

# Anzac Day in Baghdad

February–April 2009

(An excerpt from Red Zone Baghdad by Marcus Fielding)

Anzac Day is the most significant day in our military calendar. It's a truly sacred day, commemorated by Australia and New Zealand on 25 April every year since 1916, when it served to honour members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who fought at Gallipoli. In the years since that first commemorative service, Anzac Day has grown to encompass commemoration of all who have served their nation in time of war, in latter-day conflicts and peacekeeping deployments. Australians and New Zealanders recognise 25 April as a ceremonial occasion, a time to reflect on the futility of war and to remember those who fought and lost their lives for their country. Commemorative services are held at dawn, the time of the original landing, primarily at war memorials in cities and towns across both nations. Services are also conducted at war cemeteries around the world where Australian and New Zealand servicemen and women are buried or commemorated.

I know that members of the Australian Defence Force deployed to Iraq have observed Anzac Day over the last six years. I am aware that Anzac Day dawn services in Baghdad have been conducted at a stone cairn built on the roof of one of the Australian accommodation buildings on Victory Base. I am also aware that the Australian Battle Group conducted services when it was operating in southern Iraq. But since only the embeds and the security detachment are left in Iraq, I decide that someone has to take the lead and start organising something.

My own knowledge of Australian military history tells me that Australian units were part of the Allied forces that operated in Mesopotamia during World War I, and I wonder how many Australian servicemen are buried here in Iraq. I contact the staff of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who reply two days later with the details of no fewer than 63 Australian and 14 New Zealand servicemen buried in this land. I am surprised by this discovery – I had no idea there were so many. I learn that there are servicemen buried in Baghdad, Habbaniya, Basra and Mosul. All but four of them died during World War I.

Having been in Baghdad for several months, I decide it's time I located the Baghdad War Cemetery. With some effort, I find it in the northern part of the city in the district of Rusafa, close to the Baghdad University complex. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission report tells me that the Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery was first opened in April 1917.

In 1914, Baghdad was the site of the headquarters of the Turkish Army in Mesopotamia. Baghdad was also the ultimate objective of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force 'D', which captured the capital in March 1917. The city then became the Expeditionary Force's advance base, which included two stationary hospitals. The Baghdad War Cemetery grew progressively during World War I and, following the Armistice, it was enlarged as fallen soldiers were moved from other burial grounds in Baghdad and northern Iraq, and from battlefields and cemeteries in Anatolia where Commonwealth prisoners of war were buried by the Turks.

The British lost around 30,000 men fighting the Ottoman Turks and their German advisers in the Mesopotamian campaign. Many of those British soldiers died during and after the siege

of Kut, some from starvation. Others died in the bloody battles in and around Baghdad, and many more – like Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Maude, Commander of Allied forces in Mesopotamia – of diseases such as cholera. Over 4000 Commonwealth casualties of World War I are commemorated by name in the Baghdad War Cemetery, many of them on special memorials.

During World War II, Baghdad was again a prized objective of Commonwealth forces. The capital was captured in June 1941, and an advance base was established close to the city that remained active until 1946. Most of the 296 World War II Commonwealth servicemen buried in the cemetery died of illness or in accidents. Again, a number of soldiers were relocated from other burial grounds following the end of World War II.

Forty-one Australian and seven New Zealand servicemen are buried at the Baghdad War Cemetery. The more I learn about their history, the more I believe that they deserve their own commemoration ceremony at the cemetery on Anzac Day. I write a short proposal paper and pass it to Brigadier Simon Gould for his consideration. He likes the idea and we agree to do a reconnaissance, heading out a few days later to inspect the site.

The first step in visiting any place in Baghdad is borrowing a security detachment, complete with vehicles. I exploit my contacts and persuade my way into Major General Swan's personal security detachment and their vehicles so that my party can visit the Baghdad War Cemetery. The weather is overcast and a strong wind whips up the sand, creating a hazy fog which forces us to wear sunglasses to deflect the swirling grit. Reduced visibility has a nasty habit of encouraging insurgents to fire rockets at coalition bases, as the conditions degrade our ability to respond. As a result everyone is a little on edge. With two armoured Humvees escorting 'the limo', an armour-plated Chevrolet Suburban, we roll out of Victory Base and drive up Route Irish into the Green Zone. The Iraqi security forces man the checkpoints and their vehicles patrol the route. Election posters still plaster the walls.

