

Australia's "Camp Gallipoli"—a militarist extravaganza

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The centrepiece of the Australian government's multi-million dollar World War I commemorations is next year's Anzac Day—the 100th anniversary of the military invasion of Gallipoli, on Turkey's Dardanelle Peninsula, on April 25, 1915.

Over 44,000 Allied soldiers, including 11,000 Australian and New Zealand troops, and more than 85,000 Turkish troops, died in the eight-month campaign before the British-led high command admitted defeat and ordered a withdrawal.

Gallipoli—the first major WWI battle by thousands of Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) forces—has for some decades been turned into a nationalist touchstone. The patriotic and militarist bombast surrounding next year's centenary, however, will be unprecedented.

Veterans' Affairs Minister Michael Ronaldson has been given a special cabinet position—the Centenary of Anzac Minister—to oversee proceedings. Planned events include a re-enactment of the military landing at Gallipoli, a surfing boat race across the Dardanelles, a marathon swimming competition and an evening concert at the battle site for 8,000 Australians, who have been selected from 30,000 applications in a national raffle.

Running in tandem with these events is Camp Gallipoli, a mass overnight camp-out to be held on April 24 in five Australian state capitals and locations in New Zealand. Initiated by Chris Fox, a South Australian businessman, advertising executive and former charity CEO, the \$20 million extravaganza has been endorsed by the government and its Anzac Centenary Advisory Board.

Those attending will be entertained by actors, musicians, sporting figures and the screening of Gallipoli documentaries, followed by dawn military

services.

Up to 250,000 people are expected to attend, with smaller gatherings in regional towns and cities. Everyone will be presented with the service number of a soldier, whose records can be located on the Australian War Memorial's web site.

Tickets for metropolitan events cost between \$70 and \$100, with those attending encouraged to purchase a \$275 souvenir military "swag" (small tent). "Limited edition" versions, stamped with an Anzac military service number, will sell for \$375. The family-oriented event, the promotional material gushes, will "take your emotions on a roller coaster as it blends celebration with commemoration."

While Camp Gallipoli is a registered "not-for-profit" foundation, it has extensive business and media backing. Its principal partners include the Bendigo Bank, APN News & Media, TVNZ, the Aboriginal body-hire company Interact, football and cricket peak bodies, and the Jolly Swagman camping equipment company, which is producing thousands of souvenir sleeping swags.

Olympic gold medal winners Cathy Freeman and Leisel Jones, Australian and New Zealand cricketers and footballers, and various actors and musicians have been appointed Camp Gallipoli "ambassadors" to sell the event. School students are being encouraged to nominate their own ambassadors, with one selected to read an Anzac tribute at the Camp Gallipoli gatherings in each state.

"Anzac flame" torches have been launched. Torch relays will travel to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and around various parts of Australia and New Zealand to the Camp Gallipoli venues on April 24. According to the promotional material, the torches represent "the spiritual return of the 11,000 brave

Anzacs who made the ultimate sacrifice.” Keeping the flame “continually alight represents eternal life.”

Camp Gallipoli’s web site is dominated by quasi-mystical nationalist invocations, along with patriotic boilerplate that Gallipoli represented “the birth of the Australian nation” and that the “Anzac spirit”—courage, mateship and unwavering service to nation—was part of a struggle for “democracy” and “freedom.”

The “democratic” ideals imparted to Gallipoli are thoroughly bogus. The incursion was one episode in a four-year imperialist slaughter for capitalist profit—for control of resources, markets and geo-strategic advantage—that resulted in the death of millions. Turkey was attacked with the aim of forcing it to surrender control of its sea lanes and allow military assistance to the brutal Tsarist autocracy in Russia, then allied with Britain and France.

Australia’s and New Zealand’s participation in the war, moreover, was in line with their status as Dominions of the British Empire, which was seeking to defend its global hegemony. As Australian Prime Minister Joseph Cook declared in August 1914: “Remember that when the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war.”

Within that framework, Canberra and Wellington advanced their own imperialist ambitions, using the war to seize control of Germany’s Pacific Ocean territories—New Guinea, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Nauru and Samoa. The tens of thousands of Australian and New Zealand soldiers killed in WWI was the human price paid for the seizure of these territories.

It is not possible here to fully describe the harvest of death and suffering at Gallipoli. The incursion was a military disaster and a hell on earth for the poorly-trained and equipped soldiers involved.

Along with those killed by artillery, machine-gun fire and hand-to-hand combat, thousands died from enteric fever, dysentery, diarrhoea and various fly-borne diseases. Some were burnt to death in out-of-control scrub fires. Others were killed in heavy storms or blizzards, or drowned in sewage. Winston Churchill, who devised the disastrous campaign, became known as “the butcher of Gallipoli” and was forced to quit his ministerial post in the British government in disgrace.

Camp Gallipoli, of course, cannot discuss the ruthless economic and political calculations that produced this

horror. Invocations of the “Anzac spirit” aim to condition the population, particularly younger generations, to accept the increasing militarism of life and new imperialist wars.

A key element in the spin is that the Gallipoli incursion forged a special “multi-cultural spirit.” It was “a rare time of racial inclusion and tolerance,” the Camp Gallipoli web site declares.

Camp Gallipoli CEO Fox told the *Australian* newspaper last month that racism “vanished” among the Allied forces in Turkey. “We came together and it’s now in our DNA... Not only did all these nations get on, they formed a bond that is now called the Anzac Spirit.”

Camp Gallipoli’s “multi-cultural” spin is all about manufacturing a “modern” Australian patriotism. This means acknowledging the vast social demographic changes since 1914—about a quarter of today’s Australian residents were born outside the country—while promoting obedient acceptance of war and “sacrifice for the nation.”

Camp Gallipoli’s board of management, which includes senior military officials, appointed Ben Roberts-Smith, Daniel Keighran and Mark Donaldson, three decorated Australian veterans of the US-led occupation of Afghanistan, to promote next year’s events.

Roberts-Smith, who served six tours of duty in Afghanistan, and Donaldson were both members of the SAS and hailed as heroes by the government and corporate media for “putting their lives on the line” for “all Australians.” The ostensible role of the SAS is long-range reconnaissance, surveillance and raids on enemy targets. In the “war on terror,” the SAS has functioned as little more than death squads.

The fact that such veterans are playing a key role in the promotion of Camp Gallipoli is another indicator that Australia’s ruling elite is attempting to prepare the population for new imperialist wars. No doubt some of those involved in the latest US-led assault on Iraq and Syria will be given pride of place at next year’s events.



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