THE MORETON BAY COLLEGES
2015 CENTENARY OF ANZAC TOUR
Tuesday 21 April 2015

The big day has arrived. We’ve been looking forward to this for many months and we can’t believe it’s finally here. We meet at the Brisbane International Airport for flight SQ236. We look very smart in our tour shirts and there’s an air of excitement and nervousness. A great many mums and dads here to send us off. Some are looking a little anxious about their son or daughter flying to far away destinations but I’m sure it will be fine.

The flights were long and tiring. Most of us spent our $40 in Singapore airport. Mitchell even bought (and ate!) a “squid ink chicken burger”.

Wednesday 22 April 2015

Arrived in Paris in the early morning after what seemed a very long leg from Singapore.

We had originally planned to meet our guide Colin at the airport but he was nowhere to be seen. Rather, our bus driver met us and through broken English we understood there to have been a train strike and that our guide was in Lille. We loaded the party onto the bus and set off for Lille (a couple of hours away). Not 30 minutes after setting off and being caught in heavy traffic we get a phone call from Colin who is at the airport waiting for us!!

A quick U-Turn and things were sorted.

Colin suggested we postpone our trip to the Eiffel Tower till later in the tour - he’s confident that an early morning run into Paris will get us a better experience and with less traffic. So off we set for Bruges but we will head for
Villers-Bretonneux first. Colin suggests we do a reconnaissance of VB without the crowds that will be there on Anzac Day. It’s a great idea.

Our first day was spent travelling from Paris to Bruges, Belgium. We did stop off in Villers-Bretonneux to check out the layout, ready for the dawn service on Anzac day. The Town Hall was splendid with gardens and tulips in bloom everywhere. This is a town that really appreciated the Australian’s help in the war. There were Australian flags & symbols everywhere. A beautiful street off the main square was lined with cherry blossoms in full flower. Absolutely stunning.

Sam found time for a quick baguette from the local patisserie.

We visited the well-known school that honours the Aussies with the Australian National Anthem being sung each morning. It’s linked to a lovely little museum. A mural on the wall displayed images of kangaroos and French children in embrace.

As we made our way to Bruges we also came across Le Hamel Memorial which commemorates the participation of the Australian corps in the successful battle of Le Hamel on 4th July 1918 under the command of Sir John Monash. Quite an imposing stone wall with eroded trenches still in place. A glimpse of the village of Corbie was had here, where the Red Baron (Manfred von Richthofen), was shot down on 21 April 1918.

Adelaide Cemetery was also on our way which was the site of the Unknown Soldier who was exhumed in 1993 and taken to Australia for burial in Canberra. Try and read Paul Keating’s famous speech – one of the great speeches.

Our first night after the very long flight and a long bus trip from Paris airport through the French countryside of bright yellow canola fields was in Bruges,
Belgium. The city of canals, beer, lace & potatoes!! Our hotel was very nice and Colin took us for a stroll through Bruges in the early evening. It’s a beautiful place with neat and tidy houses, canals, gorgeous architecture, cobbled streets, stepped gables, and lots of people riding bicycles. I think many of us would like to come back here one day.

I noted that the term Flanders meant flooded and I can see why.

Villers Bret & Bruges - Everything I thought it would be and much much more!!!

It was Sydney Victor Parker, my Grandfather who taught me about ANZAC, the Diggers and places known as “Villers Bret” Amiens and Corbie. Syd joined the war in 1917 - 1919 and spent much time in Motor Corps based in Amiens - which meant running messages to the front line in places such as Villers Bret, Corbie, Le Hamel etc.

I can still clearly hear him telling us stories of his close shave with German bombs one night and a tree falling inches from his motor cycle or the larrikin stories involving the British Generals and cheeky Aussie diggers. Syd often laughed at his cheeky ways of stealing fruit cakes for the Diggers at the front, or taking the corners a bit too fast when driving the General around the battlefields sites. I am very fortunate to be left with Syd’s photos taken during WW1 and WWII - many of Villers and Amiens.

Feeling very tired and jet lagged from our flight - I was hoping for a nice easy day. Hearing we are going to Villers Bret I felt instant excitement, to finally be heading to this place I had heard so much about. What an amazing and perfect day it was visiting Villers Bret - THANK YOU!!!

My highlights - seeing the Aussie flags draped along the street, in the garden beds and out of people’s windows.

Visiting the school and feeling their pride and joy to never forget the sacrifice of our Diggers.
Visiting and paying our respects at the cemeteries and graves of our brave Diggers. I will always cherish walking through the endless graves and listening to the beautiful music which was been rehearsed for the ANZAC dawn service.

Crucifix corner was my special moment. Looking at Syd’s photos - I often question his caption crucifix corner and what it all meant?

Our tour guide, Colin, gave meaning to these photos taking us to crucifix corner and now knowing it was the first major tank battle in WW1. It was here, I felt the presence of the ANZACS and their battle.

Amazing, surreal, courage and sacrifice are just some of my thoughts when I think back to our day at Villers Bret. Seeing the many graves was so sad and overwhelming …….

Am grateful to the pride and care this beautiful town gives back to our Aussie Diggers.

Thank you Mr Wood for making this happen and thank you Justin for sharing your trip with me.

Nicole Lynch

Thursday 23 April 2015

Next day, after an early morning stroll around Bruges, we head to the Memorial Museum, Passchendaele. It tells the story of Australia’s involvement in the Passchendaele battles. There were underground restored trenches that led back to this building, which made the museum very interactive. Mason was kitted out as a German soldier complete with helmet, gun and bayonet.

