

CRONULLA RSL, ANZAC DAY SPEECH 2014

By Mr Nick Hill

One hundred years ago the clouds of war began to gather over Europe with the Austrians, Germans, English, French and Russians all maneuvering as best they could in the event of war. In Australia we were a new Country, officially only 13 years old however we had a very respectable and tough reputation forged on the battlefield from our service during the Boer War that only concluded 12 years earlier.

On this day 99 years ago my Great, Great Uncle, Pte Henry William (Harry) Murray of the 16th Battalion of the 4th Brigade landed on the stony beach at Gallipoli with his best mate, LCPL Percy Black. With their machine gun in their hands and belts of ammunition they stormed the hills of Gallipoli. Harry and Percy Black would be the furthest forward positioned ANZACs that night. Harry and Percy spent the night fighting along side each other with their machine gun firing most of the night and the next day to hold off the Turkish counter attack designed to push the ANZACs back into the sea. Prior to leaving ANZAC cove, Harry Murray would be promoted to LCPL then SGT then 2nd Lieutenant and transferred to the 13th Battalion, he would be wounded twice and awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions during the Gallipoli campaign. Here he earned the nickname "Mad Harry".

The 13th Battalion now on the Western Front was thrown into the thick of the Somme Campaign. On the 29th of August 1916, Harry now a temporary Major was the Officer Commanding A Coy of the 13th Bn, which captured Mouguet Farm in France. Harry was wounded twice during the German counter attack and subsequently was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his actions. He was sent to the 4th General Hospital in London to recover where he shared a ward with his mate now Major Percy Black and he then met and became good friends with the then Lt Albert Jacka VC, MC & Bar.

On the night of 4th - 5th of February 1917, Harry again in Command of A Company, 13th Battalion, attacked Stormy Trench in Guedecourt. His Company seized the right of the position and held on during two ferocious counter attacks made by the Germans. On the 3rd counter attack, Harry organized a 20-man grenade bombing party and led them in an attack against the Germans, which pushed them back to their original start line. His Company continued to repel attacks by the Germans and again he led his Company on an attack to regain some ground, which they had lost. The 16th Bn eventually relieved A Company at 2000hrs on the night of 5th of February. Of the original 140 men of A Company who began the attack on Stormy trench only 48 survived. On the 10th of March 1917, Mad Harry was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions during those two days of intense fighting at Stormy Trench.

On the night of the 11th of April 1917, again Harry's A Company was in the thick of the fight in Bullecourt where the 4th Australian Division was situated in attacking the Hindenburg Line. Unfortunately Harry's Company couldn't hold on to the line and was pushed back by an intense German counter attack. The 4th Division lost 2339 men killed or wounded and of those 1170 were made prisoners of war of the 3000 it committed to the attack. Major Percy Black, Harry's best mate was one of those who were killed during the attack.

For his actions during the attack on Bullecourt, Harry was awarded a Bar to his Distinguished Service Order. General Birdwood the Commander of the Australian Corps informed him, that if the attack at Bullecourt had been successful, he would have been awarded a Bar to his Victoria Cross. Mad Harry would have been the only Australian and one of only 3 to have this honour bestowed upon them during the Great War.

On the 15th of May, 1918 Harry was promoted to Lt Colonel and took Command of the 4th Machine Gun Battalion. He was recommended for the US Distinguished Service Medal for his efforts when attached to the US II Corps during the Battle of Bullicourt Tunnel which was his last action of the War. On the 3rd of January 1919 he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre for his actions as the CO of the 4th Machine Gun Battalion from 23 March – 24 April and 02 – 07 August 1918. In May 1919, he was awarded a Companion of the Order of St Michael & St George and on the 11th of July 1919 he was Mentioned in Dispatches for the 4th time.

Lt Col Henry Murry, VC, CMG, DSO & Bar, DCM was the highest decorated Infantry soldier of the British Empire of the First World War. He died in Queensland in 1966 at aged 85.

My Grandfather Hubert Donald Nicholson enlisted into the 2nd AIF in 1940 with his younger brother but was soon promoted to Capt because of his education and specialty in Atomic Sciences. He was never allowed to serve in a Combat area as he was seconded to the US & British Army's during the time of the Manhattan Project in which the Atomic Bomb was created, tested and eventually dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. These two days finally ended the Second World War. After the war he was sent to the UK to speak and study with the German Scientists who were so close in making an Atomic bomb. My Grandfather returned to Australia in 1950 and maintained a part of the Atomic & Nuclear testing in Woomera and Murrumbidgee prior to becoming very ill and finally passing away in 1968 as a Lt Colonel. My Grandfather always believed in what he did for our country, he believed in the fight against suppression and the will to live in a democratic country.

My Grandfather's younger brother my Great Uncle Bon, served in the South Pacific including New Guinea and Borneo and eventually became a Prisoner of War to the Japanese. He was eventually freed at the end of the war and remained in the Army, seeing active service in Korea and Vietnam. He retired from the Army in 1966 as a Colonel in which he was extremely proud of what he achieved.

