

## Serve to Lead

Master of King's College - Mr Greg Eddy, Vice president of the King's College Council - Mr Gary Lynch, Heads of other Colleges, Moderator of the Uniting Church of Australia - Reverend David Baker, The Honourable Justice Daubney, President of the King's Old Collegians Association - Mr Blake Miller, President of the King's College Student Club - Liam Spannenburg, **Kingsmen**, and friends of the College, thank you for the invitation to share a few words with you this morning.

### Introduction

It would have been a night filled with many strong emotions for the 23 year old Lieutenant Talbot Smith and his Platoon of thirty young Australians as they completed final preparations prior to their assault onto enemy positions on the Gallipoli Peninsula. They would have nervously completed preparations, checked their weapons and ammunition, anxiously tried to get some rest before re-checking everything again at least two or three more times. At about 11pm they would have gathered together in the dark on the stern of the British Destroyer that had moved them close to the coastline, their Platoon Sergeant paying particular attention to ensuring that no one lit a cigarette lest they give their position away to Turkish artillery expecting their imminent arrival. Soon, Talbot and his men would climb down the side of the destroyer into boats where they would be towed towards the Gallipoli foreshore. Their mission was to establish the Anzac Cove beachhead with lights and beacons to guide subsequent waves of Australian soldiers as they assaulted the Turkish peninsula.<sup>1</sup>

Today I want to talk a little about three great Australian wartime heroes including Lieutenant Talbot Smith from Gallipoli, Nancy Wake, probably Australia's most successful spy from World War Two and Lieutenant James Fanning, the Platoon Commander involved in the capture of the town of Derapet in Southern Afghanistan

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, 'The Battle of the Landing, 25 April – 3 May 1915', website visited 20 April 2016, <http://www.gallipoli.gov.au/battle-of-the-landing/>

just over five years ago. Each of these three outstanding Australian leaders have been recognised for their acts of bravery and leadership, values that are synonymous with ANZAC Day, but today, I want to explore another essential trait that underpinned their bravery and leadership, and that is, their willingness to serve others. You see, without a strong and determined willingness to serve others, to put their self-interest aside for the sake of vulnerable people, the heroic acts that I will shortly describe would never have occurred. It was their willingness to serve others that allowed Talbot, Nancy and James to achieve such heroic accomplishments for which they are highly regarded today. Let me firstly provide you with a quick account of each of these three Australian heroes.

### **Lieutenant Talbot Smith**

As I have briefly shared with you, Talbot Smith led the first of the Australians ashore at Gallipoli and was responsible for enabling subsequent waves of thousands of men to commence their assault onto Turkish positions. Unlike today's military operations, Talbot did not have had robust communications updating him on enemy movements, he did not have had multiple Global Positioning Systems guiding him onto the exact point on the beach where he needed establish his beacons and markers, he did not have air superiority guaranteeing a protective shield of air to ground fire as he advanced, there were no predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (drones) neutralising enemy communications and reinforcements and there was no aeromedical evacuation helicopters for Talbot to call in once his soldiers started taking hits as they waded ashore at Gallipoli.

Any false sense of confidence or bravado would have been eliminated the moment the first Turkish machine guns and artillery opened fire. Yet Talbot knew that without his men finishing their task of marking the beach, subsequent waves of men would have stood no chance of getting ashore in an orderly fashion. Despite heavy losses in the first moments of their assault onto Anzac Cove, Talbot rallied his troops, as he knew the success of those coming behind depended on his action. Talbot understood just how important it was that he and his men secured the Anzac beachhead, even though

this would come at great personal cost to his Platoon. The measure of Talbot's success was not only the comprehensive preparation of the Anzac Cove beachhead, but also the capture of the Turkish Garrison later that morning by follow on forces. Yet despite, or perhaps because of his outstanding leadership qualities, Talbot Smith was killed in action five days later as he and his men continued combat operations on the Gallipoli peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

### **Nancy Wake**

Another Australian who contributed enormously to the success of allied operations, in this case during World War II, was Nancy Wake. After growing up in Sydney, Nancy followed her dream of becoming a journalist and found work in Vienna during the 1930s where she closely followed the rise of the Nazi party. Having become disgusted by the treatment of Jews by Nazi sympathisers in Austria, Nancy decided that the best way she could serve and make a difference was to cross into Southern France and join the French resistance. In the years that followed, Nancy established covert escape routes for allied airmen who had crashed and were trying to evade Vichy French and the Gestapo. At one point, Nancy was required to cycle 500km in just three days to ensure that essential intelligence was passed between resistance fighters. At the end of this incredible feat, Nancy could barely stand for the next week.<sup>3</sup>

Having enabled hundreds of allied airmen to escape occupied France, and successfully evading the Nazis herself, Nancy was labeled the WHITE MOUSE by the German Gestapo and had a bounty of 5 million francs placed on her capture, dead or alive. Later in the war, Nancy received training with the British Special Operations

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<sup>2</sup> Australian War Memorial, 'Lieutenant Eric Wilkes Talbot Smith,' *People Profiles*, website visited 20 April 2016, <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/P10678605/#biography>.