Next were some places in Belgium along the war front.
Tyne Cot Cemetery - Gravestones seem to go forever. It is the largest Commonwealth military cemetery in the world and is the resting place for nearly 12,000 Commonwealth service men with more than 8,300 unidentifed. Those buried here were from the battles of Ypres in October 1914 to September 1918. Two large German machine gun posts were still very visible. As we come to understand the “Sword of Sacrifice” is prominently on show at each of the Commonwealth War Graves.

Now onto visit the Buttes New British Cemetery where we met some New Zealanders and the students sang Waltzing Matilda with them, which was a lovely touch. Then they sang the New Zealand national anthem for us.

In this area the village of Zonnebeke was completely devastated in the First World War. The Polygon Wood Cemetery has 2,108 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in Buttes New British section of the Cemetery of which 1,677 of the burials are unindentified but special memorials are erected to 35 casualties known or believed to be buried among them. The Buttes New British Cemetery (New Zealand) Memorial, which stands in Buttes New British Cemetery, commemorates 378 officers and men of the New Zealand Division who died in the Polygon Wood sector between September 1917 and May 1918, and who have no known grave.

Still filling up this day. Next was the Langemarck German Military Cemetery. Each tombstone represented thousands of German Dead. Langemarck cemetery is one of only four First World War German cemeteries in the Flanders region.

Onto Saint Julien (This memorial commemorates the Canadian First Division’s participation in the Second Battle of Ypres which included the defense against the first poison gas attacks along the Western Front); Hooge Crater (where we had a picnic lunch among the trenches and craters; Messines Ridge (where the first of 19 exploding mines was set in 1917); Essex farm (a forward dressing station where John Macrae wrote the famous “In Flanders Field on 3 May 1915);

Now into the evening and onto Ypres. It’s a beautiful town in the Province of West Flanders with the imposing Cloth Hall at its centre. A large square provided us with a good chance to see many of the shops - the chocolate shop even had an MBBC/MBC “special” deal.

The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing is a war memorial in Ypres, (now Ieper) Belgium, dedicated to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed in the Ypres Salient of World War I and whose graves are unknown. It has something like 66,000 names of missing soldiers on the walls. Each night at 8 pm
the traffic is stopped at the Menin Gate while members of the local Fire Brigade sound the Last Post in the roadway under the Memorial’s arches. There were hundreds of people gathered to watch the ceremony which had a distinct Canadian feel on this occasion and plenty of bagpipes.

Finally back to our hotel in Bruges, Belgium but we all had to walk around Bruges again. It was such a pretty place and reminded us of the peace that the soldiers had fought for back in WW1. The huge number of cemeteries we had seen today may have begun to blur but they brought home to us the unbelievable waste of young lives, the futility of the war, the damage that war can do physically, mentally, morally and the importance of honouring and learning from this.

Many of us woke not long after 4.00am, still adjusting to local time. A nice buffet breakfast and then most of the group headed out for Colin’s walking tour of Bruges.

What a beautiful town, full of history, wonderful architecture, grand squares, churches and canals. One hour was not enough, but all we could spare before our busy day touring the Battlefields of the Flanders region.

First stop was the battlefield and museum at Passchendaele. A brilliant start to the day, immersing ourselves in the interactive displays and starting to get a feel for life in the trenches. The peace and tranquillity was remarkable, with people fishing in the lake, a lake that in WW1 was probably nothing more than a muddy hollow where our soldiers fought and died. On to Tyne Cot Cemetery where the scale of the war became real. Thousands of graves of soldiers from so many commonwealth countries. And two German graves!

The memorial at Polygon Wood was a highlight of the day. Here we met two Maori soldiers from New Zealand who were rehearsing for the ANZAC Day Dawn Service. They were musicians, one on guitar and the other with a conch shell. They were keen to talk
with us and somehow were convinced to join in an impromptu rendition of 'Advance Australia Fair'. Two Kiwis singing our National Anthem, Go figure!

Hill 60 struck me as we learnt about the tunnelling action that allowed the allied forces to get under and behind the German lines and gain valuable ground. Messines Ridge, Hooge Crater and Butte Cemetery were all so impressive. Most of the sacred sites in the western front honour the graves of commonwealth and allied forces, but one more cemetery stood out to us. Langemark is one of the few German cemeteries notable for its much more sombre and darker colour and design. It felt really heavy by comparison to the Allied memorials.

Hugh Richards Carr, Gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery, was my Grandad, Mason’s Grand Pop! He fought for 18 months on this, the Western Front. He talked about ‘Wipers’. More correctly called Ypres, which is where we spent the evening.

To be able to visit Ypres, almost 100 years after he was here, was really special. We embraced the best of Belgium - enjoying the best waffles ever, wonderful chocolate and some frites!

The best was last……. The Daily Ritual at the Menin Gate with the laying of wreaths and playing of the Last Post, left a tear in my eye - we were blessed with watching Canadian troops past and present march through the gate joined by their own pipe band - such a moving experience.

Two days in and this pilgrimage has already been more than I hoped for. A really special Father & Son journey, honouring our ancestors.

Michael & Mason Carr

P.s. Mason just reminded me to thank Mitchell’s Dad Scott for helping them find some war relics in the fields. Rusty old shell fragments - if only we knew their story.

