

**ANZAC BRIDGE NAMING
CEREMONY
WEDNESDAY 11
NOVEMBER 1998 AT
2.30 PM**

GUESTS:

WW1 VETERAN - MR CHARLIE MANCE (LEGION OF HONOUR (FR))

THE PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES-THE HON. BOB CARR MP

OTHER DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, BOYS AND GIRLS.

Today we are part of history.

Today marks the 80th anniversary of Armistice Day, when an end was called to the four years of all-out fighting known as the Great War. It was a war, which still has no equal for the awful conditions, which were encountered, and the enormous casualties on both sides. almost 332,000 Australians served overseas in that war, about 66 percent of the whole population of Australia - and more than 60 thousand were to die in a foreign land.

The story of the original ANZACs and their landing at Gallipoli just before dawn on the 25th April 1915 is well known. Almost 6000 Australians were killed at Gallipoli.

After the withdrawal on 20 December 1915, many of the survivors then went on to fight on the Western Front in the most terrible battles ever known. in France and Belgium, 45 thousand Australians were to die. The bodies of 18 thousand lie in unmarked graves.

In France the 1st ANZAC Corps consisted of the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Australian Divisions, while the New Zealand Division and the 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions combined to form the 2nd ANZAC Corps.

In July 1916 the Australians of the 5th Division were at the centre of fighting around Pozieres, and the official historian, Charles Bean, was moved to record that this battlefield was "more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth".

In 1917, the five Australian Divisions were brought together for the first time as the Australian Army Corps - at Hamel and Fromelle and for the first time they were all under the command of one of their own - that brilliant soldier and leader of men, Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash, whose tactics and battlefield planning were to serve well into WW2 as examples of how best to use your military resources.

Today the battles fought at Passchendaele, Hamel, Menin Road and Villers-Bretonneux are part of our proud history. One British General who witnessed the Australian troops in action at Viller-Bretonneux, described their achievements as "perhaps the greatest individual feat of the war."

What we must not forget, of course, is that these battles were fought in the most terrible conditions, often with hand-to-hand fighting using bayonets, in the midst of artillery fire and mustard gas, in icy winter, in trenches filled with mud, blood and bodies. Many soldiers fell victim to what was known as trench foot - after standing for hours and even days in cold water and mud. Their feet went numb and hundreds developed gangrene, requiring toes and entire feet to be amputated. Frostbite was common too.

These Australians were also part of the ANZAC legend. They endured sacrifice and horror beyond anything that today's young Australians could even contemplate.

Those soldiers who returned, not only from Gallipoli and from the Western Front, but also from Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands, wanted to perpetuate the memory of their dead mates. The First Conference of the Returned Soldiers Associations was held in June 1916, and recommended the formation of the Returned Sailors And Soldiers Imperial League Of Australia - the forerunner to our Returned And Services League today.

For the eight decades since then the RSL has existed to provide assistance for the sick and the needy among former servicemen and women and their dependants, and it has fought to ensure that this Nation always remembers those who lost their lives in all wars.

It is therefore with pride that the RSL has endorsed the decision of the NSW State Government to name the Glebe Island Bridge the ANZAC Bridge. It is an admirable feat of engineering. It is a landmark in one of the world's great cities. It will stand for decades to come reminding this and future generations of Australians that there are debts that can never be repaid, but which must always be honoured.

Those Diggers of the ANZAC Corps who fought at Gallipoli, and who endured the wholesale slaughter and inhumanity of the Western Front, would be amazed to see this magnificent structure. They could never have envisaged the skyline of Sydney as we know it today. We, who have preserved the memory of the ANZAC, are proud that their name and their tradition are to be engraved indelibly in the consciousness of all who use or admire the ANZAC Bridge. It is an honour they richly deserve.

Footnote: after the raising of the national flag, I spoke these words. "ladies and gentlemen - look upwards and watch our beautiful National Flag fluttering proudly at the top of the ANZAC Bridge. A flag which was so much a part of those wonderful ANZACs who gave us our glorious national identity and unique ethos of mateship.

Why would you wish to change it?

LEAVE IT ALONE!

Thank you, ladies & gentlemen"

Rusty Priest

11 November 1998