

Journal of Gallipoli trip 16-29 April 2011

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Days 1 and 2

After twenty-four hours of headaches, ear-aches and back-aches, as well as large quantities of films, spilt orange juice and delicious plane food, we finally arrived safely and securely at Istanbul's Atatürk International Airport. Following our lengthy plane ride and standing in several queues, we were blessed to be greeted by the warm smile, pleasing manner and unaffected cheerfulness of our guide, Ozgür, who gave us a tiny taste of the beauty of Istanbul as our bus transported us to our hotel.

The place of our abode in Istanbul we reached via a very romantic cobble-stone rode in the Old City of Istanbul, just a stone's throw from many of her majestic sites. Antik Hotel, where we are to stay, is built upon one of the old Roman cisterns, and one of the hotel's restaurants was actually sited within one of these sewers. Once our rooms were prepared, we availed ourselves of the opportunity to shower and change for the first time in thirty-six hours. This important action being accomplished, we donned scarves and jackets and set out for our first exploration of our part of Istanbul. Scraping the surface of the Grand Bazaar by walking along past one of the streets marking its perimeter, we discovered that we had many new-found friends in the merchants and experienced the first pleasures and pains of shopping in Istanbul. Our walk around our locale in the chilly weather made us all hungry, a hunger that was more than satisfied with a 'light' lunch at the Antik Hotel. Quite struggling to even move afterwards, we dreaded what a 'normal' lunch would be like. However full we were or felt we were, all of us were grateful to be able to eat a meal at a table.

Trying valiantly to keep our eyes open, we set off to the New Town (which is not really 'new' at all) and boarded a boat for a cruise on the Bosphorus. From the first moment the boat embarked, there could be no excuse for keeping our eyes shut. For the first time we witnessed first-hand the unparalleled beauty and majesty of Istanbul: all the mosques, the old churches, the many palaces of the Turkish Sultan and his daughters, Atatürk's presidential ship and the Old City walls and fortresses of Constantinople as well as many other innumerable and glorious sites and stories that could not possibly fit on this page. The theme song for our trip – 'Istanbul (not Constantinople)' with its catchy tune seemed most appropriate as we took in the totality of the city; crossing from the European side to the Asian side we realized the astounding commixture of West and East, Christianity and Islam, the Byzantines and the Ottomans; we realized the effortless and eclectic mix of language and culture, and knew that nothing that was here in this city was out of place.

With these vivid images still in our minds, our bus then took us to the Turkish Military Museum. Its endless chambers gave us a glimpse of the imponderable magnitude of Turkey's military past, of which the Gallipoli Campaign formed an important slither, but just a slither nonetheless. An authentic military band including cymbals, drums, trumpeters, horns, singers and officers gave us the full experience of early modern oriental military practice with great pageantry.

The short time before dinner allowed us some shut-eye, though some took perhaps a little more than they should have. The photogenic dinner, by no means less impressive than to-day's lunch, with its magnificent and mouth-watering dessert was most welcome after our eventful day, and the sound of munching mouths was enriched by vibrant and passionate conversation ranging from the silly to the serious. Bed came next and with it the chance for a well-earned rest.

Day 3

We awoke to the sound of minarets calling the world to prayer just before dawn, and those who felt sufficiently refreshed, empowered and over their jetlag took the opportunity to 'seize the day' and go for a jog through the dark, damp, dawning streets of Istanbul. Others relished the chance to snuggle and lie horizontally in the warm hotel rooms in those wonderful things called beds, or to enjoy a prolonged headache at four o'clock in the morning.

Our first delicious European breakfast followed once we had the power to rouse ourselves, a breakfast that was certainly unusual – none of us were expecting fried sausages for breakfast! The nearest we got to breakfast at home was something that looked – but did not taste – like cornflakes. Once we had got over the culture shock, we discovered just how delicious a genuine Turkish breakfast can be.

With no time to wait we were on the bus at nine o'clock and off to visit the Hippodrome. This modest square once formed the centre of Byzantium for many hundreds of years, and was a fascinating mix of the eras before and after Christ: a sixteenth-century B.C. monument containing ancient hieroglyphs from Egypt in remarkably good condition, a third century B.C. snake-shaped monument with the potential for many best-seller stories behind it, and right next door the palace of the Byzantine Emperor. There was no splendour here – everything was bare and unadorned, a palace of understated beauty, of simple dignity.