Friday 24 April 2015

Now 24th, another big day in the Fromelles, France, heading toward Arras where we would stay for a few nights. The Battle of Fromelles on 19-20 July 1916 was the first occasion on which the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) saw action on the Western Front. The battle is widely regarded as a disaster for the Allies, and has been described as "the worst 24 hours in Australia’s entire history. Arras had two quite prominent public squares - The Place of Heroes and the Grand Plaza. We ate a splendid banquet in a restaurant off one of the squares.

First stop was VC Corner Australian Cemetery.

At VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial, there are no headstones. Under two large concrete crosses set flat on the ground, are the remains of more than 400 Australians who died all around here. The cemetery is in the middle of the old no-man’s-land between the Australian and German trenches of
19 July 1916. Beyond the cemetery is a memorial wall commemorating, by name 1,299 Australians who died in the Battle of Fromelles and who have no known grave.

Also at this Australian Memorial Park in Fromelles, France, there is a bronze statue by Peter Corlett (the Cobbers Memorial) called ‘Cobbers’. It shows Sergeant Simon Fraser, 58th Battalion, carrying in a wounded man on his back. In the memorial park is also a German bunker.

Back in the bus and off to Pheasant Wood Military Cemetery, still in Fromelles, which is the first new war cemetery to be constructed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for fifty years. The cemetery was started in early 2009 and completed for dedication in 2010. It has the remains of Australian and British casualties that were discovered in a number of mass graves in 2008.

Onwards ...... and on the side of the road seen in the middle of a farm was a German gun bunker. Looks better as a farm!

Next stop today, the Canadian National Memorial, (Vimy Ridge), north of Arras. It was massive and the view across the battle field- now farmland was amazing.

The land for this memorial was at the western end of the Vimy Ridge, a battlefield location where the Canadian Corps had fought and succeeded in pushing the Germans out of their heavily entrenched positions on the ridge in April 1917. The Canadian had excavated a very long underground trench in the
chalk and had massed their troops here prior to their attack. The position of the national monument was agreed to be placed at the highest point of the ridge at Hill 145. In addition to the ground for the national monument the Canadian Government negotiated with the French Government to ask for an additional section of the former battlefield, so as to preserve it as a memorial park. A section was actually fenced off which still contained unexploded ordinance.

Many trenches at Vimy ridge have been preserved so we went into them. The students had fun in the trenches and on the enormous Canadian Memorial. Having returned to the hotel at Arras we enjoyed a stroll through the town. It is quite an interesting place. Lots of cafes, bars, restaurants in this Square. Usually the Square is full of cars and is used as a parking area but in the evening people wander and socialize in the bars & cafes. There was an interesting set of large story boards recalling significant WW1 scenes.

It was Sam’s birthday today so Colin created a magnificent cake to help celebrate this special occasion.

Saturday 25 April 2015 – Anzac Day

Well, the 25th had arrived and all up at 4am to drive to Villers-Bretonneux, France, for the dawn Anzac service. Unfortunately the weather was cold & wet but nowhere near as bad as the soldiers had to endure during the war. The crowd was enormous all clothed in disposable raincoats, umbrellas, scarves, beanies... the works. It was a moving ceremony and a strange feeling to be among 10,000 Aussies and Kiwis in the middle of France. Mitchell and Olivia and Nicole and Michael laid wreaths on behalf of the Colleges. Did I say how cold it was?

After this service we walked to the township of Villers-Bretonneux for their little local service. Thankfully the rain had eased but it was still cold. This local Anzac service was very nice and there was quite a crowd. A local primary school choir sang.

OK, back on the bus, dry off, students changed out of their formal uniforms and back into warm day clothes. Now to Amiens Cathedral (built in around 1200's). Whatever memories the soldiers took away with them of Amiens, the best remembered would have been that of this great cathedral with its spire and towers visible from all over the surrounding countryside. It had been sandbagged during the war to protect it and as Colin explained was funded by the sale of woad (blue dye).
Back on the road. Slight detour. Our tour guide, Colin, wanted to show us a chateau, so we gate-crashed into the Château de Bertangles, which doesn’t usually open until June but he “sweet-talked” the owner and we got to have a look. This is where Lieutenant General Sir John Monash on 12 August 1918, was knighted by the king.

Back on the bus and despite the friendliness of the old man it appeared the wife wanted us to move on…… so first stop, Lochnagar Crater. This crater is on the 1916 Somme battlefields in France and is the largest man-made mine crater created in the First World War on the Western Front. It was laid by the British Army’s 179th Tunnelling Company Royal Engineers underneath a German strongpoint called “Schwaben Höhe”. The mine was exploded two minutes before 07.30 am Zero Hour at the launch of the British offensive against the German lines on the morning of 1st July 1916.

Back on the bus and through the Somme, the view from the bus, are not battle fields but fields & fields of Canola plants. It’s difficult to imagine those black and white images we have with the colour and beauty of this land today.

Now, onto Pozieres. It was a designated target for the first day’s advance in the Battle of the Somme, but did not fall until the end of the month. It was the key obstacle which had to be overcome in order to capture first Mouquet Farm and then Thiepval hill. This plan was assigned to Australian troops, the majority of whom had come to the Somme from Gallipoli. This is the Australian 1st Division Memorial at the western end of the village of Pozières.

