



ANZAC Day – Student Address

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War is not often the first thought on a St Andrew's College student's mind when they plan their first few years out of school. University, an apprenticeship, or going straight into the workforce will be common plans of the leavers of 2023. Having to fight for one's country would likely never cross a student's mind. However, within the history of our College, Old Collegians have been expected to sacrifice years of their life, or their life completely for their country.

This concept of war and thus the importance of ANZAC Day is often lost on my generation. With the First World War concluding over 100 years ago and the Second World War nearly 80 years ago, ANZAC Day may feel far off and distant to current students. Alongside this, fewer and fewer students will now have living relatives who fought in the wars. Without stories and living evidence of the ANZAC's, WWI and WWII can feel like history lessons rather than an important events within the story of our nation.

Due to this, our students may even question the significance or the necessity of an ANZAC Day in the 21st Century. Whether it be seen as a glorification of war or a celebration of a faraway era.

I disagree. I believe that through the legacy and the lessons left by those who served New Zealand, ANZAC Day remains ever relevant in our society. One lesson I find especially applicable to modern times is resilience; the ability to endure hardship and to continue on. New Zealanders who fought overseas endured immeasurable suffering and difficulty, making great sacrifices in the process. This should be acknowledged, respected, and learnt from. Today, I would like to focus on one person whose story not only exemplifies the idea of resilience but has also come from a similar background to most of us here today, being born and raised in Christchurch and attending St Andrew's College.

This person is Winston Smith, my great-grandfather, namesake (my middle name) and an Old Collegian. Winston fought in WWII, spending most of his time in prisoner-of-war (P)W camps. His story is that of sacrifice, hardship, and most of all resilience. This story holds personal importance to me, beyond just being a story of a relative that passed before I was born, but as someone who grew up under similar circumstances of my own but simply at a time where the utmost sacrifice was demanded. In a similar vein, I hope Winston's story can hold importance to you, either as an Old Collegian, student, or a friend of the College.

Winston started at St Andrew's in 1920 at age five and left in 1933. During these times, much was different at St Andrew's, as you would expect. However, much of College would be recognisable to today's students. The Blue and White of the St Andrew's cross was flown, the College song was belted out at assemblies and St Andrew's College put emphasis on our founding values of truth, faith, and excellence. The College's focus on developing boys into young men of character with these values in mind had a large impact on Winston in his formative years.

Following the school motto of *Fides et Patria*, Winston volunteered to fight for his country. On January 5 1940, Winston left for Egypt, joining a training camp two months later. Shortly after he was attached to the Second Field Company as a Sapper (combat engineer). He built roads, bridges and other essential

wartime infrastructure. This initial volunteering formed the beginning of Winston's story of resilience. He, like many other Old Collegians and New Zealanders, sacrificed his younger years and put himself at great risk in the defence of the Commonwealth. During this time Winston kept in touch with his St Andrew's roots, even attending an Old Collegian reunion in Cairo.

After having served in the Middle Eastern Forces for a few years, he was eventually captured by Axis troops. Winston spent the remainder of WWII within prisoner-of-war camps, first in Italy. Conditions in these camps were horrendous. During his time in Italian camps, Winston experienced bitterly cold winters and starvation as rations were reduced to 1/7th of the suggested amount to keep prisoners too weak to revolt. Eventually, Winston was released in late 1943 as an Armistice was signed with Italy. He moved westward towards safety eventually ending up in Greece. However, this was not the end of his hardship as he was then recaptured by German forces shortly after.

Winston was imprisoned again, this time in Stalag 344, a Nazi POW camp in Western Poland. The conditions of this camp would be far worse than that of Italy. The concrete compounds that the camp consisted of were overcrowded and ridden with bed bugs, lice, and disease. Hygiene became non-existent; cleaning facilities consisted of troughs of water that froze over during winter and to which prisoners only had access fortnightly. Temperatures during these winters regularly made their way below minus 20 degrees Celsius. Unheated concrete huts and a coat issued by the Red Cross were all that kept these men from the brutal cold. While rations were always extremely limited, conditions worsened when German troops were given the command in September 1944 to destroy all Red Cross tinned food. What resulted was periods of mass starvation, especially damaging to those who carried out forced labour.

