



HELLENIC ANZAC (HANZAC) 2022

25 April 2022

Preamble. Each ANZAC Day, Australians and New Zealanders travel to far flung memorials to pay their respects to those men and women who lie buried deep within the soil. From Lae in Papua New Guinea, Cairns and Townsville in Far North Queensland and Brisbane in Queensland, Sydney in New South Wales, Melbourne in Victoria, Hobart in Tasmania, Adelaide in South Australia, Perth in West Australia, Darwin in the Northern Territory, Phaleron in Athens, Souda Bay in Crete, London in the United Kingdom are memorials and graves of Australian and New Zealanders. I have travelled and paid my respects to all of the above memorials and I am always moved by the ages of those buried beneath. Silent guardians of a bygone era and a permanent reminder that when called upon, they did not shirk the call to arms.

I have never been to Gallipoli, France of the Western Front or other memorials dedicated to the fallen. I have been advised by mates who made the pilgrimage to them that they are a must to visit in one's life time. All I can say for myself and others of my generation who took up the challenge to serve is that we did so because it was the right thing to do. We were not influenced by technologies, government incentives, or by the distractions of modern-day radical movements that have no association with the meaning and spirit of ANZAC Day and what it means to the average Australian.

Today at the Watsonia RSL Dawn Service, I asked a number of lads what their thoughts were of ANZAC Day and did they believe that the current generation had embraced the spirit and meaning of it. I received mixed messages but still positive reactions. I then asked mates who had attended various services during the day and they all said that they were pleasantly surprised to see an avalanche of young Australians attending the memorial services.

I remember when I was running around the suburbs of Windsor and St Kilda as a youngster hearing of the youth questioning the value of ANZAC Day, later in the late sixties and early seventies observing Anti-Vietnam protesters grappling with Police. Then in the late Eighties and early Nineties, assisting Bruce Ruxton who was concerned that there was not enough being done to educate the youth on what ANZAC Day meant to Australians.

Bruce Ruxton was everywhere, influencing the governments of the day of the importance of ANZAC Day and reintroducing the youth to veterans who had worn the uniform of Australia. He did this by visiting schools, sports clubs, events and communities and highlighting the importance of a unified Australia, embracing Australian values as well throwing his support to any community that built a rapport with the RSL via membership or memorials to Australian and New Zealand fallen.

Bruce Ruxton, John Deighton and Keith Rossis was responsible and greatly instrumental in providing supporting the Australian Hellenic War memorial in Melbourne and in Canberra. I had the pleasure of being invited on the original committee of the Australian Hellenic War Memorial in Melbourne as the Researcher until it was completed.

HANZAC MEMORIAL. In 2015, I would create a memorial in my place of birth to commemorate the Hellenic, Australian and New Zealand people. In 2017, with friends, Don Norman - Royal Australian Army Medical Corps (Deceased), Barrie Daniel - Royal West Australian Regiment, Maurice Barwick, Royal Australian Regiment and myself - Royal Australian Regiment pooled our funds together and laid the founding stones of the Hellenic ANZAC Memorial under cover at my place of Birth. (Pellana, Laconia, Greece - 25 Kilometres North of ancient Sparta).

Officially opened in 2017 by Maria Vamvakinou the Australian Federal Member for Calwell. Since then, the memorial has been continuously developed each year. Since 2017, many other mates have contributed towards the HANZAC Memorial, A number of Australian veterans and their families have visited and stayed at the cottage adjacent to the memorial and helped develop it further. Warren Payne, Michael Hardless, Peter Hatherley, Sam Kostoulis, Peter Liakopoulos; as well as numerous Hellenic Armed forces and tourists from across the world.

HANZAC INTERNATIONAL BROADCAST PROJECT. This year on this day, for the first time, ANZAC Day was commemorated by a very brief ceremony attended by two local Guardians of the HANZAC Memorial. Using security cameras and screening them via mobile and television broadcast it was possible to capture the brief and experimental commemoration. I must say that the project was a huge success and as such, it is expected that this manner of reporting may become an annual event.

Kostas Sgourdas, the Master Stone Mason (retired) and Kostas Mihalopoulos, Marathon runner, Photographer and Electrician conducted the ceremony. They lit the Urn of remembrance located within the sanctuary, which is enclosed by marble stele depicting the meaning and spirit of ANZAC, followed by the laying of wreaths against the stone wall that held the flags of the Hellenic Republic, Australia and that of New Zealand. The flags torn from the excessive winds still flew majestically above the stone parapet demonstrating to the world that despite the elements they are still there.

Kostas Sgourdas, laid the wreath to the ANZACS at the stone wall and Kostas Mihalopoulos laid the wreath at the circular brown orange wall of an ancient warrior. The ancient warrior is a Lakonian warrior flanked on either side with ANZACs storming a barricade during the Gallipoli campaign. To the left of the ancient warrior is another marble stele which contains the names of all the patrons and Guardians of the HANZAC Memorial. Behind these structures there is ongoing development for tourist and visitors to sit down and have a rest, BBQ or merely to take in the wonderful scenery of the Taygetos mountains.

Once the wreaths are laid, Kostas Sgourdas steps up to the edge of the pond which depicts water of life and reads the ODE in Greek. The Ode is located in the centre of the pond to depict that within life (pond) the memories of those fallen in battle are remembered. As there are no Australian or New Zealanders present, the reading of the ODE in English is not read. However, as the years roll by, processes will be put into place to overcome these early challenges and hope that solutions will be found.

This year, we are returning to further develop the memorial by entering the names of all the Australian and New Zealanders who paid the ultimate sacrifice during World War 2 in Greece. The memorial is on a continuous development, through the generous donations of individuals who have pledged funds. 2022 will be an especially good year given that the previous two years the pandemic reduced our capacity to develop the memorial to the end the final stages. However, despite these setbacks, the support to the memorial has not waned and it is expected that we shall hear more of this in the future.

As always, be of good cheer, remain vigilant, stay strong always, fight the good fight and never give up.



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