A windmill stood here from as early as 1610, but during the First World War a blockhouse was built here which has now almost entirely disappeared. The grassy site now bears a lead plaque, representing a memorial to the 2nd Australian Division and a bench with the engraved dedication: “The Windmill at Pozières, of which you can see the remaining traces, lay at the heart of the battle which raged in July and August 1916 in this part of the Battle of the Somme”. The village was completely annihilated during the battle under intense bombardment. Australian caught in the hell of this battle were said to have developed “the 1000 yard stare” after cowering in their holes and trenches.

We also saw on this site, the Tank Memorial with its four small-scale models of the tanks used in 1916-1918. The British army was the first to use tanks, on 15 September 1916 on the Somme.
After leading ANZAC Day Services at MBC Primary School for 19 years, it was quite incredible to be in Villers-Bretonneux for ANZAC day - in the dark of the morning - a little cold and a bit wet - but nothing like the discomfort that was felt by soldiers from around the world during World War I.

It was moving to see so many people present to respect and honour the fallen. It was good to have representatives from different nations laying wreaths, as well as those from Australia. I will never forget Colin’s desperate actions to ensure that we had two wreaths to lay?! Olivia and Mitchell, Nicole and Michael did us proud, showing dignity and respect on behalf of us all. Singing “Make me a channel of your peace” was just so special for me and the MBC girls.

Having only found out in September that I had two great-uncles (on my father’s side) who served with the AIF in the Somme, my interest and knowledge of this area was not great. When members of the family including myself, started researching VICTOR BURGE RAWLINGS and ERNEST JOHN RAWLINGS the enthusiasm grew. How proud I felt that my ancestors were able to help the people of France in such dire circumstances. Ernest was wounded or died at Villers-Bretonneux. He is buried at Vignacourt British Cemetery and we were able to make a ‘detour’ to see his grave. I placed an Australian Flag, red poppy from Australia and a cross on which I wrote the date, my name and the words “a brave Queenslander”. It was a cemetery similar to many others - set in the midst of fields, having a stone entrance in which the book of records of those buried there could be found. There are plants - including roses, irises, kalenchoes and polyanthus everywhere. Being spring, some of these flowers are blooming. The roses are covered in new leaves. Daffodils are many different colours.

Vignacourt has Australian flags flying, showing their support for the Aussies.

Wily Colin managed to get us into Chateau Bertangles, which is open in summer, but not in spring. We spoke with the owner and he said it had been in the family for over 100 years.

I think that most amazing part of the Somme is seeing all the cemeteries set in the middle of fields of green wheat and yellow canola plants. There is a real sense of rebirth and hope out of the utter devastation of the war.

The thankfulness of the French is evident.

Narelle McNamara
MBC Primary School Chaplain
Sunday 26 April 2015

Next day (26th)....onward into the Somme. We visited the Historical de la Grande Guerre, which is an excellent trilingual museum in Peronne, France. This museum had displays and films aimed at showing us not only what life was like for the soldier in the front line trenches, but also how they lived behind the trench lines.

Now moving to Mont St Quentin. It is only 100 meters high but was a key to the German defence of the Somme line, and the last German stronghold. It overlooks the Somme River approximately 1.5 kilometres north of Péronne. Australians took this hill after fierce fighting having been instructed to “yell like bushrangers”!

We saw the Digger Statue - He gazes out over the fields of Bullecourt where in April and May 1917 the AIF lost 10,000 soldiers, killed or wounded, in their efforts to break into and hold part of the Hindenburg Line.

Still more to come. Onto the South African Memorial and museum. This place is where the battalions of the South African Brigade came under withering German artillery fire in their attempt to capture and then defend Delville Wood in mid July 1916. Delville Wood was sometimes known as Devil’s Wood, and the fighting there during the battle of the Somme was particularly ferocious. The South African’s held this spot against the Germans. Of the 3153 men that were
ordered to take the wood “at all costs” only 142 came out unscathed. The woods were replanted in the 1920’s and now form a beautiful, serene, green expanse. The museum was excellent.

Onward, further into the battlefields with a stop at the Thiepval British Cemetery and Memorial grounds, where there is a small but impressive museum. At the entrance to the museum there is the photographic panel of 600 of the Missing on the Somme - this brought home the personal tragedy. The memorial here was massive and contained the names of 72,000 British soldiers with no known grave.

The battle fields today are scattered throughout beautiful farmlands.

The day hasn’t ended yet, on to the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland, museum and evidence of the closeness of each side’s trenches, only metres apart. Here we are at the frontline and the site of one of the bloodiest battles of the war. This was one of my favourite monuments with the trenches preserved and the huge elk representing this country.

Here we found The Danger Tree, which is the only original tree in this location to survive the 1914-1918 fighting in this location. It marks the mid-point between the two sides in no man's land.
Final stop for the day was Ulster Tower, which has a museum and cemetery. This Tower is a Somme battlefield memorial to the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division. It commemorates the heavy losses suffered by 36th Division on 1st July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The small stakes with wire are to stop you going into this section because there are still unexploded bombs.

Monday 27 April 2015

It is the 27th April and we are up at 5am to travel back to Paris to visit The Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, Musee de l’Armee (Napoleon’s resting place), Notre Dame, Lovers locks on the bridge and Musee Louve. After a meagre breakfast we arrived with great excitement at the Trocadero to catch our first magnificent site of the famous Eiffel Tower. Photo opportunity!!

Lined up in the early morning queues for tickets and enjoyed bartering with the locals for Eiffel tower key rings.