We pass through the Green Zone and then cross the Tigris River, entering the district of Rusafa. The streets are jam-packed with vehicles and crowds of people shopping along the sidewalks, despite the weather. The convoy jostles its way north, turning west at one of the main roundabouts. Where they can, Iraqi policemen try to move us quickly through the jammed intersections. We wave our thanks and they respond with purposeful 'thumbs up' signs.

After a further 20 minutes working our way across the city, we turn a corner and the cemetery comes into view through the greenish tint of the car windows. The rows of headstones are immediately visible through the metal pickets of the 2-metre fence. The fence line is broken in a number of areas – the cemetery is clearly being used as a pedestrian short cut. The convoy pulls up and we jump out. We head towards a building that sits in the grounds of the cemetery and we meet Jasim.

Through our interpreter, we learn that Jasim is the caretaker and has been looking after the cemetery for the last five years. He tells us that he can't recall any Australians visiting the cemetery during his tenure as caretaker. We follow Jasim to the main gate of the cemetery – in the 100 metres we cover, walking from the vehicles to the main gate, we attract five children. We smile and shake their hands. They look at us with wide brown eyes, smile back and follow us in innocent curiosity.

Just inside the gate sits the main structure of the cemetery, a stone entranceway with a domed roof and an archway that proclaims the site as the 'Baghdad North Gate War Cemetery'. A weathered sign beside the entranceway announces that the cemetery is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and that it is currently under renovation. The sign is dated 1997.

As we walk through the entranceway, I have one overriding impression – it's all brown. Brown dirt, brown stone headstones, brown sage bushes growing between the rows of headstones, a few small, brown stone memorials among the headstones, brown dust in the air and brown dogs lazing in the brown dirt. The only spots of colour are the empty plastic shopping bags that the wind blows through the compound. There is garbage everywhere. Almost all the headstones close to the entranceway are smashed. Jasim explains that the damage has been caused by rockets, but it looks more like vandalism to us.

As we step through the entranceway, a central walkway becomes discernable only because of the rows of sick-looking palm trees on either side. A pair of makeshift soccer goals has been erected. Just behind the torn net of the far goal is a white memorial stone. The net drapes across the inscription, 'Their Name Liveth For Evermore'. Behind it is a memorial cross, which seems to have had its traditional sword stolen. We don't tell Jasim of our intentions, but as we move around the cemetery, each of us assesses the logistics – and the risks – of conducting a dawn service here.

We wander slowly through the rows of headstones, reading the names as we pass. We see British, Indian, Australian, New Zealand and Polish servicemen, and the odd civilian. Several headstones simply say 'Four Soldiers of the Great War'. As we move further from the entranceway, there are fewer damaged headstones, but the memorials around the edges of the cemetery have all been vandalised to some degree. The dogs growl and bark at us and threaten to charge towards us. They probably have rabies, so we train our weapons on them as we move past in case they attack.

We circle back towards the central part of the cemetery and inspect a squat, brown building. It turns out to be the mausoleum of Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Maude, Commander of Allied forces in Mesopotamia. His sarcophagus on the floor is simply inscribed 'Maude'. This was obviously a man who despised grandiose trappings of any sort. Like all the others, his simple headstone is fixed to the wall above his sarcophagus. It seems an underwhelming place for a figure of such historical importance to be resting, his mausoleum now an island of stone in a sea of dirt, rubbish and dogs. The same applies to all these brave servicemen, so far from the homes they left. I wonder what their relatives would think if they could see what we see now.

Jasim tells us that he is contracted by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, paid \$300 a month to secure the cemetery, and provided with a small house in a corner of the cemetery grounds. It's just enough to ensure there is no further damage to the cemetery. The pack of wild dogs must also present a significant deterrent to any would-be vandal. Given the condition of the cemetery, we guess that he doesn't get any funding for maintenance of the grounds. Jasim explains that his contact in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is an Iraqi gentleman who lives in the UK. He sees him about once a year. While it has been too dangerous to conduct any maintenance and restoration work over the last few years, we are heartened when Jasim points to two shipping containers near the front gate which, he tells us, contain replacement headstones for those that have been damaged. He explains that, in a few

months' time, a massive refurbishment of the cemetery will begin. We nod our approval and echo his hope that the security situation will allow the refurbishment to proceed.

