

## **Gallipoli “Lone Pine” lives on**

**(Thanks to Legacy for this article)**

The Gallipoli “Lone Pine” has become a piece of living history in Australia.

Every Australian soldier who served at Gallipoli knew Plateau 400 or “Lone Pine” – the scene of some of the fiercest hand-to-hand combat by Australians in World War I. The Plateau was distinguished by a solitary pine which bore silent witness to the heroism and tenacity of Australians who fought there.

Lone Pine was a heavily fortified Turkish trench position, identified by a solitary *Pinus Halepensis* species *Brutia* commonly known as an “Aleppo Pine”.

At 5:30pm on August 6, 1915, Australians of the First Brigade attacked the Turkish trenches under heavy machine-gun and artillery fire. The Australians found the trenches were roofed over with pine logs covered in earth.

They clawed the roofing back and jumped into the trenches below. After savage hand-to-hand fighting the trenches were taken by 6:00pm. Attack and counter attack continued until August 10<sup>th</sup>, when fighting at Lone Pine ceased, and the position was firmly held in Australian hands.

The six Australian Battalions involved lost 80 officers and 2,197 men in the battle for Lone Pine. Turkish deaths were estimated at between 5,000 and 6,000.

At Gallipoli, during the evacuation, 33 men of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion mounted a gallant action. They were left behind to keep up the pretence that the Lone Pine trenches were still occupied. They destroyed the remaining guns, and embarked before daylight 20 minutes before the appointed time, and less than two hours before storm blew up which would have made withdrawal impossible.

Although the Lone Pine was destroyed in the fighting it lives on today in Australia.

Which is where the Legacy Lone Pine story begins.

During the withdrawal a soldier, Sgt. Keith McDowell, picked up a pine cone from the original Lone Pine and placed it in his haversack as a souvenir. Sgt. McDowell carried the cone for the remainder of the war and when he returned to Australia gave it to his Aunt, Mrs. Emma Gray of Grassmere near Warrnambool in Victoria.

“Here Aunty, you’ve got a green thumb, see if you can grow something out of this,” the late Mrs. Gray’s son, Alexander, recalled.

But it wasn't until some 12 years later that Mrs. Gray planted the few seeds from the cone, five of which sprouted and grew into little trees.

One of the pines eventually died but the remaining four survived.

In May 1933, one was planted in Wattle Park on the occasion of the Trooping of the Colour by the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1933, the second tree was planted with full military honours by S.G. Savige of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, where it now shades the well-loved statue of Simpson and his donkey. The late Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Savige KBE, CB, DSO, MC, ED, was the founder of Melbourne Legacy. Formed in 1923, the Melbourne Legacy Club was the first such club to be established.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1933 the third tree was planted at the Sisters, near Terang, just north east of Warrnambool. This is the area Mrs. Gray's family lived and the home of several Gallipoli veterans.

The fourth tree was planted in the Warrnambool Gardens on 23 January 1934.

In 1964 Legatee Tom Griffiths, then President of Warrnambool Legacy, put forward the idea that more seedlings should be raised in the Jubilee Year of Gallipoli from the established trees with the object of planting memorial trees throughout Australia in memory of those who fell in action at Lone Pine in 1915.

The project was outlined in a paper presented to the Perth Conference in 1965 and was strongly supported. Two batches of cones were sent to Melbourne, one from the tree at "The Sisters" and another from the tree at the Warrnambool Gardens, and the full cooperation of the (then) Forests Commission of Victoria was guaranteed by the Chief Commissioner, Mr Benallack. Unfortunately, these cones had been gathered too late as the seeds had already been cast, and the few seeds that survived failed to germinate.

However, Melbourne Legacy then undertook the propagation and distribution of seedlings. With the assistance of the Shrine of Remembrance Trustees, permission was granted by the Melbourne City Parks and Gardens Curator to harvest a limited number of cones from the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion tree at the Shrine and these were gathered by the Forests Commission and after the necessary preparatory treatment were planted in the Commission's nursery at Macedon.

Approximately 150 seedlings were raised from these cones by Dr Grose, Director of Silviculture.

The Friends of Balmoral Cemetery Inc has applied for a "Lone Pine" seedling and hope to have one planted in the cemetery before Remembrance Day, 2004.

Melbourne Legacy's Commemoration Committee was responsible for the collection, propagation, presentation and dedication of Lone Pines from the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion tree at the Shrine of Remembrance.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1989 further seedlings were collected with the hope to raise 1,000 trees from the seeds. This could not be done without the invaluable assistance of the Department of Natural Resources and Dr Peter May at the Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture in Richmond, Victoria.

Thus, Legacy is helping to keep the memory of the Gallipoli "Lone Pine" alive – its spirit living on today. Presentations are made to schools, ex-service organisations and interested bodies by Legacy Clubs in the hope that they will be cherished as a symbol of nationhood and of its just pride, devotion, courage, selflessness and sense of service to others.