Lifts to the very top for wonderful views. The wind was freezing! Several of us walked down one of the tower’s legs.
Made it to the Arc de Triomphe and met our Paris guide (briefly) and saw the great views from the top deck. The round-a-bout at the bottom of the Arc was impressive for its chaotic road rules.

Another full day seeing the various sites and battling big crowds but our guide, Colin hasn’t finished with us yet. No time to rest when in Paris. We take a local train ride on the Metro, with all the Paris folk, to get on a boat to cruise down the Seine River before it gets dark then back on the train to our hotel. Not a short day, bed at 11pm but we managed to squeeze every last drop from our time in Paris.

Yes, it was a freezing cold day!
Colin tells us “12 o’clock” and exit sometime after 10 o’clock we begin to notice the trends that occur in Paris in terms of architecture. That is the 3-4 story buildings that were built in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

It appeared that every day the 28 of us had a similar “ah ha” moment which of course today was viewing the Eiffel Tower from across the river. After having the opportunity with viewing it we also had the opportunity to discover the view it possessed. After standing in the very short queue in the early hours of the morning suffering hypothermia we purchased our tickets and were privileged to be on the first life ascending for the day occupied by tourist like ourselves.

The view of the Eiffel Tower is spectacular. Despite the fact we did pay I still think the view and experience is priceless. Despite the cold and the wind the experience is something we’ll never forget. Complimentary with our visit to the Eiffel Tower was pressuring street vendors with our guide Colin getting deals like I’d never seen before.

Off we go again. Louvre Museum was an opportunity for us to comprehend the rich history of the many victorious battles and allow us to view the uniforms, weapons and armour used. This was toured alongside our new guide Jeanne who has plenty of knowledge in this field.

Next the Arc de Triomphe gave us another spectacular view of Paris accompanied by the forever going spiral staircase.

Today we also visited the Cathedral of Notre Dame, a building in Gothic style that took hundreds of years to finalise.

To finish off our day we booked into our hotel in Paris and ate dinner before catching a train into town to do a twilight cruise on the water.

Graham & Sam Atkins

Tuesday 28 April 2015

Our Belgium/France leg is over and we are up early on the 28th to catch a plane to Turkey.

After meeting our guide Nagi, our first stop was Istanbul. Crowds, traffic, ancient city walls, poppies in manicured gardens. 15 million population with two thirds in Europe and one third in Asia straddling the famous Bosphorus.

Before checking in to our hotel we have a Bosphorus River Cruise. The cruise took us down the Bosphorus and we came to appreciate the wonderful geographical location of Istanbul and why it had been so strategic for centuries. A distinctive fort, the Rumeli Hisari Fort, now a Museum commanded a great spot to blast any enemies. The red Turkish flag flew proudly and distinctively from dozens of flag poles across the city. Mosques, massive bridges that span into Asia and plenty of watercraft of all sizes were memorable.
We stayed on the Europe side of Istanbul in Hotel Klas. A small hotel struggling with the Aussie influx from two school groups at the same time but in quite an interesting, albeit narrow street area of the city. The 2000 year old Roman aqueduct of Valens was a striking feature in the middle of the city.

That night after dinner we celebrated Dianne’s and Justin’s birthdays. They were both born on 28th, different years of course!

Well there is a lot to see & taste & do in Istanbul......Turkish delight shop & other sweets shop. So yum!

We learnt a couple of Turkish words.....I think Graham was getting the hang of it as he was able to converse fluently with the locals. Hello = Merhaba; Thank you = Teshekkurler; Good bye = Hoshakal; Yes = Evet; No = Hayir

Farewell Paris- Hello Istanbul: A journey to another world. Leaving Paris was bitter-sweet. I would have loved to stay and explore so much more of this wonderful place, but there is also so much excitement and anticipation as we head to Turkey.

Yet another early start up at 4.15 for the bus to CDG at 5am. It’s our final time with our beloved guide Colin. He has connected with each of us, and I’m sure we will all remember fondly his frenetic pace, deep knowledge and incredible resourcefulness. A cheerful “artful dodger” in a black Fedora!

The flight to Turkey behind us we meet our new guide Nagi. With a pause to wait for our bus we are once again on the road. We head toward Istanbul proper. Busy traffic, crowds of picnic makers along the foreshore parks with the Marmara sea glistening in the background. My Impressions of Istanbul are that it’s a vibrant place. Walking through the streets is very different to Paris. Every doorstep is a makeshift stall seeing just about everything. Mostly western clothing, watches, jewellery, food and leather goods.

Our first Turkish experience is a cruise through the Bosporus Straight. This takes us along the division between two continents, Asia on the East, Europe on the West. We cruise gently through masses of jellyfish in clear blue water. The air is warm and the sun shines down causing us to see our shady spots on the broad deck. There is time to view ancient fortifications as we move of to the narrowest part of the passage. A pod of dolphins appears unexpectedly. We turn around slowly and head back to our starting point.

We enjoy a lovely buffet style dinner and a quick stroll around the block, such a huge day today, with so much in store for tomorrow..... Troy and then Gallipoli!!! WOW.

Scott & Mitchell Redman
Wednesday 29 April 2015

We were all keen to get going down the Gallipoli Peninsula, so after a good night’s rest, the next day, 29April arrived and after a 7am breakfast of feta cheese, olives, bread and a cup of Turkish Tea or coffee and more feta cheese, we loaded all our bags onto the bus and set off for the Gallipoli Peninsula. A very, very long bus trip too. First stop at Tekridag for a wee on the squat toilets & a cup of Turkish tea, which is quite nice. You can stand a spoon up in the coffee!