As we prepare to leave, we pose for a group photo. I thank Jasim for his efforts in looking after the cemetery and for allowing us to visit. I press US\$50 into his palm and ask him to keep looking after our brothers. At first he refuses my gift, but eventually relents and accepts the money. We learn that Jasim is a Judo champion who has represented Iraq in international Judo competitions. The children who have tailed us throughout are his Judo students. We tell Jasim that this makes him well qualified to be the caretaker. I scribble his phone number so we can talk to him later, and we say our farewells. Just before we drive off, one of the personal security detachment soldiers hands the children a tray of orange-juice poppers, and they scurry off happily. As we drive back to Victory Base, we share our impressions of what was a sobering visit. Despite the condition of the cemetery and its security vulnerabilities, our resolve to conduct a dawn service at the cemetery on Anzac Day has firmed.

A few days later, I come across an old photo of the Baghdad War Cemetery that apparently dates from the mid-1980s: it clearly shows the benefits of care and good watering – and of peace and national stability. Bright green grass covers the central area, and the palm trees are tall and lush. It saddens me that the cemetery has fallen into such a state of disrepair, but I am cheered by the fact that we now have an opportunity to hold an event that might reclaim some of its dignity.

As we picked our way through the browned headstones, we noticed three gravestones that stood out from the others. These headstones bore the crest of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). The three men were sailors – all crew members of the AE2, one of the first Australian submarines. I decide to embark on a research journey to try to work out exactly how they ended up in land-locked Baghdad.

In between tracking the security arrangements for Arba'een and designing the future operations directorate for Headquarters US Forces–Iraq, I trawl the Internet and slowly piece together the story of the AE2. The AE2 was the first Allied vessel to penetrate the Turkish defences in the Narrows of the Dardanelles. The submarine's success led directly to the now-famous order to the Anzac troops who had just landed on the Gallipoli peninsula: 'Dig, Dig, Dig!' The diary of one crewmember, Able Seaman Albert Knaggs, has been posted on the Web by his grandson, who lives in the UK. To me, it's indescribably sad that these heroes of the Gallipoli campaign have lain here in Baghdad for the last 87 years, rarely visited and in a state of dusty, broken neglect. The Anzac Day service now firms as a long-overdue commemoration for the heroic sacrifice of these men and those who rest alongside them.

In the aftermath of our visit to the cemetery, I draft a plan to conduct a dawn service there on Anzac Day. I am conscious of the importance of this ceremony to me, personally. I can't escape a sense of national guilt that, in the last six years that Australians have been working in Baghdad, no-one has visited the cemetery, let alone conducted a commemorative service to honour our war dead. I am conscious also that, with the end of the Australian military contribution to the war in Iraq on 31 July 2009, there will be no more embeds to ensure that Anzac Day services become a regular occurrence at the cemetery. In addition, given the status of embeds as individuals, there will be no opportunity for the formal end-of-mission ceremony traditional for national contingents. I begin to see the Anzac Day dawn service as a de facto end-of-mission ceremony.

Again I fall into brief-writing mode and write a short proposal, which I work through Brigadier Gould and the Australian Ambassador to Iraq. Both are supportive and so, in early March, I begin to focus on the serious issues of planning such a ceremony. Given the somewhat onerous nature of my other responsibilities, planning for Anzac Day happens in fits and starts whenever I can snatch the time. As this will be a military operation, we convene a planning group with the American units that will potentially support the activity, as well as the Australian Embassy staff and their security detachment.

I begin to draft a fragmentary order, which outlines the plan and details all the tasks that need to be completed. The Americans are very enthusiastic about supporting the activity, to the extent that I almost feel a little guilty about how much effort they are prepared to expend. I suppose it reflects the tremendous mutual respect that we have developed over the years. We plan to invite all the senior US military leaders as well as several of the ambassadors in Baghdad. This potentially high level of VIP attendance increases the risk immeasurably, so we don't advertise our intentions too widely and plan for all possible contingencies, including attacks from small arms fire, rocket fire and suicide bombers. It'll be a slightly different Anzac Day dawn service to those we run back in Australia.

