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The ANZAC legend tells how Australian soldiers, landing at Gallipoli in April 1915, proved our worth as a nation through their outstanding courage, determination, resourcefulness and mateship[1]. In assessing how closely this legend compares with the stories of individual soldiers it is necessary to acknowledge the following complications: that generalising about the individual experiences of 324,000 men, fighting in multiple locations over four years is difficult; that legends and stories not only recount deeds but interpret the motivations and emotions behind them; that censorship, both official and self-imposed, compromises the reliability of primary sources by omitting not only what they cannot say but also what they do not *want* to reveal; and that censorship encourages exaggeration of the positives as well as omission of the negatives, and this positive propaganda influences outlook and experience – that is, the rhetoric can become part of the reality for the participants. The "truth" then, is difficult to determine and requires that the broad context surrounding the discussion - before, during and after the war, and on the home front as well as the battlefield – be understood.

The seeds of the ANZAC legend were sown long before the Gallipoli landing. Australia was not only a new nation, eager to prove herself on the international scene but also an anxious outpost of "British civilisation" within an Asian region. The Defence Act of 1909 gave the government powers to call up men for compulsory military training during peace time and by 1914 a generation of young men was primed for a fight[2]. When the opportunity to fight came - in a war on the other side of the world - Australians embraced it enthusiastically[3]. The first combat encounter came at Gallipoli on April 25th, 1915 and it is in eye-witness reports of this dawn landing that the qualities we associate with the ANZAC legend are first described. British journalist Ashmead-Bartlett's account **(Source 3)**, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of May 15th 1915[4], tells of: the courage and initiative of the men, not waiting for orders but attacking with "cold steel"; their practicality in offloading their packs to deal with the terrain; and their determination and physical toughness as they scaled the cliffs under fire . Other accounts of the landing attest to the use of bayonets on the beach, the downing of packs, and that some soldiers were seen on the cliff tops[5], but without drawing quite the same heroic conclusions as Ashmead-Bartlett. The courage and initiative he ascribes to the charging with 'cold steel', was, in fact, an order given to facilitate a silent, surprise attack[6]. The downing of packs by the 'practical colonials' was,

[1] "Dawn of the Legend", *Australian War Memorial*, [accessed 29/09/13] <www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/dawn/spirit/>

[2] Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years; Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, p. 3.

[3] Opposition Leader, Andrew Fisher, while electioneering in 1914, famously declared that Australia would support Britain's war effort to "our last man and our last shilling". C.E.W. Bean, *ANZAC to Amiens,* p. 23.

[4] Source 3: An account of the landing by British war correspondent, Ellis, Ashmead Bartlett, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Saturday 8 May 1915 (available in the National Library's Trove service), [accessed 29/9/13] <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/15587076?searchTerm=&searchLimits=l-publictag=Ellis+Ashmead-Bartlett>

[5] Australia's official war correspondent, Charles Bean, observing the dawn landing from offshore, as Ashmead-Bartlett was, reports in his diary that outlines of men on the skyline confirmed the Australians had climbed the cliffs. Kevin Fewster, ed. *Bean's Gallipoli: the diaries of Australia's official war correspondent*, p. 76.

[6] Norman Harvey, Qld 9th Battalion, in his account explains that: "Orders had been given that no shots were to be fired until daylight." Extract reproduced in Patsy Adam-Smith, *The Anzacs,* p. 90.

likewise, a specific drill followed on disembarking[7]. Judging from individual soldiers' accounts preceding the landing, even the athletic scaling of the cliffs was just as likely the result of naïve inexperience and impatience to engage in a war game they feared might soon be over as it was of determined courage[8]. That the men did their best under appalling circumstances is clear but that they were driven by legendary courage and initiative is not so easily established.

Ashmead-Bartlett's motives for writing his exaggerated report become clearer when we take official censorship into account. The purpose of censorship was not only to keep confidential information from the enemy, but also to encourage Australian support for the war effort - which naturally meant omitting negative information and exaggerating positive events[9]. Given the volunteer status of Australia's troops and the alarmingly high casualties the war had already produced[10], encouraging widespread support for the war was a serious concern for the government in meeting its ongoing commitment to maintain five divisions at full strength. Glowing accounts of the brave ANZACs, like Ashmead-Bartlett's, became the ingredients for a major propaganda campaign, the success of which can be seen in the pattern of enlistment figures for the 1914-1918 period **(Source 5)**[11]. The spike in monthly enlistments from 5,000 in early April 1915 to over 35,000 in July that year, coincides directly with this wave of positive propaganda and illustrates the effect it had on the Australian population. As a British journalist, Ashmead-Bartlett would have understood that enlistments from Australia were also in Britain's interests, though 13 years later, having witnessed the carnage at Gallipoli and no longer restricted by the censor, he gave a much bleaker account of the dawn landing in his book *The Uncensored Dardanelles*[12].

