



THE SIMPSON PRIZE



SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 Students

2024 Winner | Queensland

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“Commemoration of the Anzac tradition has widespread support in Australia despite different historical interpretations and debates about the nature and significance of the Anzac legend.”

To what extent does your own research support this view?

Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April 1916: *“Australia’s great heart is throbbing today as it never throbbed before. For April 25 - ‘Anzac Day’ - is a day that will live in our hearts and in our history as long as Australia lasts.”*

The first commemoration of Anzac Day on the 25 of April 1916 marked the beginning of the Anzac tradition; a custom which has remained a significant part of Australian culture. The values of mateship, courage, loyalty and endurance displayed by the Anzacs in Gallipoli formed the foundation of the Australian nation and its identity. Despite this, in recent years, different interpretations and debates about the Gallipoli campaign and Anzac legend suggest that the Anzac tradition is not widely supported in Australia. Lack of relevance to contemporary Australians, militarism, historical inaccuracy about the Gallipoli campaign, and the diminishing number of living veterans have played a consequential role in the emergence of the detraction of support for the Anzac tradition in Australia. Nonetheless, it is imperative to recognise that whilst widespread support for the Anzac tradition is no longer existent, particular demographics within the Australian population continue to advocate the commemoration of Anzac.

The events of Gallipoli in 1915 defined the Australian national identity, yet, as time has progressed, aspects of the Anzac legend have become increasingly difficult for contemporary Australians to resonate with. On April 25 1915, the Allied forces landed on the Gallipoli peninsula, aiming to capture the Dardanelles strait from the Ottoman Army and gain power over the Black Sea. The campaign resulted in the loss of 8,709 Australians, 2,779 New Zealanders and was deemed a “failed military strategy”(National

Museum of Australia, 2022). However, accounts from various war correspondents, namely Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, emphasised the efforts of the Anzacs at Gallipoli. In his report of the Gallipoli landing, published May 8, 1915, Ashmead Bartlett writes that the Anzac soldiers “waited neither for the orders nor for the boats to reach the beach, but, springing out into the sea, they waded ashore, and forming some sort of a rough line, rushed straight on the flashes of the enemy’s rifles”(Ashmead Bartlett, 1920)(See Appendix A). The British correspondent’s glowing account of the soldiers bravery was a key influence in the emergence of the Anzac tradition in 1916 and by 1927, Anzac Day was observed as a public holiday in Australia. Moreover, the Anzac tradition’s support extended to foreign countries. A photograph of a wounded Australian soldier being carried to view the Anzac Day marches in London 1919 illustrates the significance and universal support of the Anzac tradition after World War 1 (See Appendix B). In spite of this, the Anzac legend is fundamentally a gendered narrative that portrays a white male as the “image of the ideal Australian type” (McDonald, 2017). Historian Matt McDonald from the University of Queensland believes that this “works against much of Australia’s contemporary (multicultural) population recognising themselves in this conception of what it means to be Australian” (McDonald, 2017). It is difficult for the range of ethnic groups within Australia to embrace a tradition that excludes their efforts in World War 1, thus, consequently deterring them from adopting the “Australian national identity,” and engaging in Anzac Day commemorations. Whilst the Anzac legend was once relevant to Australians, its lack of meaning for Australia’s diverse cultural demographic has impacted support of the Anzac tradition.

The reformation of Anzac Day by John Howard was a significant historical event, however, various historical debates have influenced the decline in support for the Anzac tradition in Australia. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, “the dominance of Anzac legend was being eroded” (Beaumont, 2013) within Australian society due to the use of selective conscription and anti-Vietnam War movements. The election of John Howard in 1996 signified the beginning of the transformation of the Anzac tradition and the diminishment of militarism in promoting the Anzac legend. Yet, historians have concurred that the Anzac tradition continues to glorify war and armed combat as a means of resolving disputes. The notable song, “And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda”, written by Australian singer, Eric Boyle in 1971, quotes: “And the young people ask, “What are they marching for? And I ask myself the same question”(Boyle, 1971). This suggests that slaughter is not worth commemorating, displays the universal unawareness of Anzac’s true importance, and illustrates how militarism is fused in the Anzac tradition. Additionally, an article written by Professor Romain Fathi at Flinders University examines the decrease in attendees at Anzac dawn services from 2015 to 2020 and illustrates how participation in Anzac services in Australian capital

