

Speech: Sir Alan Duncan Gallipoli

Commemoration Speech

I stand before you as the son of a Royal Air Force officer who just saw the end of the Second World War and as the grandson of an army corporal from Scotland who fought in the First.

Respect and admiration for those who have lived and died for their country rests deep in my soul. It is therefore a profound personal honour to be here today to represent the former Entente Powers as we remember the service, sacrifice and suffering of those on both sides of the seismic military encounter which took place here over a century ago.

War exaggerates the natural qualities of its combatants: it turns the bad into monsters and the brave into heroes. And there were many heroes amongst the hundreds of thousands who died fighting on the beaches, in the gullies, and in the pine woods of this beautiful peninsula.

For the school child of today, Gallipoli – like Passchendale – is the image they hold of what war was like a hundred years ago. May they also learn of the remarkable moments of decency within the many months of misery, such as when Turkish and Australian soldiers in May 1915 at Anzac Cove suspended hostilities in order to allow both sides, with dignity, to bury their dead.

As a Turkish Captain said of it: 'At this spectacle, even the most gentle must feel savage; and the most savage must weep.'

Today we salute those from Turkey, from Australia, from New Zealand, from other Commonwealth countries, and from the Entente Powers, who died or were injured during the lengthy sufferings of the campaign.

The pain and losses endured here were a source of grief, but also of pride and inspiration for the young and new nations that have since emerged from the sand, the mud and the ashes of the First World War.

The good that has arisen out of the foulness of conflict teaches us that it is the duty of all of us here today to learn from the past and look to the future.

That vision was no better expressed than by the words of Kamal Atatürk who called on all people to aim for 'peace at home, and peace in the world.'

It is a fitting legacy of what happened here at Çanakkale that, despite such ferocious battles, the historic bitter enmity that used to exist has so widely been replaced by binding friendships and steadfast alliances.

It is a remarkable testament to the value of reconciliation that a century after Turkey and Great Britain were on opposite sides, we now stand shoulder to shoulder as NATO allies and trusted friends.

Whereas my grandfather then could have found himself standing here looking at a Turkish soldier as an enemy, I can stand here now as a British minister looking at all of you as friends.

Together, we all must honour those who fought in the past, and we must strive together for a better world in which there is less need to fight in the future.

Let us be a common voice for adherence to the international rule of law, and to treaties and binding conventions. Where we see what is right, let us prove robust in defending it: where we see what is wrong, let us prove steadfast in correcting it.

After the hideous experience of gas in the trenches a century ago all nations resolved to rid the world of chemical weapons. Let us, a hundred years on, renew and uphold that wisdom.

I pay a heartfelt tribute to all the nations represented here today. May we all turn enmity into empathy; and wounds into bonds.

May this ceremony mark remembrance and reconciliation, each to the full.

May we all respectfully embrace the memory of the fallen, and the future of the living.

On behalf of the Entente Powers I salute the memory of Gallipoli Çanakkale, and look to our future together.

Further information