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What does an investigation of primary sources reveal about the Gallipoli experience and to what extent does this explain the origins of the ANZAC Legend?

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The battle of Gallipoli, though a dismal failure, was a defining moment in Australian history. Word of the incredible bravery and deeds of the men fighting for our country had a lasting impact among its citizens and continues to do so. Letters, diaries and newspaper articles from during the Great War, paint a surreal picture of what it was like for the ANZAC diggers during the campaign. Yet throughout the miserable conditions, ration fatigue, and the relentless slaughter of men from both sides, the ANZAC troops shone above the rest (Pugsley, 2008 as cited in Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). Primary sources reveal the qualities of resilience and determination, pride, sacrifice, and mateship that were shown by the ANZACs when responding to their trials at Gallipoli. Publications such as “The Argus” newspaper, the “ANZAC Book”, and the inclusion of heroic stories in the Australian Schooling Curriculum formed the ANZAC legend back in Australia and New Zealand, where stories of the gallant men fighting far away overseas found their way into homes and schools all over both countries.

The ANZAC legend depicts the legacy the Australian troops left upon the world after their feats in the Great War and especially the battle at Gallipoli. The legend highlights qualities and characteristics the ANZAC soldiers displayed during the battle at Gallipoli; qualities such as resilience, determination, pride, sacrifice and mateship. These characteristics have since become integral to Australia’s national identity and have become a kind of ‘code of conduct’ outlining the ways in which an Australian should act. Defined by Kokoda Spirit the ANZAC legend is:

“Simply put...[it] is helping your mate out, regardless of the consequences and knowing that your mate will do the same if the situation was reversed, it’s doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done. It is overcoming overwhelming odds and atrocious conditions; it is turning the impossible into the possible. It is about the ability to push past ones perceived limitations and to achieve greater outcomes. It is about perseverance, resilience, tenacity and persistence, never giving up, no matter how impossible it seems or how difficult the task. It is about trust, tradition, integrity and respect for each other, dependence on each other, keeping your word, not letting your mates, family or others down, the ability to never give up, and self belief, to hang in there when all seems lost.” (Kokoda Spirit, 2010)

Through primary sources, these qualities are evident and displayed by the ANZACs throughout the ordeals they faced at Gallipoli.
The resilience and determination of the Australian diggers was evident throughout the whole Gallipoli campaign. The ANZACs not only had to overcome the enemy, they had to battle with terrible hygienic conditions and the troublesome terrain. Capt. DG Campbell claimed “The worst things here (Turks excepted) are the flies in millions, lice…and everlasting bully-beef and biscuit, and too little water” (Gammage, 2010 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). Lt. FC Yeadon displayed his determination to get the job done; saying how “one never stops to think if them or oneself it is just a matter of keeping a few men together and go on as to keep the frontline intact” (Gammage, 2010 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). It is also well known how the Australian troops were the first out of the boats during the initial landing at ANZAC Cove; “they sprang into the sea and forming a rough sort of line, rushed at the enemy’s trenches”, determined to prove their worth (The Argus, 1915). The steep cliffs of the peninsula were another obstacle during the initial landing at Gallipoli. Pvt. Roy Denning showed the resilience to keep climbing despite the rain causing him to, “[slip] every now and then right down the side where the earth was very loose, making my already wet and heavy clothes still heavier with mud” and how, “men struggled through the wet scrub, grooping their way and slipping down every few steps, but only to struggle on again without a murmur” (Denning, 1915 as cited in Board of Studies NSW). This quiet determination displayed by Pvt. Roy Denning and his comrades is an example of the perseverence and resolve of the ANZAC legend.

A reason for their resilience was their pride in their country, comrades and their feats. All of the men who ended up in Gallipoli, voluntarily enlisted to fight for their country. Reasons for enlisting varied; some used the war to seek adventure and travel, while many joined because they believed Britain’s cause was right, for “They had been brought up to believe that men should be willing to die for their country and the empire, and that Australia needed to prove to Britain that Australians were heroic and worthy” (Darlington, et al, 2012) Also, patriotism and pride kept the men going even throughout the darkest of the fighting. Many troops described war as “hell” and condemned the men responsible for their situation, yet they were still enthusiastic to serve their country and “would not miss seeing it out (or until I go out) for any consideration” (Gammage, 2010 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). Throughout the campaign, troops expressed their pride in and admiration for their fellow Australian comrades. Pvt. Roy Denning was “proud of being an Australian” and, provided he had Australians as comrades would go anywhere duty called (Denning, 1915 as cited in Board of Studies NSW). This pride in their identity was so strong that it enabled many men make the ultimate sacrifice while battling on the front line.