<sup>3</sup> Australian War Memorial, 'Nancy Grace Augusta Wake 'The White Mouse,' *People Profiles*, website visited 20 April 2016, <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/P332/>

Executive, later referred to as MI6, and returned to France where she led a brigade of 7,500 resistance fighters in their successful campaign against the German occupation.<sup>4</sup>

### **James Fanning**

A more recent example of courage, tenacity and leadership were on display in the remote Tangi Valley in southern Afghanistan just over five years ago. Lieutenant James Fanning and his platoon of about 30 soldiers, serving alongside an Afghan Platoon, were tasked to secure the village of Derapet. This area was notorious for Taliban extortion and violence and James' Platoon was given the mission of bringing security and a new sense of hope to the people of Derapet and the Tangi valley. James and his men used an aqueduct system to move into Derapet after his recon elements had identified a number of young Afghan men moving into the village, while women and children were seen leaving the valley, a sure sign that the situation was likely to quickly deteriorate.<sup>5</sup>

As they moved towards the village, James and his men were engaged by a Taliban force of 90–100 insurgents from positions less than 100 metres away. James counter attacked and with the support of American Apache gunships, and after three hours of fighting, his Platoon finally managed to capture the village forcing what remained of the Taliban to flee into nearby mountains. Although largely successful, this battle came at the cost of Lance Corporal Jarryd Mckinney, killed in action. It was also the battle in which Corporal Daniel Keighran, born in Nambour and raised in Bundaberg, was awarded our nation's highest honour, the Victoria Cross.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Fitzsimmons, 'The White Mouse who roared,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2011, website visited 20 April 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/the-white-mouse-who-roared-20110808-1ij2o.html>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Government, 'Battle of Derapet,' *Defence News*, 17 September 2010, website visited 20 April 2016, <http://www.defence.gov.au/defencenews/stories/2010/Sep/0917b.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Australian War Memorial, 'Corporal Daniel Alan Keighran,' *People Profiles*, website visited 20 April 2016, <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/P10027493/>

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Each of these three cases resulted in significant recognition and honour. In Nancy Wake's case, she ended up being the most decorated Australian Woman of World War Two, with the US, France, Australia and New Zealand all recognising her achievements. It is normal and indeed appropriate to recognise these achievements on ANZAC Day. Yet, even more important to me than their specific acts of bravery, is another quality, without which none of their subsequent success would have ever occurred. I am of course referring to Talbot's, Nancy's and James' willingness to serve others, a willingness to put aside the comforts of their life, to forego the substantial professional rewards they could have gained and instead to say goodbye to friends and family in order to contribute to a higher cause, to help vulnerable people who needed assistance.

When I consider these three Australians I am strongly reminded of the young men from King's College and the many young ladies here today. Like you, Talbot, Nancy and James had the world at their feet, they were aged in their early 20s, were educated at some of the best schools and Colleges in Australia, and they all had enormous potential for individual success. Yet they were willing to forego personal opportunities so that they could make a difference.

While we do not find ourselves facing the same challenges that confronted Talbot Smith and Nancy Wake, the opportunity to serve people others at home and abroad remains. This could look like some of the work that Old King's Collegians are doing around the world such as Nick Veltjens who is healing children with clubfeet in Madagascar or Andrew Blackman who is providing financial advice to the Government of Ecuador.<sup>7</sup> Or it could mean serving others closer to home like so many do here at King's in organising and leading our many cultural and sporting teams, or giving up time and effort to help out another Kingsmen in need.

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<sup>7</sup> King's College, 'The Wyvern Spreads its Wings,' *The Magazine of King's College*, Issue 29, 2015, pp. 8-11.

While it is important to commemorate the courage of those that have fought on foreign battlefields over the past century, ANZAC Day also challenges us to consider how we might follow Talbot, Nancy and James, and make a real difference by serving others in need.

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