It contrasted sharply with our next destination – the Blue Mosque, which we all concluded was a curious name after observing the interior of the mosque was as much red as it was blue. I can safely speak for all of us when I say that it quite simply took our breath away: its painted dome the diameter of an eight-storey building, the patterns beautiful and timeless, the later addition of the stained glass by no means an unwelcome one. Its Greek cross design made clear its architectural origins in the Byzantine world, and the facile bringing-together of Greco-Roman and Islamic engineering and science.

After a delicious lunch in a nineteenth-century restaurant we were able to ponder the huge size of Ottoman and Islamic history as we strolled unhindered through the impressive grounds of the Topkapi Palace – the palace of the sultans. Here all was glorious and enormous in proportion, beautiful cloisters leading to chambers full of religious and historical relics – all witnesses to the crowning achievements of this great and enduring civilisation.

Our day was by no means finished as we headed off to an old restaurant for dinner. Being spared the baklava due to a nut allergy, I received in its place a lovely sweet cheese pastry. The girls (and some among the boys) enjoyed receiving paper roses from the waiters.

Day 4

By this stage being used to the Turks' tastes in breakfast we entered upon our next day in the imperial city. According to Ozgür, the most important word of the century is 'flexibility', something we certainly needed as we dodged from one famous site to another due to the heavy crowds. When we got around to it, the bus dropped us at the Turkish museum of science and technology, a huge museum on a large plot of land in central Istanbul owned and operated by the richest family in Turkey. Here we were greeted not only by the tentative staff but also by a multitude of young school

children, on whom we practised our rudimentary Turkish skills; the laughter or dead silence we received in reply did not exactly fill us with confidence. The museum itself was most interesting, displaying the evolution of the Apple Mac computer, London buses, aeroplanes and a gorgeous old ship filled with small models of gorgeous old ships.

Next stop was lunch, but to work up an appetite we decided to walk down the main street of Istanbul. We 'de-bused' in Taxiem Square at the perfect moment – just as a huge riot was beginning demanding independence for the Kurds. Nonchalantly walking past the rather worryingly armed riot police, we came to the busiest street of Istanbul, and took an hour to explore the shops, the libraries and the churches that central Istanbul has to offer. By the end we wished we all had much more time. We then went into the Hajibaba restaurant for an interesting lunch – eggplant stuffed with mince, lentil soup and very rich rice pudding.

A short bus ride through the less well-off areas of Istanbul and we came to the historic thirteenth-century Church of Chora. This very petite Church was full of amazing mosaics and frescoes which are frequently showed to the West as standard icons of Eastern Orthodoxy, including one of Christ Pantokrator showing his eyes following you wherever you go. I had the opportunity to practise my French skills as I observed and listened to the many different languages of the tourists – French, Italian and German. The transition of the monument from country church to imperial church to mosque to museum represents Istanbul's changing state from Christian Byzantine to Muslim Ottoman to secular Turkey. The Church of Chora was a jewel of Turkey's shining past.

Our final destination for the day was the spice markets, where we seized the moment and developed our haggling abilities in preparation for our time at the Grand Bazaar. A pashmina or three and lots of authentic Turkish delight from Turkey for the loved ones at back home and it was hard to believe that an whole hour had gone by. The sound of three nearby mosques heralded the end of our stay at the markets- a late stroll around the nearby streets and lively humorous conversation brought midnight closer and before we knew it our eyes were closing, trying hard to persuade ourselves that there would be time in the morning to pack for our trip to Gallipoli.

Day 5

Today we woke up earlier than usual and made ready for our five hour journey to Gallipoli – the real reason for our being here in Turkey, so far from home. We waved goodbye to the bustling shops and business of Turkey's largest city for the picturesque, quiet and understated beauty of rural Asia Minor. Driving out of Istanbul, it truly felt like we were leaving the present moment and journeying into a past that has rightfully become so important and fundamental for both the Australian and Turkish cultures and histories, countries formed within just twenty-five years of each other. The time flew by as we were captivated and infuriated in turn by the debates that the Simpson Prize group is becoming used to as we waited for our 330 kilometre drive to the peninsular to come to an end, so that we could finally step onto the sacred ground that is Gallipoli.