Of the tales to emerge from Gallipoli, most famous among them were the stories of the selfless men who sacrificed themselves on the frontline. Of the 136,425 lives claimed by the Gallipoli campaign, 8,709 of those were young Australian men (National Archives of Australia). Instead of mourning those lost at ANZAC Cove, Australians refer to Gallipoli with honour, pride and glory; tribute to the thousands of men who gave up their lives in the name of their country (National Archives of Australia). Pvt. AJ McSparrow believed that it was “every young fellow’s duty” to enlist and fight, highlighting the importance many men held their imminent sacrifice for their country and the cause (1915, as cited in Darlington, et al, 2012). Also Sgt. AA Barwick wrote of witnessing the acts of selfless sacrifice in the face of adversity:

“I saw several men sacrifice themselves here…we were chasing some Turks round a little sap [trench] and they reached the bend first, everyone knew the first man around the corner was a dead one, but this chap never hesitated, he threw himself fair at them, and the 6 fired together, and fairly riddled him with bullets, that was our chance and we into them, and it was all over in a few minutes.” (Gammage, 2010 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012)
However, pride in their country wasn’t the only reason many ANZACs put their lives on the line. Gallant acts were often initiated by men protecting their mates.

Mateship is one of the most upheld of the qualities outlined in the legend. Since the campaign at Gallipoli mateship has become a kind of code among men; looking out for your mate, sticking by them no matter what and that easy going and friendly attitude toward any man, no matter his history. This attitude took centre stage on the battle field at Gallipoli. Sgt. AA Barwick wrote of how he wanted to run away from the fighting, yet the thought of leaving his mates to face it without him kept him there, and that he would stop and see it out at any cost (Gammage, 2010 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). Men recalled the feeling of revenge at seeing their mates lying dead on the battle field, many swearing vengeance for their fallen comrades (Ornek and Toker, 2010 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). However the Australians never blamed the enemy for their losses and hardships. In fact in truces to bury the dead, the ANZACs spent the time talking and befriending the Turks. Capt. Fussell recalled how the men at his position had an exchanging of notes with the Turkish soldiers in the enemy trench not far away. Tins of cigarettes and tobacco were accompanied with humorous notes, and packages that fell short were able to be collected without being fired upon (Education Gazette, 1916 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). This mutual respect being a core aspect stressed in mateship, and mateship in turn being one of the core aspects of the ANZAC legend.

Tales of the resilience, determination, pride and sacrifice of the men at Gallipoli were the beginnings of the formation of the ANZAC legend. The legends made their way back to Australian shores in the form of publications such as the ANZAC book, newspaper articles and the stories of the Australian diggers have since been included in the Australian schooling Curriculum. The ANZAC book was published in 1916 and contained works by the soldiers at Gallipoli. Sketches, stories, poems, cartoons and illustrations in the book helped people back home in Australia to grasp what it was like for the men who fought in the campaign (Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). Before this however, citizens had to rely on local publications to get the latest news on what the young men were doing. Melbourne newspaper “The Argus” wrote many articles on the happenings at Gallipoli. Journalists such as Mr. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, was a war correspondent and was present at the initial landing of troops on the Gallipoli coast and was able to give his readers great insight into the battle (The Argus, 1916). Shortly after the events of Gallipoli, schools were sent accounts of what happened as educational resources (Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). This ensured the legacy of the ANZACs and their legend has been upheld in the following generations. Poems such as “Farewell!” published The School Paper 1916 were provided to Victorian students, demonstrating a strong focus on glorifying the legend:

“For ‘ANZAC’ all the world around/ Stands for a lot of useful things/ you helped make it, though your breath/ Is still for ever, and your fame/ shall speak of high contempt of death/to those who never heard your name” (The School Paper, 1916 as cited in Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012)

Up until this day the legend of the men who fought at ANZAC Cove is taught in schools to guarantee their legacy is never forgotten.

These publications and curriculum inclusions have ensured the legend of the ANZACs lives on. The qualities of the ANZAC Legend were displayed by diggers at Gallipoli and can be seen by investigating primary sources. Through the terrors of war the Australian troops were able to persevere and overcome the obstacles in their way, some making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of their country and their mates. The legacy born from the failure at Gallipoli has found a place in every Australian’s heart and will never be forgotten.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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