All refreshed and onwards….Moving down the peninsula past canola fields, farms of wheat, vegetables, apricots, olives, sheep, and hay heading for Eceabat where we are to catch the ferry across the Dardanelles to Canakkale. First stop… the Canakkale Fort and Navel Museum. We met the captain of and toured the TCG Nusret, which is a replica of the 1915 Turkish minelayer. In early 1915, as the Turks awaited Allied attack, they laid over 370 mines across in the straits in lines. Along with the guns of the various forts, ramparts and mobile batteries these mines formed the main defences of the Dardanelles against naval assault. The allies lost lots of ships and men in these waters from the mines and subsequent artillery bombardment and were defeated by the Turks in the first naval engagement of the battle. There is a striking memorial to this naval victory on the hills overlooking the waterway.
Soon we were moving on to the ruins of Troy at Hisarlık, Turkey, which holds a key archaeological site whose many layers illustrate the gradual development of civilization in north western Asia Minor side of Turkey.

The Dardanelles formerly known as Hellespont, is a narrow strait in north western Turkey connecting the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara. It is one of the Turkish Straits, along with its counterpart, the Bosphorus, which we have already cruised. The city of Troy was located near the western entrance of the strait and the Turks were able to control the marine traffic entering their waterways. Of course the Trojan horse was there too and the students got to dress up as Roman soldiers and climb into the horse.

Moving on from here we went to the town of Canakkale, which is a seaside holiday type spot and it was beautiful. The hotel was on the water and close to the city centre. There were fish merchants, bars and cafes, seaside promenade and the Trojan horse model used in the Hollywood film “Troy”.

May I begin by saying that 7am is entirely too early to be walking down the middle of a busy street with a suitcase in each hand a box of icing sugar spewing box of Turkish delight crushed between my fingers. My poor black suitcase is now dusted with white.

I do admit the day started slow with a 5 hour bus ride and cup of nice chay (Turkish) tea at our stopover. Lunch was chicken, pasta and chips at a small place on the edge of a beach which we walked on after lunch was complete.

To get from one side of the Dardanelles to the side with the military museum we took a ferry across, where students hung off the railings and Mr Wood was ripped off twice (for a scarf and a cup of tea).

The grounds of the military museum were filled with duplicates of old canons and half of an old submarine found at the bottom of the nearby River.
Most information given was about the attack of a certain crew of ships, the date of which overlapped with Gallipoli.

A short bus ride away was Troy, an interesting old (Sooo years kind of old) town with several layers of its own town built atop it. This creates amazing layers of history, showing the evolution of things such as building design and the change of construction materials. We dressed up in ancient Roman attire after the tour was done and many of us brought photos of the event.

When driving back through town, a giant faux wooden horse was pointed out to us. A gift to the city, it was the horse used in the Hollywood movie “Troy” Sadly Brad Pitt was nowhere to be seen.

The Hotel is nice, dinner was an amazing buffet (with desert of course) and most went out for a brief shopping trip. The day was exhausting but enjoyable.

Darcy Robson

Last night Jack ran into a wall .........................

He did not notice the pain at first as he was lying on the floor laughing. It was only till later that he realised how badly he had injured himself. After a while Jack decided to go to McDonalds and then the Nike store. The only that saved Jack from not injuring himself badly was his illuminati necklace that gg bought him and Marshall. Colin the leader of illuminati saved Jack. It was only until jack got back from McDonalds that he got his hand bandaged. Jack is most definitely the smartest coolest midget in the world. That I why Jack is a recruiter of the illuminati, recruiting only the best recruits in the world (ME). Jack has been assigned a new mission along with Marshall (MT) to take over the world, well at least when his hand gets better.

Justin

Thursday 30 April 2015

After an impressive breakfast we boarded the ferry again back across to the peninsula and made our way to the key battle site of Gallipoli and the place where the Australians first came ashore on the 25th April 1915. The names of the places have, up to now simply been confined to books, newspapers or TV documentaries but here we were in the middle of what is now a peaceful, rugged and spectacular place.

It's hard to imagine what the Australian troops must have thought when they first landed to be faced with huge escarpments, steep ridges, and thick bush not to mention well-armed and determined Turkish fighters. How they endured for eight months is almost impossible to comprehend.
Lone Pine, arguably the most well-known site on the peninsula was where Arthur Robinson (Dianne’s great uncle) is remembered. We laid a wreath and spent some time wandering around this sombre but special place.

We had a walk through the trenches and the students found a bullet embedded firmly in the clay.

Other special places of interest included - Johnston’s Jolly, Courtney and Steele’s Post, Quinn’s Post, Baby 700, The Nek, Chunuk Bair, Shell Green, Shrapnel Valley, Plugges Plateau, Ari Buru, Anzac Cove.

We climbed to the top of Plugges Plateau in hot conditions, we walked through Shrapnel Valley and learnt that the Australian surf life savers iconic red and yellow colours originated from safety flags displayed during the battle of The Nek. We saw the New Zealand memorial at Chunk Bair right next to the ubiquitous stature of Mustafa Kemel.