The Beach Cemetery was our first experience of the Gallipoli battlefield, and here we were so grateful to be able to pay tribute to the memory of John Simpson Kirkpatrick, for whom this prize is named, at his grave, contemplating details of his life and brave deeds beyond what we had learnt before. We took the opportunity in a sacred silence to pace the length of the cemetery, modest in size, reading the lovely and moving epitaphs on the headstones of the soldiers, gracious thoughts and feelings about their

lives, their humour, their memories expressed by loved ones in Australia, as well as attempts to put their unspeakable thanks for their courageous sacrifice into words. Several of us commented that one of these epitaphs, 'to live in the hearts of those we leave behind is not to die' resounded with us, the ever-living memory of these soldiers being perpetuated through individual efforts as well as large-scale commemorations. We also considered that our generation has an obligation through study and learning to never stop trying to make sure that the sacrosanct memory of these diggers is never forgotten. Before coming here to Gallipoli, each of us pupils has researched one individual soldier who died at Gallipoli without trumpeting and glory, so that we might collectively, individually and as a symbol make personal tribute from our generation to certain men whose stories may not have been told, who are just part of a generation and a legend that is often revered but rarely pondered or understood.

When we came to walk along the beach at Anzac Cove, a spot that springs to mind whenever 'Anzac' or 'Gallipoli' is mentioned, it was really hard to imagine or believe that ninety-five years ago thousands of lives were lost right where we were standing in a strategically disastrous campaign full of blunders and imperfections. Feeling the sting and the bite of the elements in this place, I think that we could begin to realize and understand all the sufferings, needs and wants that our Anzacs must have experienced. The penetrating silence and deep solemnity of the cemeteries and the few people there certainly caused me to think just how immensely privileged I am to be able to walk literally in the steps of so many Anzacs, be they named or nameless, and I felt the same sense of detachment, distance and yearning for their families, friends and homes that they themselves would have sensed.

While writing this journal, we are enjoying the simple pleasures of playing cards and backgammon in the Kum Hotel just a stone's throw from Anzac Cove, and we can know what it is like to enjoy the same amity and companionship that the Anzacs are well-remembered for. However today has taught me and I am sure the rest of us to always keep in mind the manifest, ever-present, and ever-living sacrifice that so many ordinary people made through their so many extraordinary deeds.

Day 6

After the most western breakfast of the trip so far, we made the most of the first clear blue sky and sun and began our walk in the footsteps of the Australian diggers at Gallipoli nearly a century ago. Our initial stop was at Plugge Plateau - the believed first objective of the campaign. From here we had a panoramic view of the whole layout of the campaign and its battlefields, including the Walkers' Ridge, known as 'the Sphinx'. The next cemetery we visited was the one at Shrapnel Valley. It was profound and moving to go around and read the young ages, the names and the epitaphs on the headstones. After several photographs and much still and silent reflection, Stuart gave us a rundown on the bill of fare for the Anzacs at Gallipoli in 1915, and we had the chance (or, more accurately, the obligation) to try the corned bully beef and dry biscuit that formed the staple of every Anzac's daily food ration.

Leaving behind the silence and the solitude of this green and peaceful spot, we made our way to Lone Pine, the site of Australia's greatest losses, as well as the only successful major battle of the whole campaign for the Allied side. Here the sheer number of names on the memorial and the many graves brought home to me the sadness and the futility of war, and the fact that thousands of Australian and Turkish soldiers died fighting over a few hundred yards of, realistically speaking, quite inconsequential land. There were many more people from Australia here than at the smaller cemeteries, testament to the great and sorry place this battlefield holds in the

hearts of so many Australians, young and old. Even for those whose families are not specifically linked to battle doubtless still felt a deep connection to the free sacrifice of these men, fighting for an injudicious reason that they themselves could not really understand or rationally justify. Here we, pupils of the twenty-first century, paid tribute to certain individuals whom we had researched and whose powerful stories resounded personally with us. The chilly wind made our brisk walk a most welcome activity, our surroundings always bringing us back to the reality of where and why we had come. Channel nine news crews joined us in walking the original trenches to bear witness to the undying power, potency and poignancy of the spirit of sacrifice that is there but too often forgotten or ignored in mainstream society. So many of the headstones that we visited bore the date of death as 25 April, showing the evident confusion, disorder and bewilderment of the first moments and hours of the campaign.

