

Australian veteran comes to seek Turkish brothers in arms

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An almost 60-year quest to find his old Turkish brothers in arms brought an 87-year-old Australian war veteran to Gallipoli for Anzac Day 2010.

Clemence Kealy, or Clem to his friends, is a fit 87-year-old Australian war veteran. He participated in four conflicts, starting with World War II in which he fought even though he was underage. He also fought in the Malayan Emergency, Korea and Vietnam.

He explained why he traveled from Newcastle, New South Wales in Australia, to visit Gallipoli, infamous for the battles fought between the Ottoman Turkish forces and the Anzacs and other commonwealth and European troops in World War I.

Although he fought in the world-renowned Special Air Service, or SAS, and despite his chest full of medals, Kealy remains astonishingly modest. He and six other veterans of the Vietnam War came to Turkey to remember fallen Anzac troops, but Kealy also made the journey to seek Turkish comrades from the Korean Battle of Kunei.

Relating his experiences there despite the passage of 50 years, he said: "Korea was the first time [United Nations] troops fought together. On Sept. 28, 1950, my regiment landed in Korea. The Turks arrived shortly after. We had nothing to do with the Turkish army until Nov. 28 and 29 and the battle of Kunei."

Since that time he has thought about the Turkish soldiers, who he believes were in the most vulnerable position to protect the flank of the United States military.

"In my old age I have become very interested in what we did and I can't find much written about Turkey. If you read our side of it you get to the stage where you can really admire them as a good enemy. They are incredibly brave soldiers. You see, I am what is called a 'grunt,'" he said.

He and his fellow Australian soldiers had nicknames for virtually everything to circumvent authority; in military language, a "grunt" is an infantry soldier.

"We were the ones who fought "eyeball to eyeball," Kealy said.

"The Turks were under the command of the American 2nd division [in Korea], in a big battle during which the Americans lost 8,000 troops – two-thirds of their troops. I don't know what happened to the Turkish soldiers," he said.

"The Turks were trying to protect the American flanks. We were ordered to move to Kunei on 27/28 November. We marched 25 miles at 2 p.m., arriving in Kunei on the 28th. It took us 14 hours but we didn't make contact [with the Turks] – we didn't know where they were. I want to find out what happened," he said, adding that he wants to meet with some of these Turkish veterans.

Other war veterans and their wives then began to arrive at Gallipoli, and the stories of their experiences started coming thick and fast: Vietnam, the consequences, the trauma and the memories.

Tommy Yeo, a fellow "grunt," learned his skills from Kealy and clearly has enormous respect for him.

Sharyn Newburn, meanwhile, wife of Vietnam veteran John, talked about the role wives have taken in helping their heroic soldier husbands deal with what they endured.

During a sunny day in Istanbul's famous Sultanahmet, Clem's piercing blue eyes occasionally brim with emotion as he recalls the dark days in Korea with unerring accuracy.

He wants to know what happened to his Turkish brothers in arms and hopes on his pilgrimage to Gallipoli that some of the questions he has been asking for the last 60 years will finally be answered.