It’s one hundred years since Australians and New Zealanders splashed out of the sea, right here.

So now we gather in the cold and dark before dawn; wondering what to say and how to honour those whose bones rest in the hills and the valleys above us, and whose spirit has moved our people for a century.

Year after year, we journey to what’s now a peaceful coast to remember things that, normally, we might try to forget.

Year after year, from all over our country, from every walk of life, from every background, young and old make this pilgrimage.

We aren’t here to mourn a defeat or to honour a success, although there was much to mourn and much to honour in this campaign.

We aren’t here to acknowledge a legacy in this country, although Gallipoli shaped modern Turkey as much as it forged modern Australia and New Zealand.

Few of us can recall the detail, but we have imbibed what matters most: that a generation of young Australians rallied to serve our country, when our country called, and they were faithful, even unto death.

Beginning here, on this spot and at this hour, 100 years ago, they fought; and all-too-often they died: for their mates, for our country, for their King and – ultimately – for the ideal that people and nations should be free.

The first Anzacs were tradesmen, clerks, labourers, farmers and professionals; they were from every conceivable occupation, from every rung in the ladder of society, and from every point under the Southern Cross.

Instead of landing here, they would have longed for the homes they’d left behind, the times they might have shared with their families, the backyard sport they could have played with their mates.

But ordinary men did extraordinary things.
“They lived with death and dined with disease” because that was where their duty lay.

In volunteering to serve, they became more than soldiers; they became the founding heroes of modern Australia.

If they had not been emblematic of the nation we thought we were, Anzac Day would not have been commemorated from that time until this – in every part of our country, in every place where Australians gather, and in every military base where Australians serve.

If they were not still emblematic of the nation we think we are, none of us would be here.

But like every generation since, we are here on Gallipoli, because we believe that the Anzacs represented Australians at our best.

It’s the perseverance of those who scaled the cliffs under a rain of fire.

It’s the compassion of the nurses who attended to the thousands of wounded.

It’s the conquest of fear, often through a larrikin sense of humour.

And it’s the greatest love anyone can have: the readiness to lay down your life for your friend.

It’s this that’s ennobled those Anzacs to all who have come after them: they faced the hardest possible test and they did not flinch.

The Gallipoli campaign was a failure, of course; the only really successful part was the evacuation.

But the survivors of Gallipoli and their reinforcements went on to become some of the world’s finest soldiers.

The Australian and New Zealand mounted infantry spearheaded the British army that captured Jerusalem and Damascus.

In March 1918, it was the Australian army corps that held the last great German attack that had split the British from the French armies.

And it was Monash, the engineering genius and citizen soldier, the commander who’d struggled at Gallipoli but succeeded in France, who pioneered the all-arms warfare that led to victory, by breaking the bloody stalemate on the Western Front.

Over the past century, the Anzacs’ descendants have honoured that tradition: in the Second World War, Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, Iraq and – our longest war – Afghanistan.

Those serving on peacekeeping and relief missions have likewise kept faith with the original Anzacs.

Even now, our armed forces are serving in the Middle East and elsewhere, defending the values that we hold dear.

Today, all of us who have not been tested in war salute all of those who have.

Most of us have never worn our country’s uniform.

We have not climbed the steep cliffs of Gallipoli.
We have not trudged through the snow of Bullecourt.

We have not struggled through the mud of Passchendaele.

We have not experienced the horrors of Hellfire Pass, or fought through the jungles of Kokoda or Vietnam, or shaken the Uruzgun sand from our clothes.

We have not risked being shot out of the skies over Germany or torpedoed in the Med or in the Pacific.

But we are the better for those who have.

Because they rose to their challenges, we believe that it’s a little easier for us to rise to ours.

Their example, we believe, helps us to be better than we would otherwise be.

That’s why we’re here: to acknowledge what they have done for us – and what they still do for us.

The official historian, Charles Bean, said of the original Anzacs: “their story rises as it will always rise, above the mists of ages, a monument to great hearted men; and, for their nation a possession forever”.

Yes, they are us; and when we strive enough for the right things, we can be more like them.

So much has changed in one hundred years but not the things that really matter.

Duty, selflessness, moral courage: always these remain the mark of a decent human being.

They did their duty; now, let us do ours.

They gave us an example; now, let us be worthy of it.

They were as good as they could be in their time; now, let us be as good as we can be in ours.

[ends]