After lunch we walked up to the Nek, the emotional site of the most disastrous engagement for the Australians, as dramatised by the famous Australian film, 'Gallipoli'. The ubiquitous views from this pleasant position was a striking juxtaposition between idyllic beauty and peace of this spot to-day compared with the horror of the senseless killing and bloodshed of a century ago. A certain sensitive and dignified solemnity pervaded our journey back to the hotel, conscious like never before of the huge feats asked of these diggers, many nameless and unknown, who though fearing, gave their all and did their duty for the sake of liberty and our country.

Day 7

Good Friday made me think of family over the seas at home, and how the Australians in 1915 must have longed for their own families and loved ones at home as the weeks and the months went by. To-day we took a diversion from the usual programme of graves and tributes, and drove our bus onto a ferry by which we crossed the Dardanelles from Europe to Asia. The fact that we were crossing at the most narrow point, about 1.5 kilometres in length, meant that we did not have to spend too long on deck at the mercy of the scathing wind.

Safely on another continent, we made our way through the quiet fields and Mediterranean hamlets before coming to the ancient city of Troy, a city surrounded by and surviving in famous legends and endlessly enthralling mythology. The ancient walls from several of the city's forty-six levels were still in good condition, especially considering the fact that the Trojans had not discovered the use of mortar! We had the chance to sit in a genuine ancient amphitheatre and found amusement in watching the girls' rather ambitious cabaret. The teachers were thrilled to be able to take photos and use them as sources for their own ancient history classes.

Next we 'embused' and arrived at the southern tip of the Asian peninsular at the entrance to the Dardanelles. Here we discussed and considered the failed attempts and implications of the Allied British and French marine attack upon the Turkish port, a battle which was definitively decided on 18th March 1915 as a Turkish victory, the date on which Turkey as a nation now commemorates World War I, much in the same way as Australians commemorate Anzac Day. The 18th of March holds a special place in the military memories and spirits of both Turkey and the countries of the Old British Empire.

Lunch was new for some of the group but the Catholics on board were pleased when a full scaly fish was put in front of us. A welcome departure from the usually rich Turkish desserts was afforded in the way of some fresh fruits. Following this

refreshment we walked just around the corner to a fort built in 1463 under orders from Sultan Mehmet II, the Turkish conqueror of Constantinople. As we walked its long halls, this fort, now a museum, told us the story of the Gallipoli campaign from the point of view of the Turks, and a small dramatisation based on Turkish soldiers' journals made clear the feelings of empathy, respect and understanding that existed and exist between people of both nations both in 1915 and to-day, and which we as young people must ensure continues long into the future.

Our final stop before we boarded our bus which boarded our boat was the model of the Trojan Horse used in the film 'Troy', now stationed as a public exhibit in the centre of the town of Çanakkale, a fairy-tale sea-side town that would form the dream holiday of many people all around the world. The laughter and smiles of the young adults and children in this thriving town seemed somewhat incongruous with its involvement in past military activity. Back at the hotel, we watched Connor set a new record amidst gasps of admiration, wonder and revulsion as he downed thirteen large sugar-balls each the size of a large egg. Once we had recovered from this jocular moment, those of sufficient ability took pleasure in beating some nearby Turks at their own games of cards and backgammon.

Day 8

It is always important to remember not only the sacrifice of Australian troops, but also those of all countries, and so it was fitting to travel to the British cemetery at V Beach on Cape Helles, the southernmost tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula, where far more British troops died than Australians. Here we rationalised the battle and the landing that the British affected by way of a model before walking between the headstones, mostly bearing the religious epitaphs of Irish Catholics from the Dublin Fusiliers.