Unfortunately he had always denied being a Prisoner of War as it was a part of his life he did not deal with well. He died at the age of 92.

My father was classed as a 10pound POHM. He came to Australia just after World War 2, his father, my Grandfather landed at Normandy on D Day, the 6th of June 1944 as part of the British invasion force but unfortunately he died of wounds on a hospital ship returning to England the next day. Like so many, my Grandmother died not long after that with a broken heart with the loss of her husband.

My father was a National Serviceman; he only joined because he thought it to be the right thing to do to serve the country he now called home and gave him a new start in life. My father served in Vietnam, he was wounded in action and returned to Australia in 1967. My father loved the time he spent in the Army and was extremely proud of his service, but like so many of our Vietnam Veterans he was treated poorly when he returned. He was one of the 1000's of Vietnam Veterans who never wore his medals, marched on ANZAC Day, set foot in an RSL and eventually became ashamed of his service. He never told my mother that he served in Vietnam, as that part of his life was well and truly over before they met and I was born. Today she is still baffled as to why he never spoke about it. Those Vietnam Veterans in the crowd this morning can relate to my fathers decision not to ever talk about it. He never spoke about it until I joined the Army.

I enlisted into the Australian Army in May 1989. Nearly 25 years ago at 17 and knowing that was all I ever wanted to do since I was a little boy growing up in Melbourne. I grew up listening to my Uncles, Aunts and other family members talking about their service in the Army during WW2, Korea and Vietnam, the great stories they told, the adventures, the fighting and the sad times they had. All I wanted to do was serve my country and be a soldier.

I left Kapooka and was allocated to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps and eventually posted to the 5th/7th Battalion (Mechanised), the Royal Australian Regiment at Holsworthy Barracks here in Sydney. I spent 8 years in that Battalion and forged my early days as a professional soldier.

I attempted the Commando Selection Course in 1998, passed and was selected for service in Australia's first full time Commando unit since the Independent Commando Companies of WW2. I was posted to the then 4th Battalion Commando now the 2nd Commando Regiment. I've spent 17 years in that Regiment. I've been lucky to have served in the biggest Combat unit in the Army, be a part of the most highly decorated unit in today's Army but unfortunately we have also suffered the most Killed or Wounded in Action during our service in Afghanistan. Eleven of the KIA has come from our unit alone. That's more than 1 ¼ of all combat deaths in Afghanistan. Only one of us has been awarded the highest Decoration for Valour, the Victoria Cross. We have three Stars of Gallantry, numerous Medals of Gallantry, Commendations of Gallantry, Distinguished Service Crosses, Distinguished Service Medals; Commendation for Distinguished Service, US Bronze Stars for Valour, US medals for Brave Conduct and the list is almost endless. I suppose these are the results of our unit continually doing the heavy lifting in Afghanistan.

One of my good friends SGT Brett Wood, MG. DSM was the most professional soldier I have had the honour of meeting and serving with. We did our Commando Selection Course together, were posted to the same Commando Company in the 4th Battalion Commando, I had the honour of being one of his Team Commanders and at one stage his Platoon Sergeant. He was one of the most respected members of our Regiment and was sadly Killed In Action on the 23rd of May 2011 in Kesh Mesh Khan, Helmand Province, Afghanistan during his 3rd tour. His death tore a hole in our Regt. It shocked us to the core that someone as invincible as he was, was taken away from us so quickly. I had the honour of being one of his mates who carried his casket at his funeral. That was a very emotional day. 2010/11/12 were hard years for our Regiment, we lost 8 unit members Killed and well over a dozen Wounded In Action.

From July 2011 – Feb 2012, during our 6-month tour of Afghanistan, our Company spent most of our 80+ operations flying deep into Taliban dominated territory in Urazghan, Zabul, Kandahar and Helmand Provinces, flying in Russian built Mi-17 Helicopters, flown by US & Afghani pilots, US Marine Corps Super Stallions, Super Hueys, US Army Blackhawks and US & Australian CH47 Chinook helicopters supported by US Marine Cobra and US Army and UK Apache helicopter gunships and on occasion UH1H Huey gunships from the Vietnam era. We had US fixed wing aircraft from C-130 gunships and B1 bombers to Australian P3C Orion's to Predator and Reaper UAV's. We spent a lot of time fighting the Taliban who were defending the heroin drug trade and IED making facilities veraciously and could counter act and adapt to our tactics quicker than we could counter their ability to hide their drug processing capabilities or IED facilities. On one mission we had over 17 helicopters in the air, flying into what we called the Wild West, where no other Collation unit would go in the early hours of the morning, only to spend most of the day fighting, blowing up and destroying drug labs in extreme heat of about 50 degrees Celsius. We would walk the 3-5kms out the following night to secure the Helicopter Landing Zones in the desert or sometimes they would pick us up right next to where we landed the night before. My entire tour I never travelled in a vehicle except to travel the 3 minutes to get on and off a helicopter.