cities, Gallipoli and Villers-Bretonneux has dropped between the ranges of 68% to 85%. The largest downturn in participants was at Gallipoli, with numbers falling from 10,000 in 2015, to 1,434 in 2019 (Fathi, 2021)(See Appendix C). Anzac is said to idolise the Gallipoli Campaign and overshadow other key events in Australian military history, in particular Kokoda, and numerous battles on the Western Front, these of which were decisive to the victories of World War 1 and World War 2. Australians were the executors of poorly planned British initiatives and although they had become their own nation 14 years prior, Australian soldiers were fighting in “defence of British - rather than Australian - interests”(National Museum of Australia, 2022). Moreover, Professor Joan Beaumont from the Australian National University states that only 275,000 Australians attended Anzac centenary dawn services, approximately a “fraction more than 1 percent of the Australian population”(McDonald, 2017). Hence, the significance of militarism in the Anzac legend, historical inaccuracies about the Gallipoli campaign and Anzac dawn service statistics make it evident that there is less universal embrace of Anzac tradition among the broader Australian population.

Select demographics continue to embody the Anzac values, however, as the number of living veterans diminish, it becomes challenging to comprehensively understand the experiences of the Anzacs. Those who have lived in periods of war, veterans and their families tend to be the primary supporters of the Anzac tradition in Australian contemporary society. Belinda Mackay, a 25 year old interviewed by the ABC, believes that “If you don’t have that family or close connection to what the Defence Force does in modern times, [Anzac Day] probably seems a little bit foreign or a little bit old school”(Nothling, 2019).

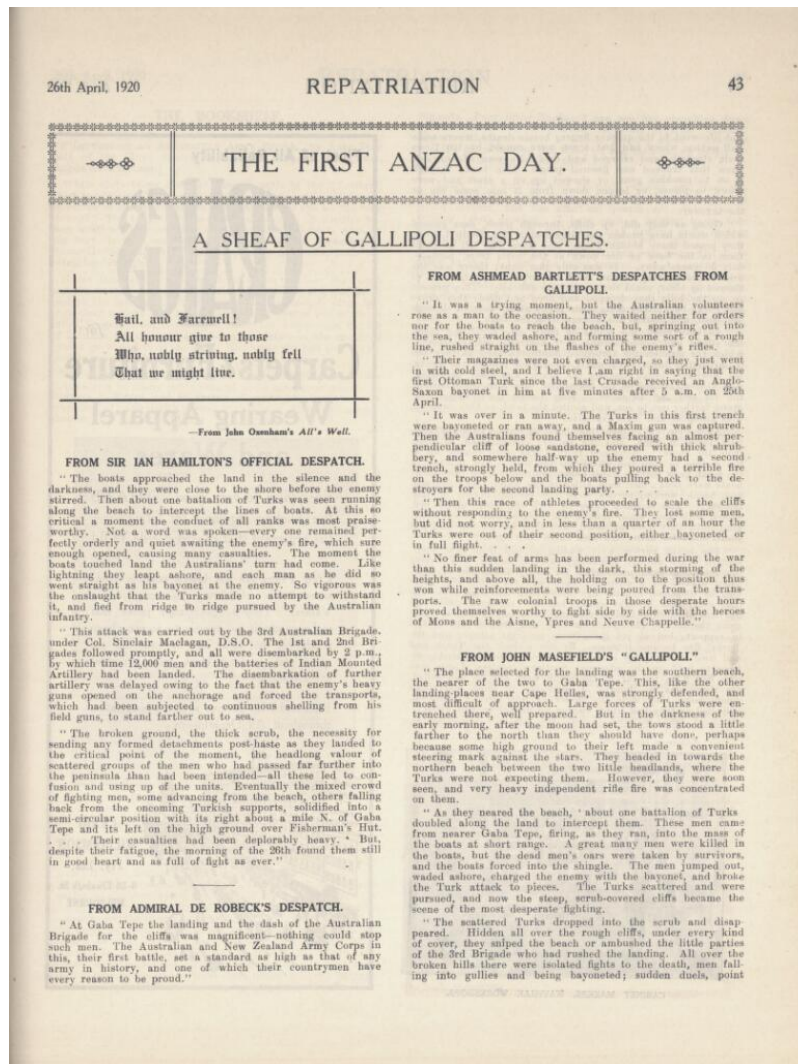
Since the end of the Vietnam War, 1975, fewer Australian troops have been required in conflicts, therefore, the number of living veterans embodying the Anzac Spirit has shrunk. Furthermore, Bogles’ “And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda” remarks on the decreasing number of war veterans: “[...] as year follows year, more old men disappear. Someday no one will march there at all”(Boyle, 1971). Hence, a pivotal question is posed: “When all of the veterans of a war are dead, who carries on their legacy and memories?”(Genius, 2014). This leads many to believe that support for the Anzac tradition will wane as the years go by and as immigration numbers increase, “the genealogical connection to the Anzacs [will become] more tenuous”(Fathi, 2021). Nevertheless, institutions such as the Australian War Memorial continue to encourage Australia’s population to embrace the Anzac tradition by holding the Last Post Ceremony daily. The ceremony concludes with Charles Bean’s well-known statement: “[...] Many a man lying out there at Pozieres or in the low scrub at Gallipoli, with his poor tired sense barely working through the fever of his brain, has thought in his last moments: ‘Well - well - it’s over; but in Australia they will be