After paying our respects to those British soldiers who fought as the allies of Australia, we stopped next at the French military cemetery, an experience that was deeply moving and spiritually profound for me personally – an atmosphere and a tradition so different from the Commonwealth cemeteries: inexpensive crosses bent out of fence pickets, in seemingly endless and precise rows. This cemetery seemed far more intimate to me than some of the others – it connected with me on a more profound level. It was hard not to feel emotion when I looked at the visitors' book empty of names, across the sweeping field of black fashioned crosses bordered by two rows of perfect trees, the centrepiece a magnificent white shrine to France. Upon each cross the simple inscription: 'mort pour la france' – died for France. There were no individual epitaphs, rather a sense of community and oneness was emphasised here, in a manner so different to the war cemeteries we have become accustomed to over the course of this trip.

Continuing on, we walked up a steep slope, all the while being swamped by downwards-walking Turks, leaving us, in the words of Andrew, to 'swim like Salmon upstream'. At the top of the hill though was a sight well worth the walking for – a Turkish memorial epic in proportions, with a huge Turkish flag that requires seven men to carry flying proudly at the top of the landmark. Also here were murals and reliefs of the Turks and the Australians during the Gallipoli campaign, showing the perspective of the Turks as regards the battles, and as an enduring legacy of the fraternal bonds of respect, fellowship and in a sense camaraderie that are so vibrant and so potent. Despite the boys being swamped by Turkish girls and the girls being swamped by Turkish boys (or I should rather say, men), we managed to get something out of Ozgür's, and it took some time for us to get over the sheer enormity of the Turkish monument. It was a very special moment for all of us to stand in the

Turkish cemetery and pay our silent respects to their courageous sacrifice, to acknowledge the fact that they answered their country's call and fought unbegrudgingly for their people's and their nation's integrity. This moment, standing at the Turkish graves, was incredibly meaningful for me, as it made me think just how often the efforts, the actions and the sacrifice of the 'enemy' is forgotten, and gave me a realisation that there should be definition rather than separation between the ways that different countries commemorate war.

These portentous thoughts still fresh in our minds, we made our last stop of the morning at the singular grave of Doughty Wiley, V.C., a British veteran of the Boer War who was shot during the campaign and was buried by his wife or lover, depending on which legend you listen to. We all concurred that his name sounded as though it belonged in a cartoon, a good laugh though not distracting us from the reason of our visit: to honour one honoured for his bravery and consistent loyalty to his country throughout numerous conflicts.

At lunch we noticed that the quality of the hot chocolates was severely diminished, and so were not sorry to leave behind the hotel and partake in the rehearsal for the Lone Pine ceremony for Anzac Day. There was discussion at great length as to whether jackets should be worn, and our own Tanvi stole the show with her clear and crisp recitation of a poem, 'Scots of the Riverina' by Henry Lawson. We had the chance to practise the important art of wreath-presenting, and in so doing it struck me that the atmosphere is building as we come closer to Anzac Day. Despite the length of the rehearsal, we managed to board our boat for a two hour boat-trip along the coastline of the peninsular, which gave us the ability to rationalise the geography of Gallipoli, and to see the peninsular from the sea, just as the Anzacs would have seen it when they landed at dawn on 25 April 1915. The fierce and chill wind on the roof of the ship made it easy to imagine the contained excitement, palpable fear and mutable feelings of the diggers as they rowed into the shore. It was a welcome relief when the captain brought us into the control-cabin with its terrific views and cheering warmth.

Back in the hotel we engaged in a passionate game of trivia, and the 'Aguileras' were triumphant over the 'Cobblers', forty-eight points to forty-five, winning the grand prize of a mini Trojan Horse key-ring. We were amazed and yet not at just how much we had actually retained over this past week.

Day 9

A relaxing itinerary was planned for to-day, a welcome digression from the packed schedules of the past few days. After a bedtime of anywhere between two and four a.m., somehow we managed to feel somewhat rested and rouse ourselves for a fairly early start. This morning's affair was a beautiful scenic walk starting from Hill 60, where we were dropped, and continuing along the Kirectepe Ridge, a tireless walk that afforded an exquisite view over the Suvla Bay area. Although we were often looking at the ground to watch our feet, we were more than able to revel in the natural glory of the Peninsula's unspoiled beauty, its picturesque green dotted now and then with white stone and a large cross. For those of us who forgot or chose not to put on sun-block, the sun had her fun, and headaches resulting were put to rest by rigorous 'walking and talking' lessons in French and Italian.