Graham and Sam found their relative at Quinn’s Post and we found the grave stone of John Simpson Kirkpatrick (of the Donkey fame). Dianne found her great uncle’s name on the panel at Lone Pine. These were all very special occasions and while we may not have known them personally each one felt something deeply. Somehow the 100 years disappeared and there was almost a tangible connection.

Anyway onto the Anzac Memorial site and Cove, not our final spots for the day. We did go to the Turkish memorial too. Anyway at the Anzac site all the chairs were still set up from the Anzac day service but we got to put our feet into the Aegean Sea. It was a very hot day and we were all getting very tired.

Back on the bus, back on the Ferry, back to Canakkale and our hotel and one final wander getting Turkish delight, Turkish coffee and other souvenirs.
We had breakfast at our hotel in Canakkale, (which is a lovely hotel with a view of the Bosphorus Sea). The day’s touring started with a ferry ride over to Eceabat to start exploring the Gallipoli battlefields. We visited the Kabatepe museum which had a lot of Turkish war and Australia memorabilia – which also attracts a lot of Turkish tourists each year. We visited the Nek and Lone Pine was a highlight with most of us being familiar with the story of Lone Pine. Mr Wood lay a beautiful wreath at Lone Pine on behalf of the Colleges and the kids as well as adults seemed to really appreciate the opportunity to be there. We read a poem there, written by Helen Loris Burke, which tells the story of the legacy of Lone Pine:

Lone Pine - Our Legacy by Helen Loris Burke

A seed - a cone - a Nation grew, in a far off distant land.
Australian troops left home that year to make our country’s stand.
They crossed the sea’s they climbed the hills with back packs and with gun.
They fought in trenches - bled - in tears.
Our soldiers did not run.
The bullets ripped, their bodies blown.
The gas was all around, it crept on in and laid them low.
A thief, without a sound.
Pine branches hid their bloody deaths, but nothing stopped their cries.
The place was fought for rocks and mud.
A wasteland all despised.
Our nation grew there, at the place.
Lone Pine - they called it “HELL”
Yet form that cone, bought bravely home, four pine trees grew - not fell,
So like our children, standing here.
A Legacy - hard won’neath clear blue skies -  
no need to fear in this Australian sun.  
"LEST WE FORGET" the toll it took, our soldiers of that war -  
with mates, they fought and died for us,  
Honour - Evermore.  

After lunch we visited several sites including Beach cemetery and Anzac Cove. Most people have been waiting to get to Anzac Cove since we commenced our trip - and it did not disappoint. It was remarkable site to see; to see the burial place of so many brave men - and to place our feet in the same water and on the same soil as the troops arriving at Anzac Cove did 100 years ago.  
We enjoyed taking our shoes and socks off and stepping into the water - even though it was a little chilly.  
Over 27000 are named on graves, some known and some unknown, on six memorials to the missing on Gallipoli. Those who fell at Gallipoli represented a diversity of cultures, religion and language - but all were sons, brothers, fathers and heroes. During the Gallipoli campaign, the dead of both sides were buried in simple graves - over the years many (6000 plus) of the remains have been identified but may more (21000 plus) remain unnamed. We all read the large commemorative monument built on the site of Anzac Cove. Many of us really noted and respected the words on the monument - These are the words of Mustafa Kemal, the first president of Turkey.  

"These heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives; you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side, here in this country of ours.  
You the mothers, who sent their sons from far away countries, wipe away your tears. Your sons are now lying in our bosom and are now in peace. After having lost their lives on this land, they have become our sons as well"  

Mustafa Kemal  
First President of Turkey  

We also did a 30 minute hike to Plugge’s plateau - which was amazing and a fabulous view. The weather has been perfect - warm and sunny - after our full day of battlefield exploration we got the 5pm ferry back to our hotel. Then we enjoyed a really nice buffet dinner. Afterwards we had free time to chat with friends - the kids has a fabulous time bonding in their private “sitting room” 8.30pm - not quite time for bed or “sleep”. A night walk to McDonalds sounded like more fun - after ships & nuggets and sundaes - back to the hotel for quiet time and sleep. A highlight was to hear the girls and boys laughter - they are having such a wonderful time.  
Tomorrow we do some exploring then the 5 hour drive back to Istanbul, where we have our final 2 nights. Now Marshall wants to ass his Illuminati narrative (as a tribute to Colin)  

Janet & Marshall Garside
Colin is Illuminati - By Marshall Garside

Collin Peck rhymes with the SS Titanic Shipwreck that was 100 years ago. You know what else was 100 year ago…… The WAR. What does this have to do with the Illuminati?

Let’s find out. The war was in 1914. England was part of the War. Colin is from England. Let’s go deeper. The most common rifle used by English soldiers was the Mach 3. A triangle has 3 sides. You know what else has triangles? The Pyramids. The Pyramids are in Egypt. The Australian soldiers were stationed in Egypt. The four group Colin is Australian. There are exactly 28 people in the tour group. 28 divided by 2 = 14. The war was in 1914 coincidence? I think not. WW1 has 3 digits, Pun has 3 letters Colin makes puns. Pun starts with P. So does pyramid, and what do pyramids have? Triangles. But what else is a triangle? Doritos! But can we link this to Illuminati? Indeed! Doritos come in a wide range of flavours such as cool ranch. Ranch has 5 letters and cool has 4. 5 x 5 = 20. 20 x 5 is one hundred which is the amount of ammo that the average soldier would carry. Soldiers carried 200 rounds, Round roundabout. Hellfire corner is a roundabout. Hellfire corner was a battlefield. But it seems like we are going in circles. But no! In the fourth line of this report there was the letter Y. Y does this matter? Aha! Y is the 25th letter of the alphabet. Anzac Day is on the 25th of April. Colin walks at 25km/h Walking is a form of transportation. But before I link this to the Illuminati, please grab a shovel because these tranches are deep! Transportation rhymes with creeping barrage attacks formation. Formation rhymes with illumination. Illuminati Colin has an eye (i) in his name Illuminati has one eye (i) Illuminati confirmed.