This was what I joined the Army to do. Doing what Australian Commandos are meant to do, fly in quickly, fight, blow things up and get out wit out losing a single person. Unfortunately that didn't occur every time. On one of our missions into Helmand we had one very critically wounded Australian and two severely wounded Afghani Police and an interpreter. Luckily they all survived due to the professionalism and skills of our Doctor and Medics who would come with us and the bravery of the US Army medical evacuation helicopter crews. They truly were angels in disguise.

On another mission we had a Drug Enforcement Administration agent that was severely wounded when he was shot through his helmet where the bullet travelled from temple to temple, he managed to survive with the ability of our Doctor and medics. Unfortunately he only has 20% vision in his eyes but he is alive and now married and still with the DEA. The success of our Counter Narcotic Operations in Afghanistan was presented to the US President, Barack Obama and was mentioned in a sitting of the US Congress. In Australia it was a very low-key affair, which is standard procedure for Australia's Military unless it's to do with awarding a Victoria Cross or a death of one of our Soldiers.

The Commando Company that I was in destroyed nearly \$4 Billion (US Street Value) worth of narcotic materials. It was considered one of the most successful deployments in our unit's history.

One of those guys in our Company during that tour to Afghanistan, I had the honour of serving with, would be in my mind the bravest man I had ever had the privilege to serve with and witnessed in action was CPL Cameron Baird, VC. MG. who became Australia's 100th Victoria Cross recipient and unfortunately our 40th and hopefully our last soldier to make the ultimate sacrifice in what is now our longest continuous war. Cam was a character, a constant professional, fit, strong, loyal, very humble and unwavering in the face of the enemy. Many a time he would come out of his room with a crazy camouflage cream paint scheme on his face whether it being one of the characters of the rock band KISS, to the punisher skull or a devil. It was always a guess to see what he would have on his face. He was the only one in the Company who wouldn't paint his weapon to camouflage it as from his point of view he wanted the Taliban to see him so they would shoot at him. Cam would be seen running towards the enemy, firing his M4 assault rifle or M203 grenade launcher at a full sprint. On one occasion I actually had to pull him aside after one of our missions to give him some words of advice. "I said that he should not be running to the front of a shoot out, with his team members chasing after him, he should be maneuvering his team members around to enable the fight to be as we wanted it, enable him to control the

battle better. He was the Team Commander not necessarily the one to do all the fighting". He nodded at me and agreed that's what he should do. He walked away after our conversation with a huge smile on his face knowing that he was going to continue to do what he thought was motivational for his team. I bumped into him in RHQ just before he deployed on his 3rd tour to Afghanistan, we chatted for a while, shook hands said our good-byes and good luck and off he went. On the 23rd of June 2013, I received a call from of my mates informing me that Cam had been Killed In Action in Afghanistan. I was in shock to begin with then I thought this doesn't really surprise me. I always thought that he would be killed in action somewhere, not because he was doing something wrong but because he was brave and always led his men from the front. I attended Cam's Ramp Service at RAAF base Richmond with friends, family and other members of Regt; it was a very somber and sad day. For the first time since Brett's death I was actually very moved and emotional.

I was asked to give this speech this morning, which is a great honour, this year is the first time that younger veterans of our modern wars have been allowed to lead the ANZAC Day march. I'm a modern veteran of our current conflicts. I have been lucky enough to have served my country for nearly 25 years in which I have served all over the world, from Malaysia, East Timor, Iraq, The Sinai, Afghanistan and during Counter Terrorism duty. I am often asked what does ANZAC Day mean to me? I often have thought what it does mean to me, then I see some old mates who are in the crowd this morning who I joined the army with all those years ago, I think back to the fun times, the nights out on Penang Island as a young 21 year old on his first trip out of Australia, to carrying my pack up the mountains of East Timor speaking with the village elders who fought the Japanese with the Independent Commando Companies, seeing the joy on the faces of Iraqi kids who were so young and innocent, who would only be hoping for a better future, to serving with Kiwi mates in the Sinai, playing a cricket match on boxing day against them, flying into the bad lands in Afghanistan and onto ships off the coast of Australia at night, to the times throughout my career when I thought, Jesus that was close.

I think of my family that was always at home while I was deployed, missing birthdays, Christmas's and weekends away, they always made the sacrifice.

I think back to my Great-Great Uncle Mad Harry, to my Grandfathers who served in two different armies, to my Great Uncle and his 26-year career, my father and his service, to my mates that I have served with, to Brett, Cam and the 9 other members of my Regt, to the 40 Australians and 11 Kiwis who have made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan. Their sacrifice is why we live in the luckiest country on the planet that is what ANZAC Day means to me.

Thank you