Most of the high-level planning for the dawn service is set in motion well ahead of the day itself. Via a written order, tasks are passed down to subordinates within the Multi-National Force-Iraq. Thankfully, we locate a Kiwi officer working with the UN Mission in Iraq, and he gladly agrees to be part of the service. Aussie Colonels Bill Date and Graeme Sligo help out by taking on other jobs, such as coordinating the RSVPs for the VIPs and finding someone who can play a bugle. The planning effort invested by all the elements involved in the dawn service is tremendous. It's remarkable to see the germ of an idea turn into something that generates its own momentum. Security for the event is our highest priority and so, just to ensure that everything is in place and everyone is comfortable, we run a desktop contingency planning exercise five days prior to Anzac Day.

We gather all the elements involved, including the US Army unit providing the outer security cordon, the officer commanding the Australian Embassy security detachment, and the personal security detachments for each of the seven VIPs attending. The personal security detachments include US State Department teams, US military teams, British military teams, and civilian private security contractors. Together we trawl the latest intelligence and threat assessments and re-assess the plan in terms of who is doing what, when and where. It looks good: over the last few weeks there have been no significant security events in the immediate vicinity of the Baghdad War Cemetery. Nevertheless, it becomes very apparent that this is going to be a significant military operation. A troop of armoured cavalry soldiers will form the outer perimeter in partnership with an Iraqi infantry battalion. Counter-improvised-explosive-device teams will sweep the roads all the way from our bases to the Baghdad War Cemetery. Explosive-detection-dog teams will search the car park and the area in the cemetery where the service will take place. Three sniper teams will position themselves on rooftops. A Predator drone will patrol overhead and provide a continuous picture of activity across the area. A US fighter jet will be stationed overhead on standby. An armoured quick-reaction force will be put on short notice standby in the area. All of this is provided not only willingly, but enthusiastically, in support of our event, and I am quietly overwhelmed by the response. The fallen Australians in that cemetery would have been proud. As a military operation, it falls tidily into the usual guidelines on who has responsibility for what and who has to coordinate with whom. From a planning perspective, as the Americans would say, it's looking pretty neat.

With all the VIPs attending, we need to work out the sequence of actions we will take in the event of a security incident at any stage of the proceedings. We consider attacks by sniper fire, rockets and suicide bombers, both on foot and vehicle-borne. All of these events are possible, albeit relatively unlikely. After three hours, we have thrashed out the details and we produce some confirmatory notes for everyone's reference.

Anzac Day, 25 April 2009, falls on a Saturday. On the Thursday prior, a suicide bomber attacks a group in the southern part of Rusafa in Baghdad city, a mere 8 kilometres from the Baghdad War Cemetery. Iraqi police and workers from the Red Crescent charity organisation are handing out aid packages in front of an apartment building when a female suicide bomber detonates her explosives vest. In a perverted twist of tactics, witnesses report that the woman led a child by the hand so as to avert suspicion. There are conflicting reports of casualties, but the final toll appears to stand at 28 killed and 50 injured. Just after midday on Thursday afternoon, another suicide bomber attack occurs in al-Muqdadiyah in Diyala province, north-east of Baghdad. The suicide bomber targets a restaurant and kills 47, injuring another sixty-nine. There are reports that many of the casualties in this attack are Iranian religious pilgrims.

On Friday morning, I brief Major General Swan on the security plan for the Anzac Day dawn service. I nervously seek his assessment of whether the residual risk is acceptable. I run through the threat assessment, the VIPs who have advised they will attend, and the security that will be in place. The two bombings the previous day give us cause for concern. Is an Anzac Day dawn service worth the potential of having several VIPs killed? It's a tough decision, largely because, in a country such as this, we can never be sure that our plans haven't somehow been compromised and an attack prepared. But, on the other hand, changing our plans in response to the enemy only relinquishes our hard-won initiative for security in Baghdad. I suggest that the most dangerous attack would probably be a vehicle-borne bomb positioned in the car park and detonated as the VIPs arrive. I explain that the explosive-detection-dog sweep will counter this particular threat.

Major General Swan then tells me that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will also be visiting Baghdad on Anzac Day – of all days. This significant event will demand the attention and effort of another collection of security elements. Secretary Clinton is scheduled to arrive (with a sizeable entourage in tow) at around 8.30 am; the dawn service will, in all likelihood, be completed by then. Major General Swan decides that we will proceed with the plan, and I breathe a sigh of relief.