For those who survived the landing, naïve enthusiasm began to turn to grim determination and feelings of fatalism, as Private Walker's letter of September 1915 **(Source 4)**[13] reveals. The struggle to reconcile the relentless duty, death toll and destructive reality faced each day ("one thinks … he wouldn't care if a bullet came his way")with the propaganda-fed expectations to uphold a proud reputation ("we are

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[7] Bean, *ANZAC to Amiens*, p. 85.

[8] Letters from soldiers waiting in Cairo and Lemnos show the impatience and naïve misapprehension regarding combat, with comments such as "at last the word came – we are going to have a fly at the Turks" and "now I am going to a place where monotony is unknown and a year seems like one crowded hour of glorious life". CSM G. S. Feist and Capt. W. M. F. Gamble. Extracts reproduced in Gammage, *The Broken Years*, p. 54.

[9] Bean, in his diary, discusses the pressure to report in a heroically exaggerated style and omit the negatives: "if you write that a man did his job people say: Oh, but there's nothing heroic in that! …There is horror and beastliness and cowardice and treachery, over … which the writer, anxious to please the public, has to throw his cloak…"Fewster, ed .*Bean's Gallipoli*, p. 205.

[10] By the end of 1914, 900,000 French and British soldiers were dead or wounded. "World War 1: An Overview", *NSW HSC Online*, [accessed 17/10/13] <http://hsc.csu.edu.au/modern_history/core_study/ww1/overview1914_18/page137.htm#anchor165302>

[11] Source 5: A graph showing enlistment figures for each year of the First World War, taken from the *Official Histories of the First World War, Volume XI, Australia during the war* by Ernest Scott viewed online, [accessed 29/9/13] <http://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first_world_war/AWMOHWW1/AIF/Vol11/>

[12] The 1915 report describes how coordinating the troops was "a tough proposition to tackle in the darkness, but those colonials were practical above all else and went about it in a practical way", while his 'uncensored' version tells of the "indescribable confusion" he encountered on the beach – the contrast shows how wilfully positive his earlier account was. Extract from *the Uncensored Dardanelles* reproduced in Patrick Carlyon, *The Gallipoli Story*, p.50.

[13] Source 4: Letter from Private Walker to parents of Corporal John Inglis Smith of the 6th Reinforcements, 15th Battalion. Viewed online, [accessed 29/9/13] <https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/PR-01323.pdf>

British and … must keep up heart…") is clearly apparent here. As was typical of such letters of consolation to a dead comrade's family, Walker is careful to stress that Corporal Smith died bravely, and makes several hopeful references to God and a proper burial, but omits any detail of the injuries that caused his death. Given the many graphic diary accounts of soldiers' deaths[14] and descriptions of decaying, unburied corpses [15] we begin to appreciate how self-censorship in letters like Walker's helped to reinforce unrealistic notions of the conflict for those at home.

That these home front notions affected the expectations of new recruits arriving on the Western Front in 1916 is clear from diaries entries of soldiers en route. Fear of failing the reputation of Gallipoli veterans was a preoccupation for many[16] and even hardened soldiers felt the pressure to live up to it[17]. However, in the entrenched, heavy artillery-dominated engagements of the Western Front, where small gains made one day were invariably lost the next, many, like Lieutenant Alec Raws **(Source 1)** felt their efforts were futile[18]. Raws' letter is unusual in its frankness regarding the horrors of the Front and even acknowledges the daring of its own candour: "It's horrible but why should you people at home not know?"[19]. The "practicality" of the ANZAC legend is evident here, not as resourceful enthusiasm but as grim pragmatism that reduces a man to scavenging clothing and equipment from the dead. This pragmatism took other, even less heroic forms – in many a soldier's hopes for a wound that would ship him off to hospital and safety, and, more darkly, in the callous resolve that enabled some Australians to shoot surrendering Germans rather accept the added risk and burden of managing prisoners[20]. Stripped of its romantic associations, this pragmatism manifested itself in other, less negative attitudes and behaviours. Enabled perhaps by the egalitarian structure of the AIF there was a somewhat relaxed relationship between officers and men that favoured mutual cooperation over hierarchical control. While the ANZAC legend appropriates this tendency and labels it "mateship", individual soldiers' accounts suggest a "mate" was whoever happened to be in your trench, and the high casualty rates forced a rapid turnover in such companions.[21] If soldiers looked out for each other it was for the practical reason that this aided their chances of survival and allowed them to get the job done, rather

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[14] From Private Jack Gammage's' diary, for example: "Their pleas for mercy were not heeded … some poor fellows lay for 30 hours waiting for help and many died waiting." and from Sergeant Cyril Lawrence: "Thank God that their loved ones cannot see them now." Extracts reproduced in Patrick Carlyon, *The Gallipoli Story*, pp. 105, 106.