During this time, the resilience of Winston and other POW's was unquestionable. Rather than being a choice, it became a necessity. Despite every opportunity to give in Winston decided to endure this suffering and survive.

Though he had already experienced over three years of suffering in these camps, this was not the end of Winston's hardship. With the end of the war nearing in 1945, and the Russians slowly approaching from the East, he was forced to march westward away from the invading army. This was nicknamed 'the Death March' or 'the Great March' after the large distance, harsh winter conditions and the great number of men who lost their lives. Prisoners experienced blizzards with poor clothing and footwear, dwindling rations and regularly had rocks thrown at them by the locals they passed. During this time Winston marched between 20 to 40 kilometres a day for two months straight. These conditions would give current students who complain about winter tramps at Castle Hill much to be grateful for. Winston was eventually liberated by American forces in April of 1945.

Upon his return to Christchurch, Winston spoke about this time to the Press. In keeping with his character, he was humble about his suffering as well as grateful to those who had helped him. When talking about the Great March, he referenced other groups of prisoners intercepted by columns of Nazi soldiers who greatly mistreated their captives. He claimed that he in comparison was "one of the fortunate ones," showing humility in his hardship. He also gave his gratitude to the Red Cross which in his words did "a wonderful job in providing us food, cigarettes as well as sports equipment and books". Even through difficult times, Winston showed his gratitude and retained his strong character. Following the war, he married and became a father to two daughters, a grandfather to four and continued a successful career as an art dealer. Winston did not allow the conditions he faced to be an excuse for him to amount to anything less in his life.

Though we are not facing a world war, life will not always be smooth sailing. We all face setbacks, challenges, and difficulties in life. Resilience is important. It defines our ability to move forward and beyond these challenges. Winston's story illustrates something one could call unglamorous resilience. He shows that courage during wartime does not need to be in the form of well-documented moments of bravery as many retellings of war tend to focus on. In most forms of hardship or suffering, resilience is not glamorous, it consists of failure and disappointment. Resilience is not the measure of one's visible

achievement but the capacity to withstand challenge while still moving forward. Remembering this lesson allows us to recognise our own resilience regardless of the result and gain respect for the hardship endured by New Zealand troops.

I believe unglamorous resilience is key to ANZAC Day. The first ANZAC Day celebration was formed to honour the members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps that served in Gallipoli in 1915. The original aim of the expedition was to take the Gallipoli peninsula to open the way for Allied forces to capture Constantinople. Instead, the ANZAC's were locked in a stalemate at Gallipoli, enduring eight months of brutal trench warfare and suffering over 56,000 casualties. I believe that it is extremely significant that for our National Day of Remembrance, we have decided not to reference some overarching triumph as a symbol of our military might, but rather we have chosen what could be considered a strategic failure to display the extraordinary sacrifice, courage, and resilience of New Zealand troops.

So, what does this mean for the ANZAC Days of the 21st Century? Firstly, Winston's story teaches us the importance of unglamorous resilience. Without a World War, St Andrew's College students have an opportunity to employ resilience to improve and excel in our lives. In the years to come as we move beyond school, we can use our work ethic and determination to push ourselves through difficult times in the pursuit of success whether it be in sports, academics, or a career. When we all inevitably encounter low points, it would not hurt to remember the lessons of past Old Collegians. Remember that your resilience often will not be glamorous and shown by short-term results, but this does not make it any less valuable or admirable. Remember to be thankful to those who support you just as Winston showed gratitude to those who helped in his time of need. Remember to stay humble. Respect and acknowledge your own resilience but remember there will also be those who have it tougher and need support just as much. Though you should strive for individual success, it is not a bad idea to give sacrifice to support something greater than yourself just as past Old Cols and ANZAC's have.

Secondly, retellings and acknowledgement of this unglamorous resilience allow us to be grateful for those who gave so much for our country. One person I would like to acknowledge who has made this possible today is Gail Turner, my grandmother and Winston's daughter. Through her work to research and compile his story she has allowed his memory to live on. Likewise, we should continue to take ANZAC Day as an opportunity to remember and honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice and showed the ultimate resilience. They shall not be forgotten.