Friday 1 May 2015

Next morning 1st May, after a breakfast of more feta cheese, bread and coffee we again cross the Dardenelles this time to visit the very southern tip of the peninsula. The site where the British troops landed. It happened to be Labour Day in Turkey so schools and businesses were on holiday. As a result there were thousands of Turks out enjoying their long weekend. The roads were congested and the Turkish monuments were extra crowded.

The morning was marked by a stunning fog across the Dardanelles and the inevitable call to prayer ringing across the city. As we headed across the
peninsula I am reminded of how fastidious our bus driver was. He took great pride in the cleanliness of the bus – even polished his tyres – the cleanest bus in Turkey!

While the crowds were thick at the Turkish monument, they were thin at the Commonwealth monument at Helles Point. Once we had finished we headed back up the peninsula to Istanbul stopping at Gelibolu, a busy sea port, for lunch.

Today we started a 5 hour bus ride back to the European Istanbul. We were debating if we were going to stop at a Turkish memorial, however it was packed and we voted not to stop instead we continued on. Our first stop was a large memorial where we had a quick talk and a toilet stop. The next stop was for lunch at a restaurant right on the water, we had some good Turkish food.

Our final stop before the hotel was at a servo people bought some food and went to the toilet before we got back on the bus for the rest of the way back to the hotel. Everyone was tired and we all stayed in for the night and had a dinner in the hotel. After a short hangout we went to bed at 9.30pm.

Ben

Saturday 2 May 2015

Today was a day for sightseeing in Istanbul, our last full day away. We were able to sleep in a bit this morning.

First stop was the Topkapi Palace, which was the primary residence of the Ottoman sultans for approximately 400 years (1453-1931). Originally, it had many courtyards that lead to various sections such as the Harem quarters, armoury, kitchen, sultan private quarters etc. but it is now an impressive museum. It was very crowded and we suspected that the crowds were bigger than usual with the arrival of about 5 huge passenger cruisers that we had seen in the harbour.

Wonderful views of Istanbul from the old walls. The history of the Sultans had given Mr Wood some ideas and he was subsequently addressed as Tony the Merciful.

Then through to the Hippodrome area. Although the Hippodrome is usually associated with Constantinople’s days of glory as an imperial capital, it actually predates that era. The first Hippodrome was built when the city was called Byzantium, and was a provincial town of moderate importance. In AD 203 the Emperor Septimius Severus rebuilt the city and expanded its walls, endowing it
with a hippodrome, an arena for chariot races and other entertainment. What a spectacle that would have been. There are various monuments in the Hippodrome Area, such as the "Egyptian Obelisk" and a "Serpentine Column", which has three intertwined bronze serpents forming the column. There are lots of shops, cafes and tourist too. It was packed with people.

The world renowned Blue Mosque, is an impressive building but the queue was too big for us to negotiate. So, instead we decided to walk on to the Church of the Holy Wisdom, known as Hagia Sophia. The line here was slightly shorter and we only had to line up in the heat for about 30 minutes. This place was a Byzantine church and then an Ottoman mosque but is now a museum. Hagia Sophia is universally acknowledged as one of the great buildings of the world – it was built about 1400 years ago. It still has much of the gold tiled symbols of religion on the wall, including 10th century frescoes depicting images of Christ, Constantine, etc.

And finally the Grand Bazaar, for us to do our last minute shopping and practice our haggling to fill our bags with stuff. In an ancient building were row upon row of narrow lanes with crowded and bustling shops selling everything from pottery to handbags. The Bazaar was filled with shop on shop on shop, with bowls, bags, shoes, glassware, jewellery, clothes, and more. There just wasn't enough time to see it all. Fortunately, we had a plan to ensure we didn't lose anyone because that was certainly on the cards!

Back to our hotel for a rest, get packed ready for the plane home tomorrow.
Sunday 3 May 2015

Well the trip is nearly over. Some last minute changing of money and shopping, especially for Turkish delight which comes in an enormous variety of flavours and ingredients. A few evil eye trinkets also found their way into our bags.

We say goodbye to Naci and make our way towards the check-in and onwards to our flight home. Our long stop over in Singapore airport gave us a chance to wander and rest for quite a few tired travellers.

Such a busy trip but it was terrific! Lots of places to go back to especially in Belgium and Turkey.

Figure 31 Enjoying the culture
Figure 32 Turkish Delight - yum!

Figure 33 Grand Bazaar entrance
Figure 34 Shopping in the Grand Bazaar
Monday 4 May 2015

It’s about 7.30pm and we’re home at last. No troubles through Customs and into the arms of parents and friends who are delighted to see us home safe and sound. The buzz of stories fills the arrival hall. There is an excitement of children and adults who have so many memories to share and treasure.

A special thank you to everyone on the tour – it was a fantastic trip made more so by the friendships that have been forged in such a short time.

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