As before even the course of the week, the British, Australian and New Zealand cemeteries served as living reminders of the sacrifice of the dead. From higher ground at the beginning of the walk, it was very special to be able to see the totality of the battlefields at Gallipoli. As the sun continued to beat down we were glad that the

walk was mainly downhill. Along the way we all felt much younger as we sensed the desire to climb into old holes, tunnels and trenches to explore. Fortunately the bus was always close at hand to help us along the more trying sections and without drama save a sore knee or two, we came back to the hotel in time for lunch which few of us ate.

Ozgür indulged us with a special cultural treat: Turkish tea in a Turkish teahouse. Walking down its narrow streets with its poky shops, its quiet and its untarnished beauty, we could have been in any village in Italy or Greece. Not only did this particular village afford a delightful, fairy-tale teahouse, but also a museum: an old village cottage where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of modern Turkey, staid for two days during the campaign. While we drank either bitter Turkish kafé or deliciously sweet apple tea, we pondered the fact that this father of a nation was not above residing in the humblest of residences, or associating with the humblest of people. It was a privilege to enter into rooms he had entered.

The afternoon was passed in various occupations – some of us played backgammon, or ‘tavla’ in Turkish, others cards, some talked and the sensible ones among us settled down for a well-earned and well-needed siesta. Not feeling particularly rested after our nap, we tried to eat what we could of a very Australianesque barbeque, but most of us were not feeling very hungry and instead of food, forced down cake and coffee and anything caffeine-filled to give ourselves as much ammunition as possible for the long night ahead. Resolving not to fall asleep after dinner, and seeing as the taps and electricity in our rooms were far from consistent, we bunked in an area now well-known to us, the ‘kafeterya’ where we were able to change our cameras, have some company and fill up with sugar.

As the clock continued to tick, our excitement began to build and we tried to halt the rising emotions by logically and methodically changing into and packing the articles that we correctly deemed necessary. Other Australians in large numbers made up the majority in the restaurant and the bar, and ‘we young ones’ heard a few stories that commanded admiration, sorrow or humour, and at times a mixture of all, but with every conversation a short-term friendship did not fail to be created, the happy product of an happy smile and some cheerful banter.

As the night wore on, the chill set in, leaving certain members of the group to remark that it was not so cold as the water of the Aegean Sea in which they had swum that afternoon just following lunch. By all reports that swim was indeed a chilly affair, evidenced by the grimaces trying to look like smiles as the lookers-on took photos of the girls in the waves.

At last the midnight alarm-bell rang, we shivered into six or seven layers, and collected our food packs and sleeping bags in preparation for the rousing, moving and compelling experiences shortly to come.

Day 10

Our day – Anzac Day – for us began at one o’clock a.m. when we left the Kum for the Dawn Service. Our government passes ready at hand, we ‘d-bused’ and began our brisk walk to North Beach, the site of the Dawn Service at Gallipoli. Having found our seats – front row with a terrific view of the beach and all the proceedings – we arranged our sleeping bags and snuggled in, our biscuits, poppas and sandwiches there to go from the night before. Our walks around the Dawn Service compound revealed to us that Turks will stop nowhere to get a buy; having set up markets selling ‘chicken kepaps’ and ‘warm soop’. Too our disappointment, sadly by the time we

arrived the much-coveted hot chocolates were all safely and soundly in other people's bellies.

In the build-up to the service proper, we Simpson Prize winners enjoyed a chance to rest or chose to view the entertainments provided, including military and traditional music played by the military bands of the Australian and New Zealand Royal Air Force, as well as invaluable and interesting short documentaries about various aspects of the Gallipoli campaign that are often overlooked: be it the hospital nurses on the island of Lemnos or Stoker and his exploits in the AE2 Submarine. These provided the necessary context to fully envelop us in the feeling and spirit of Anzac. Suffice to say, with all these captivating informative and amusing diversions, I found myself awake the whole time. We were cold yet cozy as we saw the sky lighting somewhat and with tears in our eyes watched and listened to the stories of and tributes to individual soldiers, some as young as sixteen, who died doing their duty, their epitaphs and photos projected boldly and proudly for all the pilgrims to plainly see.