[15] Opportunities to bury the dead were few and far between. Sergeant A.L. de Vine writes that: "it was impossible to avoid treading on them…there has been no attempt … to either remove or bury them". Extract reproduced in Gammage, *The Broken Years*, p. 83.

[16] Lance Corporal Douglas Horton noted the remark of a British soldier: "If you Anzacs can hold Pozieres we'll believe all we've heard about you". Extract reproduced in Scott Bennett *Pozieres: The ANZAC Story*, p. 21.

[17] Private Stan Stanfield wrote: "… don't forget the propaganda – we were brainwashed that we were so good that you had to be good. We were taught not to lay down, therefore we didn't lay down." Extract reproduced in Davidson, *Zero Hour*, p. 145.

[18] Transcription of a letter from Lieutenant Alec Raws to Mr Norman Bayles viewed online, [accessed 29/09/2013] <https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/2DRL0481.pdf>

[19] Raws was an ex- journalist with a reputation for speaking plainly about the atrocities of the war. Bennett, *Pozieres*, p. 124.

[20] Killing prisoners was illegal under international law but escorting them back through the lines could risk the lives of both prisoner and escort and sometimes Australian soldiers did shoot German prisoners. Bennett, *Pozieres*, p. 84.

[21] High casualty rates meant regular changes in the personnel of a fighting unit. Soldiers grieved the loss of a comrade but soon became friends with the next man they shared a dugout with – until he too died or went missing. Davidson, *Zero Hour*, p. 89.

than because they felt an abiding loyalty to their comrades[22]. For most "getting the job done", not through "legendary" determination, but with a fatalistic acceptance that there was no reasonable alternative, was the "story" of their war experience, as Charles Bean explained: "They felt themselves penned between two long blank walls reaching perpetually ahead of them, from which there was no turning and no escape, save that of death or of such wounds as would render them useless for further service."[23]

Australian soldiers fighting in World War One were, for the most part, ordinary men coping as best they could with a relentless job under horrific circumstances. The ideal of the heroic ANZAC, courageous, determined and resourceful, was consciously promoted, at home and to the troops abroad to encourage support for and enlistment in the war effort. The young nation, anxious to prove itself internationally, willingly adopted it. While Australian soldiers continued to cope with the increasingly heavy demands of the war as it progressed, pressure to "live" the legend affected their ability to communicate about their experiences and added to their disillusionment regarding their involvement in the war. For many returning soldiers the gulf between the legend and their own experiences added to their feelings of alienation after the war[24]. It was understandable, perhaps inevitable that Australia, in its debut on the world scene, should create and sustain a heroic legend. Ironically, the genuine though more modest story of the hundreds of thousands who fought and tens of thousands who died, of their desire to fight well and of their facility for pragmatism and cooperation, spoke more eloquently and inclusively of the obvious potential and democratic aspirations of their country than the legend ever would.

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[22] This attitude was evident in experienced soldiers' treatment of new recruits. Rather than befriend them, the veterans avoided the 'cleanskins' because associating with vulnerable newcomers increased their own chances of being killed. Davidson, *Zero Hour*, p. 71.

[23] Bean, *Official History*, II, p. 427 as reproduced in Gammage, *The Broken Years,* p. 80.

[24] Suicide, alcoholism and mental health issues were some of the symptoms of that alienation. Gammage, *The Broken Years,* p. 279. For others it was the stony silence whenever they were asked about the war. When VC recipient Corporal William Dunstan died in 1957 he had never spoken a word to his children about his war experiences. Patrick Carlyon*, The Gallipoli Story,* p. 109.

My mother remembers how when my own great-grandfather, Donald Isherwood, would sit for hours on the back veranda silently smoking, she and her sisters were instructed by my grandmother not to bother him as he was "thinking about the war."

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Source 3
"Mr Ashmead-Bartlett's story", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8th May 1915, p.13. Available in the National Library Trove Service, [accessed 29/09/2013] <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/15587076?searchTerm=&searchLimits=l-publictag=Ellis+Ashmead-Bartlett>

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Source 5
A graph showing enlistment figures for each year of the First World War, taken from the *Official Histories of the First World War, Volume XI, Australia during the war* by Ernest Scott viewed online, [accessed 29/09/2013] <http://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first_world_war/AWMOHWW1/AIF/Vol11/>

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