

Gallipoli 2015 at ANZAC Cove with Denis and Colleen Hare

Being both Ex-Army, a visit to Gallipoli had always been on our bucket list. We have no known family connections to the Gallipoli campaign or WW1, but both our fathers were WW2 Army veterans and our son is an Afghanistan war veteran. We also met and married when in the Army, so the connection is strong - to the ANZAC spirit.

When the ballot for tickets to the ANZAC commemorations at Gallipoli for the 100th Anniversary was opened, we entered and were successful on the second round, giving us just 2 weeks to plan and book! It became clear that a small tour in Turkey would be nice instead of going half way around the world just for ANZAC Day. So a two week bus tour with 'On The Go Tours' was booked, which would get us to Gallipoli, as the last part of the tour, removing the problems of getting to the Peninsula.

The two weeks travelling around Turkey included Istanbul, Cappadocia, Konya, Antalya, Perge, Aspendos, Fethiye, Pamukkale, Ephesus and the Aegean Coast. There were lots of Roman ruins, snow-capped mountains plus the Turkish people were very friendly and appear to have a strong affection for Australians and New Zealanders. Our fellow travellers on the bus tour were from all age groups and from both ANZAC countries, all younger than us, so quickly we became known as Nan and Pop! We enjoyed the tour however the details are for another day.

On the morning of the 24th April we were on the bus very early heading for the Gallipoli Peninsula. After a quick visit to Troy, we crossed the Dardanelles Straits by vehicle ferry. During the crossing we both reflected on our brave submariners, in HMAS Submarine AE2, being the first British ship to get into the Straits and caused a lot of problems for the Turks on 25th April 1915 and a few days after until the crew had to scuttle AE2. The crew spent the next three and a half years in a Turkish prison camp, in which four ratings died.



Mimoza Park, Gallipoli (left) and Colleen showing the first security wrist band

Upon arriving on the Gallipoli Peninsula, we passed through a number of security check points, passes checked, bag checks and electronic scanners before arriving at Mimoza Park, which was being used as a holding area, while the Turkish Military and Police did their final security sweeps of the commemoration site at ANZAC Cove.

At about 4pm the first groups were released to either walk to the ANZAC Cove, or in our case, because Colleen had a mobility pass, travel by small bus. Arriving at the site involved more security pass and bag checks and passing via electronic scanners. Mobility pass holders and their carers had reserved seating, so we settled in for the night under the Sphinx and Plugge' Plateau looking out to sea from ANZAC Cove. Denis just could not believe how small ANZAC Cove is! By mid-night the announcer was asking that all on the lawn area stand-up, so that more people could be brought into the site. By 4am the balloted 8,000 Australians (*) and 2,000 New Zealanders (*) were in the site, which is less than a football field in size. Last to arrive were the ten special WW1 War Widows and the VIP's, including both ANZAC PM's plus Royal Highness's Charles and Harry.

The Sphinx

Plugge's Plateau



ANZAC Cove 1915



ANZAC Cove 2015

The setting was magical, with hidden blue search lights shining on the Sphinx, Plugge' Pateau and over the waters of the cove. The dawn service started and when the first ray of light appears on the horizon, a sail-by of a flotilla of naval vessels occurred in front of the ceremony. We were lucky with the weather over night; it did get cold but didn't rain! The spirit of ANZAC was very strong with all that attended.



Denis and Colleen (left) toolled up for the dawn service. Bit hard to look good for the camera after a camp out with little sleep!

After the dawn service, the Australians moved to Lone Pine and the New Zealanders to Chunuk Bair for each countries ANZAC Day service. More security checks and we took our seats at Lone Pine knowing that about 2,000 ANZAC soldiers (mostly Australians) and over 10,000 Turkish soldiers lost their life in an area about half the size of a football field. The area is just one big unmarked grave.

Royal Highness's Charles and Harry plus the PM's Tony Abbott and John Key plus other VIPs walked around, shaking hands and talking with as many as they could, before the start of the Australian ANZAC service. The Australian and New Zealand services were timed so that the VIPs could attend both, but security issues only allowed the ballot tickets holders to attend their own country service.



Denis (left) at Lone Pine holding the 104 Sig Sqn Pennant (His Vietnam Unit)

After the moving ANZAC service we had time to have a good look at Lone Pine, its graves and memorial, while waiting for the New Zealand service to be completed at Chunuk Bair. Then the difficult task of getting over 350 tour buses loaded with the correct people from both Lone Pine and Chunuk Bair via a one-way narrow vehicle road started. We got on our tour bus at about 5pm for the trip back to Istanbul, arriving just after 10pm. We were lucky; buses were still leaving Gallipoli late into the night.

During the stay at Gallipoli the DVA and New Zealand defence staff and all their volunteers were just marvellous, nothing was too much trouble. They checked on the older folk all night to ensure they were warm and OK. Some were in there mid 90's in our area.

Gallipoli was an unforgettable experience and we were so lucky to be part of the commemoration activities, recognising the 100th anniversary of the first landing.

We still have the Western Front on our bucket list. Wait Out!

Denis and Colleen Hare

() The number of ballot ticket holdings was based on the ANZAC war dead from each country, which just work out, as the maximum that could be located in the commemoration sites at Gallipoli.*