Just after midday on Friday, however, there is another big attack in Baghdad. A suicide bomber detonates his vest outside the Kadamiyah Shrine and then, as the crowd moves away, a second female bomber detonates her vest near the gold market. The toll is frightening – a total of 53 people killed and over 110 injured. This double attack is only a few kilometres west of the Baghdad War Cemetery. The news of this attack breaks just as General Odierno is being briefed about the dawn service. In full realisation of the carnage that has just been inflicted, the Commanding General weighs up the risks and nods his concurrence to proceed. Mercifully, the remainder of Friday is relatively quiet, but the burden of responsibility weighs heavily on my shoulders. I assure my boss, as we are setting up at the cemetery the next morning, that I will call off the event if there is any indication that we have been compromised.

As I try to snatch a few hours' sleep that night, my mind continues to work through all the risks, and I make a mental checklist for our arrival at the cemetery. Lulled by the snores of the other sleepers around me, I drift off, wondering whether this dawn service is such a good idea after all.

In the early hours of Saturday, 25 April, everything begins moving. It's a clear night with no moon, but the lights of the city allow a grainy visibility. The US and Iraqi Army security perimeter around the Baghdad War Cemetery is slotted into place first. A team mounted in specialised vehicles that clear improvised explosive devices checks the roads through Baghdad leading to the cemetery.

In the Green Zone, we are up by 2.00 am and ready to move by 2.45. I jump into the back of one of the five Australian light armoured vehicles operated by the Embassy security detachment. In unison, my fellow soldiers and I don ballistic vest, anti-flash hood and gloves, helmet and goggles. We squeeze into the back of the vehicle and hold our weapons between our knees, pointing them towards the floor. We drive out of the Green Zone and make good time to Rusafa, given the absence of traffic. The steady whine of the engines sends most of us in the belly of the vehicle into a dozing half-sleep.

We arrive at the cemetery just as the explosive-detection-dog teams finish checking the car park. A few civilian vehicles and a truck sit around the car park, but the dogs confirm the absence of any traces of explosives. The sniper teams make their way up onto the rooftops. The Predator circles above. All the activity rouses the neighbourhood dogs, and they begin barking. This is likely to wake everyone up and draw attention to us. I grimace: that's not good.

By around 3.45 am, the Australian security detachment soldiers have set everything up in readiness for the service. They have manufactured flagpoles and national flags, and brought a lectern, a public-address system and a small generator to the cemetery. Tiny torches illuminate the white memorial stone and the flags. The light catches the sea of brown headstones around the central memorial stone – in the pre-dawn darkness, the effect is dramatic. Almost directly behind the memorial stone, the flag atop the Turkish Embassy is also illuminated. While the Turkish Ambassador couldn't attend the service, I wonder whether the Turks have illuminated their flag as a sign that they are with us in spirit.

Once everything is ready, the amount of activity diminishes and the dogs settle down. But after a moment of quiet, the muezzins in several of the local mosques begin their call to prayer. Thankfully, this only lasts about ten minutes. Just as the call of the muezzins dies away, the first of the VIPs arrive. Young soldiers from the security detachment escort them from their vehicles to an area next to the entrance archway, where they are briefed and offered coffee. A convoy of American armoured trucks delivers all the Australian embeds and the other guests. After handing out programs for the dawn service and a host of candles, we call all the attendees forward to the memorial stone. There are over 100 people present.

We begin the dawn service at around 4.40 am. It proceeds smoothly, as if we have done it a dozen times before. We mount a catafalque party. US Army Chaplain Dan Rice recites the invocation. The Australian Ambassador delivers a stirring introductory address. We join Chaplain Rice in singing 'O Valiant Hearts' with all the sincerity we can muster. Fittingly, the main address comes from the Australian National Commander, Major General Mark

Kelly, delivered in a distinctly Australian twang that would have gladdened the hearts of the fallen Australians.

The VIPs are invited to lay wreaths at the memorial stone. The commander of the security detachment recites the *Ode*, and the bugler plays 'The Last Post'. The flags are lowered and we observe a minute's silence. As we stand amid the headstones with heads bowed, we can hear the Predator buzzing above us – I don't imagine many dawn services have been accompanied by such a tune before. It's a fascinating combination of one of the oldest Australian military campaigns with one of the newest.

