prohibited to convicts, the military and other officials proved only too willing to part with government supplies of spirits in exchange for bribes.

By 1808 dealing in rum provided such a lucrative income for the New South Wales Corps (as well as for officials and some richer landowners), that they rebelled and illegally deposed Governor William Bligh when he arrived in the colony with orders to halt the trade.

So great was the thirst among convict and freeman alike, that the colony's first church was built with labour paid for in spirits, while in 1816 Sydney was given a hospital by liquor merchants who were granted, in return, the sole right to import 270 000 litres of rum.

Beer, first brewed in New South Wales in 1796, gradually became the country's most popular alcoholic beverage. By 1870, 116 breweries were needed to quench Victorian thirsts.

Everywhere, even in the most remote outback towns, with few other forms of entertainment or relaxation available, many men spent most of their leisure time (and money) in pursuit of intoxication. It was inevitable that some

became addicted and neglected their families and jobs because of their craving for liquor.

Inevitably, too, temperance groups, consisting mainly of women and supported by churches and other religious groups, arose to combat this evil.

One of the first and most influential was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which spread to Australia from the United States in 1882. With the motto 'For God, home and humanity', it managed to combine the struggle for women's suffrage with the war against alcohol.

So successful were the temperance campaigns that New South Wales passed a Liquor Amendment Act in 1905 which gave local ratepayers greater say in the number of liquor outlets in their area.

Between 1907 and 1914 the temperance groups managed to close down 1300 licenced premises in New South Wales and Victoria.

But it was the first World War which provided the temperance cause with its greatest opportunity: the safety of the nation was at stake and everything possible had to be done to keep soldiers and workers sober and fit. Some agitated for total prohibition; others, more realistic, wanted at least early closing of the country's numerous pubs.

South Australians went to the polls in a referendum on the subject in March 1915 — and gave their overwhelming support to early closing. But even the most optimistic temperance campaigners realised that victory in the more 'liberated' New South Wales would not be as easy.

But then, as if in answer to a prayer, 15 000 Australian Imperial Force soldiers mutinied near Sydney and went on a drunken rampage. Reported the *Daily Telegraph* on 15 February 1916:

The most disgraceful episode in our military history occurred yesterday, when thousands of men at Casula camp [near Liverpool] struck against the extra time for training (about one hour and a half per day), provided under the new syllabus, walked out of quarters, and, gathering more men from Liverpool camp, took charge of the trains for the city [Sydney], and entered upon a round of rioting and general misconduct.

Apparently a few malcontents were responsible for the whole business, and the decent men in the camp were cajoled or threatened into passive or active support. Some establishments in Liverpool - hotels and fruit shops - were entirely denuded of supplies, and the bill was lawlessly 'put down to Kitchener'.

The trains for the city were packed with khaki clad men, who refused to pay fares, and by the time the city was reached the last vestige of discipline and regard for private property had disappeared. Hundreds of men were obviously intoxicated, and quite irresponsible. Others became innoculated with their comrades' vain glorious, devil-may-care spirit...

The soldiers spent the entire day looting their way through the main streets of Sydney, smashing shops, and assaulting bystanders. Fights erupted everywhere, and many of the mutineers were arrested.

Meanwhile, the military commandant for the district issued an order through

the Press to all soldiers based at Liverpool to parade at 11 o'clock the following morning, 'and notifying that those who do not attend this parade, and are unlawfully absent, will be summarily discharged from A.I. Force, and will not be re-enlisted, and the names of such men are to be published'.

This threat had the desired effect and order was restored.

Churches and temperance movements immediately blamed liquor — 'the foe within' — for causing the riot, and pressed their demand for early closing. In New South Wales a referendum was called for 10 June 1916.

Both sides embarked on a highly emotional drive for votes. One advertisement by the Liquor Trades Defence Union, for instance, proclaimed:

Our soldiers are being represented as men who are unable to keep sober. It is a libel on Anzacs. The world stands astounded at the bravery of the French at Verdun. France does not deny her soldiers beer and wine. There are no six o'clock restrictions. She freely supplies wine to her troops. The real truth is that the extremist is using the cry of the drinking soldier in a time of national stress with a view to ultimate prohibition.

The *Australian Christian World* retorted:

Quite apart from the social side of the drink question-the whole question of national existence is to be fought out at the polls on Saturday... our national existence depends upon an adequate supply of fit and competent soldiers, and plenty of ammunition, and the concentrated and devoted efforts of all parties of the State... We also believe that the vast majority of people who have been accustomed to take their glass at the

public house - will be quite willing to forego the habit as a patriotic duty...

Although New South Wales - and later Victoria and Tasmania - voted over-whelmingly for six o'clock closing, the Temperance Movement's trust in the 'patriotic duty' of the people was sorely misplaced.

For the next fifty years this was all too clearly illustrated each afternoon by frantic drinking bouts that became known as the 'six o'clock swill'.

After work, men stampeded into the pubs in a desperate bid to drink their fill in the hour or so before closing time. Although six o'clock closing continued after the first World War, within ten years the *per capita* beer consumption had doubled to 110 litres a year.

It was not for almost ten years after another World War had been fought and won that the first moves were made to turn back the clock.

Ten o'clock closing was endorsed by an extremely narrow margin in New South Wales, where the new hours came into operation in February *1955.* Victorians had to wait a further eleven years before their hotels finally became places for leisurely and civilised drinking, with South Australia following suit a year later.