FOREVER ANZAC

First published Friday 25 April 2008 in News section of Northern Echo
Today is Anzac Day when Australia and New Zealand pay homage to the sacrifices of past generations and, as Chris Lloyd discovers, a family in Teesside remember their own hero.

TODAY, on the other side of the world, is a day of quiet reflection and remembrance. It is a day Down Under to remember the sacrifices of past generations. It is a day in Australia and New Zealand which is solemn and spiritual, a day which begins, fortified by a "gunfire breakfast" with a Dawn Service.

So it is on this side, because in Teesside's Acklam Cemetery there is a corner of a English field that is forever Anzac.
Our story begins in the late 1860s when Henry Taylor emigrated from Catterick, North Yorkshire, for a new life in New Zealand. He worked at first for the Maoris who, out of gratitude, gave him 365 acres of land - one for every day of the year - near Whangarei on the North Island.

There in 1891, Henry's eldest son Harry was born. Harry was destined to follow in his father's footsteps. " But he was on a training mission with the Territorial Army when war broke out in 1914 and he never went home until 1925" says Morris Taylor in his front room in Thornaby, surrounded by sepia pictures of broad-chested Kiwis who went to war in broad-rimmed bushwhacker hats

A kiwi tie pin, made from an iridescent turquoise seashell called paua which is found on NZ beaches, twinkles on the 88 year old's chest as he tells of father.

Harry joined up on January 1st 1915 and as part of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, he sailed for pre-combat training in Alexandria, Egypt. They had been expecting to go to France to serve in the Western Front but the Allies wanted to open an Eastern Front, partly to distract the Germans from the Western Front, and partly to open a sea route through the Dardenelle Straits into the Black Sea so that Russia - Britain's ally - could get it's navy out to join the conflict more fully.

But the narrow Dardenelles are guarded by the Gallipoli peninsula. In February 1915, Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, thought the British Navy could bombard its way through the Straits, but the shellfire from the Turks on the peninsula was too strong and a land invasion was necessary to clear the Turks from Gallipoli.

Harry and the New Zealanders joined forces with the Australians to form the ANZACs (Australian, New Zealand Army Corp) and set sail from Egypt to be involved in their countries' first major conflict.

They landed on Gallipoli at dawn on April 25, 93 years ago - no doubt the poor souls could have done with the "gunfire breakfast", coffee laced with rum, with which their countrymen now begin Anzac Day.
It was a disaster. They had drifted two kilometres too far north and instead of beaching on sand they were faced with towering cliffs and impenetrable ravines, also the Turks were far better armed than expected and occupied the high ground.

"They couldn't get out of the water to start with and then they had the cliffs to contend with so they didn't make much headway inland" says Morris.
Allied orders became confused and when they did make a break through they failed to press it home. As night fell Allied commanders vacillated about whether to order a full scale withdrawal or whether to dig in.

At last the order came to dig in. Of the 16,000 men who landed on Gallipoli that morning, about 1,000 had been killed and at least 2.000 of the wounded had been evacuated from Anzac Cove - with many more lying injured on the battlefield awaiting assistance.

Very soon, the Eastern Front became as bogged down in trench warfare as the Western Front. The New Zealanders' most notable success came in August when they captured Chunuk Bahr hill only to be swept from it the following day. Of the 760 who made it to the summit, 711 came down as casualties.

The horribly hot and humid summer turned into the blizzards of winter. In thaw, trenches flooded, soldiers drowned, dead bodies were washed away.

Finally the order to evacuate was given and the New Zealanders invented self-firing rifles - water dripped into containers attached to the triggers - to cover their backs and they successfully withdrew by January 9, 1916.
The Gallipoli campaign had cost 129,000 lives. More than 2,700 of the dead were New Zealanders - a quarter of those that had landed - with a further 4,500 wounded.

Harry was one of the wounded. Somewhere amid the carnage he'd been mown down by a machine gun.

"He had three or four bullet holes through his legs and out the other side," says Morris.

His sister, Gwynneth, 75, chips in. " They went in behind the tibia and out through his calf," she says, her medical knowledge betraying her career as a ward sister at South Cleveland and Poole Hospital.

Harry was sent to a hospital on the Epsom Downs, Surrey, to recover. His stay was long enough for him to form an attachment with a nurse, Elizabeth Morgan, from Ebbw Vale. Twice he was sent back to the Front, twice he was gassed, and bombarded around Ypres, twice he came back to Elizabeth for repairs.

He was demobbed on 14th March 1919 and his records show he received 709 pounds, eight shillings and two pence for his war service = 1.493 days regimental pay at five shillings per day plus 1,462 days field allowance at 1/6d a day, less two pound fifteen shillings and ten pence for cables home and three pound two shillings for "hospital stoppage" - he appears to have had money deducted for being too injured to fight.

On April 19th 1919, he married Elizabeth and they settled in her hometown where Morris was born on March 20th 1920. "Father started work in the steelworks, but it was completely foreign to him." says Morris, "He was bought up as a farmer and yet was serving his time as a wheelwright."

But Harry was struggling in to settle in Elizabeth's Welsh steel town and just before the deadline expired on the NZ government's scheme to pay the passage for returning soldiers, Harry sailed the growing family - including a six-week-old, their son Russell, to the other side of the world.

"I remember we sailed from Southampton on the SS Ruahine, and we went the back way to New Zealand, through the Panama Canal and past Pitcairn Island" says Morris who was five and wide eyed with wonder, "It was a mail ship and it stopped off Pitcairn and the islanders came out with their letters. The passengers were throwing money off the side of the ship and they were diving for it"

'At Wellington we caught a big Yankee train, with a cowcatcher on the front, and a great chimney, and the seats were all wooden, and you could put them backwards or forwards - I had never seen anything like it"

They returned to the family farm at Pukekohe, where Morris remembers riding to school across a creek on the back of a cow, and thoroughly enjoying himself. "I had a very strong Welsh accent and I took some stick," he says, "They called me Lloyd George."

His mother, though, was horribly homesick. After five years, they sailed back around the world " I remember stopping off at Naples and Vesuvius was smoking"

But, in the grips of the Great Depression, Ebbw Vale was even more grim than before."My mother had two cousins in Middles- broh" says Morris, pronouncing the place name in his Welsh / Kiwi accent as a long established Teessider would, "and Middlesbroh was starting to boom. He came up, got a job at Dorman Long steelworks, got a few bob together and then sent for us." "In fact, the story goes" adds Gwynnneth " Mum's cousin, Uncle Will, had walked 274 miles, from Ebbw Vale to Middlesborough, to find work."

Gwynneth was born in Middlesborough in 1933, although it wasn't until 1935 that they could afford to move out of their rented rooms.

When Harry died in 1969, the New Zealand government paid for his headstone in Acklam in recognition that his health had suffered because of the war. "The shell shock knocked seven bells out of him." says Morris "I also remember as a small boy him calling out ' my legs given out 'and we would have to get him home"

"Sometimes his speech went," says Gwynneth, "He knew what he wanted to say but he struggled. We used to speak for him a lot of the time. He didn't talk very much about Gallipoli, it was if a chapter had closed."

Morris dredges his memory, "But his favourite song was about Charlie Chaplin," he says, " I remember him doing the chorus: ' And his little baggy trousers want mendin, before they send im, to the Dardenelles'."

Morris continues; "My father never missed Anzac Day. It was a day of silence and remembrance." Particularly as his nephew William, another Anzac, was killed during the Second World War when his bomber crashed in Cambridgeshire.
"Father never talked very much of his experiences. But he knew what the day was."

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