

I am deeply honoured and humbled to be able to speak at today's ANZAC commemorative assembly. ANZAC day on the 25th of April marks the anniversary of the landing of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps at Gallipoli in Turkey during World War 1 in 1915.

However, ANZAC day is an opportunity for us to recognise all those who have bravely served New Zealand in battle during various conflicts our country has been involved in. In particular, we can remember and honour the people that made the ultimate sacrifice in protecting our proud country.

Mt Albert Grammar was established in 1922 four years after the end of World War 1. So other than a small number of teachers who served, our pupils and Old Boys were not as directly involved. In contrast by the time World War 2 started in 1939 nearly all of the Old Boys who had come through the school were of an age to serve or participate in some capacity. By the end of the War around 5000 students had attended MAGs and of those 40% of students had served.

The teaching staff were also severely impacted. In 1942 when the threat of a Japanese invasion was a realistic possibility 9 of the 21 full time staff were on active duty serving with forces.

It was around this time that New Zealand troops were becoming increasingly involved in active conflict. The Air War over Europe was intensifying, the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force had arrived in Egypt and significant numbers of New Zealand troops were involved in campaigns and action in Greece, Crete, Tobruk and the Pacific. With this the harsh realities and cost of war began to be truly felt at home.

This was experienced most dramatically and poignantly in this very Hall which now bears the name of the Headmaster, Mr Gamble, who established a special Friday assembly during which past pupils who had made the "supreme sacrifice" were remembered. Mr Gamble often with tears in his eyes and struggling to keep his emotions in check would speak about the fallen Old Boy recounting stories of their time at school and their war record. These services had a lasting and harrowing impact on those involved, particularly as the list of those past students killed or missing in action grew longer.

By the end of the World War 2 198 Albertians had been killed and a further 444 wounded. It is important to recognise that 3 further Old Boys have also paid the ultimate price in serving their country:

- Major Robert Genge who was killed in action in 1954 during the Malayan Emergency which lasted from 1948-1960.
- Corporal J.E. Lott who serviced in the US Marines and was killed in 1968 in the Vietnam War; and
- Lance Corporal Rory Malone who died in Afghanistan in 2012 while serving with the NZ Defence Force

Photos of all of these fallen soldiers are displayed here today. To see all of these faces is particularly moving and it sparked within in me a desire to know more about them and their

stories. My Great Grandfather was an artilleryman in World War One who fought in the Battle of the Somme and subsequently Passchendale in Flanders, Belgium which is where the poppies used to signify ANZAC day originated from. He fortunately survived the war but died well before I was born. Talking to my Granddad he said that his father never spoke of the war and all any of our family know of his experiences is through a wartime diary he left stored in the attic which was discovered following his death.

As a result, I want to share some insight into one of our fellow students displayed here today and I've chosen our most recent fallen soldier, Rory Malone.

Why, because ANZAC day is about remembering the fallen of all wars and it highlights the unfortunate reality that war and conflict still continue today. We have men and women bravely serving our country around the world as we speak.

Rory would also have been sitting in this very hall only a few years ago leaving school as a 17-year-old, the same age that I am now, to join the army reserves. Although his mum described him as a shy sensitive child and a bit of a "mummy's boy", he was destined to be a soldier. His great great grandfather was a World War 1 war hero William Malone nicknamed the Man of Iron after leading an assault on Chunuk Bair the highest point in Gallipoli and after joining the army Rory quickly excelled. He came out as the top recruit for his year and won a Top Soldier contest. He was deployed twice to Timor-Leste in 2006 and 2007 before being stationed with the NZ Provincial Reconstruction team in Bamyán, Afghanistan. The harsh reality for Rory and his fellow soldiers was in stark contrast to the portrayal of a peaceful reconstruction mission painted to the public. By the time he arrived some nine years after New Zealand troops were first deployed there was a growing hostility from the local Afghan people. In emails back home he described being confronted by angry children making throat slitting gestures which he found particularly confronting.

On 4 August 2012 his unit was called to provide emergency backup for Afghan secret police who had come under attack while trying to detain a bombmaker. His unit along with four other patrols quickly became embroiled in the largest fire fight involving New Zealand troops since the Vietnam War. It was described by other soldiers there as "utter chaos". Rory who had already been shot in the leg went to the aid of his badly wounded commanding officer Major Craig Wilson and oblivious to the danger dragged him to the safety of a Humvee. As Rory was re-entering the Humvee he was shot again and died almost instantly. The battle left another Kiwi soldier dead and six wounded. For his bravery Rory was awarded a New Zealand Government gallantry award and the then Minister of Defence Gerry Brownlee in making the award said:

"His sacrifice and that of other personnel who lost their lives must never be forgotten." The sacrifice that Rory made along with all of the other people displayed in the photos around the walls must always be remembered and honoured.

In closing I think it is fitting to finish with the words of Robert Louis Stevenson's Requiem that were sung by the school at the end of each special Friday remembrance assembly led by Mr Gamble all those years ago:

*Under the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.
This be the verse you grave for me:
“Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor; home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.*