

The Anzac spirit today



Day to remember:
Australian veterans parade proudly alongside veterans from Timor-Leste during last year's ANZAC Day march in Brisbane.
Photo: Mark Bowling

Deacon Gary Stone – the veterans' padre and president of the Veterans Care Association – talks about the ANZAC Spirit and facing the COVID-19 challenge as a nation.

WE celebrate Anzac Day in unusual circumstances this year.

The energy and camaraderie of gathered activities is not possible due to the coronavirus, but the spirit of Anzac remains.

Our Prime Minister has called upon the ANZAC Spirit to be our inspiration at this time.

Many commentators are calling this coronavirus a war of sorts.

While we honour and respect our health workers who are definitely at "action stations", those of us who have experienced "bombs and bullets" know that we are well short of the horror of human conflict.

But we are fully respectful that for some people at this time, the losing of loved ones to the virus, losing jobs, losing businesses, losing superannuation, losing freedom and facing isolation, is very distressing.

We veterans of armed conflict would certainly want to inspire the broader community at this time through our reflection on the ANZAC Spirit.

For some people, talk of the ANZAC spirit may conjure up images long past of young men scaling the cliffs of Gallipoli or the Kokoda track.

Courage, mateship, endurance, and sacrifice were hallmark qualities that emerged from these times of trial.

Our forebears certainly laid a foundation of service before self, social cohesion and national unity, that blossomed in our nation post war.

But the Anzac Spirit has continued to develop since then, especially in the past 30 years where our troops have served in peacemaking and peacekeeping in many parts of the globe.

Last year the Australian War Memorial developed a new major gallery called, The Courage for Peace. Much of the gallery displays video interviews with veterans of recent conflicts. A wonderful 30 minute documentary called, The Courage for Peace showing these interviews, is available on Youtube.

Both my son Michael and I were interviewed in making this.

Michael, who spent eight years overseas in his 20 year military service, is recorded as saying (To armed rebels confronting him in Timor):

"... I wouldn't be here risking my life unless I really cared for you..."

The soldier's role is all about being willing to sacrifice your life for someone you don't know. It's not just about the soldier next to you. It's about being ready to put your life on the line for another human being; in many cases for another human being who doesn't have the power to protect themselves."

That powerful statement ushers in a whole new dimension to the Anzac Spirit.

It's not just about being victorious in war, or caring for your mates, important as that is, it's about caring for others, loving your neighbours, especially the defenceless, and seeking to help them find peace.

Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers, and

what a blessing our troops have been to hundreds of thousands of defenceless people from the Middle-East to the Pacific over the past 30 years.

Moreover, many of those veterans, like our Vietnam veterans before us, have gone back to these places afterwards and assisted in their reconstruction and health and wellbeing.

Our Veterans Care Association has facilitated over 300 wounded ill and injured veterans and their partners participating in two week rehabilitation programs in Timor,

where we have helped many struggling Timorese veterans and their families.

We are even in the process of building a Veterans University.

Our veterans are getting healthier, by transforming their own crises into opportunities to help others.

In the military we dealt with situations by uniting in a common purpose, focussed on a primary mission of protecting life, and restoring peace.

Personal preferences were laid aside, and the good of all, took priority over any individual freedoms or comfort that we might have desired. Leaders at multiple levels were needed to be actively present in the greatest areas of need, to visibly lead and inspire their troops, and use innovation to find local solutions to problems.

Indeed everyone was expected to be a leader using their initiative and taking risks to achieve the mission.

But the mission was always about going out of our way to seek out and save those most at risk.

Underpinning all of this is a deep spiritual

confidence that God was and is with us in Peacemaking. We just have to do our best and never give up.

This is our Anzac Spirit in full bloom, seeking out and loving neighbours who we have never even met before, even at risk of death.

God blesses such activity, and that indwelling Spirit of God, underpinning the Spirit of Anzac, is why veterans today display such camaraderie and passion for peace.

Indeed Easter and Anzac are partner celebrations of life, death and resurrection, inspiring and giving us hope. More importantly, they must inspire us to mission to those in need.

In the midst of adversity, we can grow and be blessed with courage, character, commitment and compassion to make us better people, and the world, and our churches, better places for all.

May we seize this opportunity to be the people, and become the church, that the world needs at this time. These current crises are presenting us with opportunities to display the Anzac Spirit in reaching out to those who don't have the power, resources or ability to protect themselves.

We pray Lord God that you will inspire us to seek them out and embrace them.

Deacon Gary Stone is chaplain to the ex-services community in south east Queensland. The Veterans Care Association was set up to support returning veterans and their families to overcome Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other challenges in returning to civilian life. It gives practical, direct support to the wounded, injured and sick... and as a central hub for Veteran Services, brings together traditional medical practitioners, complementary/holistic practitioners, therapists, counsellors and more to support veterans on the journey to good health and vitality.



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