Vox Populi
24 April 2024

This week many families, veterans, and serving members of our defence and peacekeeping forces gathered to observe one of Australia's most important national occasions - ANZAC Day.

When war broke out in 1914 Australia had been a federated nation for only 13 years.

In 1915 Australian and New Zealand soldiers formed part of the expedition that set out to capture the Gallipoli peninsula in order to open the Dardanelles to the allied navies.

The Australian and New Zealand forces landed on Gallipoli on 25 April, meeting fierce resistance from the Ottoman-Turkish defenders. What had been planned as a bold stroke to knock Turkey out of the war quickly became a stalemate, and the campaign dragged on for eight months.

At the end of 1915, the allied forces were evacuated from the peninsula, with both sides having suffered heavy casualties and endured great hardships. More than 8,000 Australian soldiers had died in the campaign. Gallipoli had a profound impact on Australians at home, and 25 April soon became the day on which Australians remembered the sacrifice of those who died in the war.

Attending dawn vigils, memorial services, and marches is not to glorify conflict but to commemorate those 60,000 Australians who died and the 156,000 wounded in the First World War - and to also acknowledge those who have given their lives in conflicts throughout the decades or who have been part of peacekeeping forces.

We give witness to the freedom for which they fought. Let us continue our prayers that they may provide comfort and consolation for those who still bear the physical and mental scars and disabilities of their service.