It is difficult to describe feelings and emotion at the moment the sun came over the ridge and the Dawn Service started. For me personally, this week I have not pictured battlefields or bodies, perhaps not even people, just a feeling, general in nature, that seems to emanate from this place – a feeling too colossal to verbalise or transcribe, just one of perpetual horror at the appalling waste and aimlessness of this campaign, followed by immense respect for the free sacrifice of men whose motives for enlisting were varied, whose ideas of the war were unknown, whose fear at fighting and dying was no doubt palpable, yet who obeyed their commands, answered the call of their country and, for many, paid the ultimate price. For this free and unbiting sacrifice we must be eternally grateful and mindful. Some people find it hard to reconcile the evil of war with military commemoration, but this poses no problem for me – whether war is right or wrong, those diggers who fought did so not for tactical reasons but out of pure loyalty to their 'God, king and country' and for those who live in it to-day. This reality will for ever demand and command our respect and devotion.

There was no time for breakfast after the Service had ended, as we had places to be. A swift tidy-up was all that time would afford us before we said good-bye to North Beach, and left behind the magic and sadness of the Dawn Service. We enjoyed the beautiful weather on this most important of days as we walked up the long artillery road, the freezing cold of our long night giving way to a glorious sun and cloudless sky, the breathtaking surrounds of the Turkish coast all around us, reminding us of how privileged we have been to make this pilgrimage, to be able to witness the Anzac Spirit that is ever so vibrant and alive.

Perhaps walking a little too briskly for our teacher-chaperone, soon we arrived at the top of the hill, and at Lone Pine, not before stopping at Shell Green Cemetery to hear some more of the story of Rusty Richards, just an ordinary Australian whose story, extraordinary and moving in its simplicity, was truly representative of the lives of many of the Anzacs.

At Lone Pine, we Simpson Prize winners had the privilege to present wreaths to both Australian and Turkish military and political dignitaries, a special and memorable occasion indeed. Though the wind was chilly at this elevated site, the friendly and exciting atmosphere that was the product of five thousand enthused Australians' presence, kept us well and warm. Songs were sung, prayers were prayed, addresses were given, and our own Tanvi Karnik delivered perfectly the reading of a poem, 'Scots of the Riverina'. To be at this Service, specifically a tribute to Australia's own

involvement in the campaign, was truly to be a witness to this proud tradition, this compelling spirit.

There was a stillness and a silence that held sway as we drove back to the Kum, had a well-deserved lunch and for some a quiet walk. Yet we had been up and attentive for no small while, and so we came to our rooms and went to bed.

Day 11

After a breakfast that did include the delicious hot chocolates from the Kum, for the last time we said goodbye to Gallipoli and the 'Australian history' part of our trip — at least until we may find ourselves there again some day. Bags packed (for most, at least, fully), we embarked on our coach and began our journey back to the city of Istanbul. There were no debates this time, just friendly chitchat and some sleep, both of which apparently seemed to provoke a few embarrassing photos.

We halted our journey to take lunch at a fine restaurant, the Turkish-sized portions never ceasing to amaze. In the distance we could see, somewhat hear, and certainly feel the hassle and bustle of Istanbul. Once we reached the familiar sight of the Antik Hotel, we took some time to unpack, and to transform our rooms into giant mattresses. This important activity being accomplished, we once again hit the streets of Istanbul in search of anything that might catch our eye—gifts for ourselves and for our families and friends.

A walk in the evening, some ice-cream, dodging trams on the streets of Istanbul, some conversation, a large and delicious dinner as always, and that was the end of a remarkably and refreshingly uneventful day. It was a chance for all to recharge and to reflect.