The spell of silence is broken by the bugler's *reveille*. The flags of Australia, New Zealand, Britain, France and Turkey are raised to full mast. Dawn begins to creep over the horizon as the dark shadows fade. Brigadier Gould recites Ataturk's address, and our resident Kiwi intones the classic World War I poem, *In Flanders Fields*. Chaplain Rice closes the service with a benediction and we dismount the catafalque party. By now it is approaching 5.15 am, and there is enough light to spot the sniper teams on the surrounding rooftops. In closing, I thank everyone for coming and, on behalf of the Australian Ambassador, invite them back to the Australian Embassy for breakfast.

Few of the attendees have visited the cemetery before, and most will not have another chance, so they take the opportunity to have a quick walk around. The significance of the event is not lost on any of the participants. It may be some time before another Anzac Day dawn service is held at the Baghdad War Cemetery. Digital cameras appear, and people pose in small groups to try to capture the moment. As we wander through the rows of headstones, the 'little bird' helicopter that belongs to the security detail watching the US Charge d'Affaires buzzes above us, with its characteristic high-pitched whine. It adds to the slightly surreal setting.

After 15 minutes, the personal security detachments begin to grow nervous and start herding their principals back towards the vehicles. They load up and make their way to the Australian Embassy in the Green Zone. The rest of us file back into the armoured trucks and follow. The security detachment packs up and moves off, and the US security forces similarly head off to another day's work in Baghdad city. In the space of 30 minutes we've all left; all that remains are the wreaths on the memorial stone.

Given the feverish buzz of activity, I don't have a chance to meet up with Jasim, the caretaker. But Jasim finds one of my compatriots and hands him something for me. It's one of his prized Judo medals – a heartfelt 'thank you' for honouring his cemetery. It is a gesture that touches me to the core.

At the Australian Embassy, another team has been preparing a breakfast of barbequed steak, chicken and eggs. The early morning and the adrenaline generate a hearty appetite, so the fare is well received. A rank of small Bundaberg rum bottles stands invitingly alongside the coffee urn. The Australians and Brits are happy to partake in a gunfire coffee, but the Americans are more reluctant – it's not a custom with which they are familiar. I find US Ambassador Butenis alone at the coffee urn and suggest she might like a tipple. She refuses at first, but when I tell her that it's traditional, she looks left and right to see who is nearby, then gives me a quick nod. Considering that Ambassador Hill – her replacement – arrived the previous night and that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton – her boss – is arriving in a couple of hours and that both of them will demand her attention throughout the remainder of the day,



I think this is pretty cool. The embeds don't have many chances to socialise, so the opportunity is welcome and we embrace it with gusto. A couple of hours later, it is time to return to our bases, so we jump back into the armoured trucks for the run down Route Irish to Victory Base. It's been a good morning.

The Anzacs who fought for our freedom were a tremendously social breed and so, after a solemn dawn service to remember their sacrifice, we celebrate that night with an Anzac Day party at Aussie Island. All the Victory Base embeds invite their workmates, and I make sure that all those who helped us with the dawn service are also invited. We cater for 150 and about 300 turn up – we have clearly underestimated our popularity. I give a short impromptu speech about Anzac Day and what it means to us. I also tell the crowd a little bit about the dawn service and why we regard it as so significant. Brigadier Gould takes the microphone to explain the Australian government's decision to end its contribution to the coalition. He also explains that we can't sing and we aren't very good at drill, but that we *can* throw a party and that this evening will be our de facto end-of-mission ceremony.

We have asked the 56th Army Band to play for us, and they don't disappoint. They set up beside the empty pool and proceed to belt out great music for three sets. After the meal, the cigars come out. The near beer is a poor accompaniment. By the time the band finishes two hours later, we still have 50 or so guests, and we manage to coax two more encore songs. By this time, those who haven't managed to grab a catnap during the day are gripped with fatigue, so, as a group, we hit the wall at about 10.00 p.m. It's been a long day, but a very memorable one. Like those Australians in the Baghdad War Cemetery, I sleep soundly, knowing that this was an occasion of my making and one of which I can be truly proud.