

Media Release 16 April 2013

***Kiwis pay Homage to WWI Soldiers with Gallipoli Pilgrimage***

A pilgrimage tour to Gallipoli, Turkey, will give Kiwis the chance to pay their tributes to the New Zealand soldiers who served there during WWI.

The nine-day trip has been timed to mark the centenary of WWI with visits to battlefields on the Gallipoli Peninsula, where more than 11,000\* NZ and Australian soldiers lost their lives.

The Managing Director of House of Travel in Palmerston North, Stephen Parsons, developed the tour to help Kiwis better understand the story of Gallipoli.

Parsons, who has travelled to Gallipoli three times in the past four years, says it’s important that New Zealanders understand and respect the significance of this site and have the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of our forebears.

“When you stand on the beaches of the Gallipoli Peninsula you have an immediate sense of what it felt like for our Kiwi soldiers from an emotional point of view. You have a vision of what it would have been like to be a young fella in the trenches with flies and filth around you, watching your comrades die,” he says.

“It hits home that while you can actually leave, they couldn’t. No matter the extreme temperatures and trauma, they were bound there. It feels good to pay tribute to those who came before us and gave us the gift of freedom that we enjoy today,” says Parsons.

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Participants in the trip will embark on a range of definitive battlefield tours, before commemorating ANZAC Day, our national day to remember the Australian and NZ Army Corps’ arrival at Anzac Cove, on April 25.

Due to the limited capacity of Gallipoli’s small commemorative site, Parsons says he understands the New Zealand and Australian governments will each run a ballot system to allocate the attendance passes for April 25th 2015.

“Australia will receive 8000 passes, New Zealand 2000, and the remaining 500 will be reserved for visitors from Turkey and other official representatives. The allocation numbers are based on the relative number of casualties suffered by NZ and Australia at Gallipoli,” he says.

Parsons says many of the people who have secured 120 of the 220 spots available on the tour are going to honour relatives who served in Gallipoli.

“For me, the trip is personal, as the grandfather of my wife of 34 years, Julie, fought in Gallipoli. He was on shore the first day the troops landed,” he says.

“After suffering a bad shoulder injury, he ended up being a stretcher bearer for other injured soldiers. His survival has been instrumental in my life as otherwise I would never have met my wife or had any of my four children.”

Parsons has turned his gratitude for the sacrifice of our men in Gallipoli into a journey with the help of the New Zealand RSA, which has helped him develop the concept.

RSA Chief Executive, Dr Stephen Clarke, says that the RSA is proud to be involved in helping Kiwis to learn of the NZ story of Gallipoli.

“We have ensured some of the country’s top military historians will be on the trip so that Kiwis will have the opportunity to experience their history firsthand from the best,” he says.

“Travellers will also get the chance to honour the memory of our ANZACs 100 years to the day, through this once in a lifetime experience.”

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Four Kiwi historians will be present on the tour to give a historical explanation on the events as they unfolded at Gallipoli. An historian from Turkey will also attend to give a balanced perspective, says Parsons.

Professor of War Studies at Massey University’s Palmerston North branch, Glyn Harper, will also be taking part in the trip.

He says that while Gallipoli was one of our nation’s greatest tragedies, it was a “victory over death and suffering and of the human spirit”.

“Gallipoli was a time when NZ learned about itself and its values. We discovered our own self-worth and Australia as a fighting partner. It gave a huge push to cementing our national identity,” says Harper.

The tour will underpin the locations and events which will feature in a book Harper is writing on the first definitive history of NZ’s involvement in the First World War, *Johnny New Zealand* – *the NZ soldier in the First World War,* the first volume of which will bereleased this year.

Along with a commemorative service to acknowledge the centenary of WWI, the trip, to run from April 19-27, 2015, will include sightseeing throughout Istanbul and visits to the Temple of Athena and the ancient city of Troy; the scene of the Trojan Wars.

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Notes to editors:

\*http://www.anzac.govt.nz/gallipoliguide/

Stephen Parsons

Stephen Parsons has over 40 years of travel industry experience, including several commemoration tours. The 100th commemoration tour reflects a life-long involvement with this occasion. Having toured Gallipoli and other battlefields, he is committed to helping others learn about the sacrifice our nation made in World War I.

Stephen Clarke

Stephen Clarke, a History graduate of Otago University and the Australian Defence Force Academy, is currently leading the transformation of the RSA for its second century. Over the last decade Dr Clarke has been involved with the return of the Unknown Warrior (2004), pilgrimages to Gallipoli (2007) and Crete (2011), and is currently working on a number of projects relating to the Centenary of World War One (2014-18).

Glyn Harper

Glyn Harper is Professor of War Studies at Massey University in Palmerston North. He is now General Editor of the Centenary History of NZ and the First World War. A former teacher, he joined the Australian Army in 1988, and after eight years he transferred to the New Zealand Army, where he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Glyn was the army's official historian for the deployment to East Timor and is the author of eighteen books which include Kippenberger: An inspired New Zealand Commander; In the Face of the Enemy: the complete history of the Victoria Cross and New Zealand; Dark Journey: Three Key Battles of the Western Front; Images of War: World War One: A Photographic Record of New Zealanders at War 1914-1918 and his most recent Letters from Gallipoli: New Zealand Soldiers Write Home.

Tour Details

To book on the exclusive tour contact your nearest House of Travel outlet or Stephen Parsons House of Travel Palmerston North 0800 Anzac2015 ( 269 222)l outlet or online at houseoftravel/anzac2015.

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