Day 12

Our last day in Istanbul and our last day in Turkey. We began the day with a visit to the Hagia Sophia, a sixth-century wonder of religion and engineering, its ancient dome still standing strong as ever, its mosaics uncovered and maintained. With justification could the Emperor Justinian remark, 'Solomon, I have outdone thee!', for this building, this remarkable edifice, this testimony to culture and science, even to-day stands as the fourth-largest church in the world. Having some Greek heritage myself, this occasion was a special one for me, though the Hagia Sophia is no longer a Greek Cathedral. Having hanged from a church to a mosque and now to a museum, this monument spoke volumes of the very age of Turkish history, the depth of her culture. Its conversion and maintenance showed the healthy relationship between religion and the state, the successful transitions from Turkey's being Christian to being Muslim to being secular. The Hagia Sophia was indeed a terrific spectacle to behold.

Following this, next came a visit to the Suleyman Mosque, a fine building extremely renaissancesque in design, clean and pristine as the day it was built four and a half centuries ago. This mosque, named for Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, a fine and distinguished Renaissance prince, lawgiver, and social and political reformer, had the most beautiful patterns on its walls, and a magnificent dome imitative of that of Hagia Sophia, its form and architecture taken straight from the design of a Greek-cross.

In one of the buildings attached to this mosque, we took lunch in the Daruzziyafe Restaurant, where once again we struggled to finish each course, and decided we had

finally resigned ourselves to the fact that we would forever expect dessert with our lunch. All of us—teachers and pupils—were sadly coming to the realisation that this magical trip would be ending soon.

This fact only increased our desire to shop—a desire common to both boys and girls, I might add—to spend the last lira in our wallets, to take away as much of beautiful Turkey as we could. For this purpose, nowhere would do as well as the Grand Bazaar, the shopping destination of Turkey, its over four thousand shops in its covered passages selling anything of any description, anything the heart could desire or the mind could imagine—jewellery, leathers, cashmeres, pashminas, chess and backgammon sets, tea-cups and tea, spice-mixers and spices. Defying the odds, none of us found ourselves lost at all in this labyrinth of passages and laneways, thousands of stalls and thousands of people, with nothing to help our sense of direction but Turkish signs that we could not understand. It was the Turkish cultural match to the historic wonder of Anzac Day. Suffice to say, we found some exquisite souvenirs to bring home, to serve as an eternal reminder of our happy times together. We were sad to leave.

Our last dinner together as the Simpson Prize group 2011 was held at the Sarnic Restaurant, a lovely restaurant in the Old Town with equally lovely food. Here, all of us tried to stay cherry as the inevitable sadness began to grow within us: this was our last night in Turkey. At the restaurant, we met some (quite) young Swiss visitors, who were in Istanbul for a few days, whose English was (mostly) perfect, and who happened to have lived in Australia for a couple of years earlier in life. These kind, warm, welcoming people simply confirmed my belief that the world is full of good people. To their children we gave the last of our toy koalas and Australia key-rings, and wished them all the best.

Back at the Antik, for the last time we gathered in the foyer, wrote the last blog entry, and exchanged gifts. These we pupils had arranged ourselves, gifts to the chaperones, gifts to the guides and the driver. Here, the tears began to be shed. Then we went to bed, in close proximity each to each other, relishing our last sleep in this glorious foreign country, one last sleep on this wonderful journey.

Day 13

We awoke early to-day, packed our bags and took breakfast. I am writing this last entry on the plane, surrounded by people I consider life-long friends. The last activity set in store for us was a second visit to the Grand Bazaar. There, this morning, I brought the total of my purchased scarves to the grand total number of sixteen. There, this morning, I said good bye to the Turkey I have absolutely loved for these two weeks. There, this morning, I savoured the last moments in Turkey with these the best of my friends. I had the opportunity to buy and enjoy one last Turkish simit as we walked back to the hotel, and there waved it good bye.

From there, we made our way to the airport, a sombre atmosphere prevailing, viewing for the last time the sites and streets of Istanbul. At the airport we did all the usual things, and boarded our plane. During our flight, we were not kept quiet or without entertainment, drawing caricatures of each other, some red wine being spilt (on my clothes), and blocking the aisles in talking together, sharing favourite memories and keeping happy company. It was a lovely way to end these two weeks.

At Sydney I said goodbye to everyone. They and Turkey and the Simpson Prize will always live inside me, and will always have a place amongst my fondest memories. Many hugs and promises of a reunion, and then I was on my way home.