proud of this” (Australian War Memorial, 2023), implying that the concept of Anzac is something that every Australian, regardless of race, gender or religion, can resonate with. Whether this ceremony has a significance for all individuals, and will continue to have regular attendance in the future is questionable. Nonetheless, the tireless efforts of Greek immigrant, Lambis Englezos, in discovering the mass graves of 250 lost Australian soldiers from Fromelles demonstrates that it is possible for those of differing ethnic groups to adopt the Anzac tradition. Anzac is a significant notion that remains supported by veterans and their families, but in truth, over recent years, the dwindling number of veterans has induced a lack of widespread support for the Anzac tradition.

The Anzac tradition has remained a hegemonic aspect of Australian culture that encourages Australians to commemorate the efforts of all Anzac soldiers and appreciate the efforts made to ensure protection of the Australian nation. The notion of Anzac has undergone extensive change over time in an attempt to become inclusive towards women, Indigenous and other ethnic groups. Moreover, there is no doubt that Anzac is embraced by veterans, their families and various historical institutions. However, the absence of relevance of the Anzac legend to modern Australians, militarism, historical inaccuracies relating to the Gallipoli campaign and a decrease in the number of living war veterans illustrates that the Anzac tradition is not widely supported in Australia. Therefore, one must consider, “[...] is the problem really the story of Gallipoli and the actions of the Anzac troops themselves, or is it the particular meaning given to these?” (McDonald, 2017). Ultimately, it is not the Anzac tradition itself that has led to its decline in support, but how society has chosen to interpret it.

Appendix A

Page 43 of the Repatriation Paper, Issue 26th April, 1920, describing Gallipoli despatches from the First Anzac Day



Ashmead Barlett, E. (1920). From Ashmead Bartlett's Despatches From Gallipoli. *Repatriation*, (Issue 26th April 1920), p. 43.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-7364673/view?sectionId=nla.obj-64362331&partId=nla.obj-7381025#page/n42/mode/1up>

Appendix B

Photograph of an Australian soldier, who had lost both his legs, being carried to Australia House in London, 1919 to obtain a position of vantage to view the Anzac Day March through the streets.



Anzac Day March, London 1919 [Photograph]. (1919). Australian War Memorial.
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C392771>

Appendix C

Statistics from Romain Fathi's, The Conversation Article, 'Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years. It's time to reinvent Anzac Day'

Number of attendees at Anzac dawn services

City	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015-2019
Canberra	120,000	55,000	38,000	38,000	35,000	only officials	-70%
Melbourne	85,000	45,000	30,000	35,000	25,000	only officials	-70%
Adelaide	20,000	10,000	5,000	6,000	5,000	cancelled	-75%
Perth	75,000	40,000	40,000	30,000	20,000	cancelled	-73%
Gallipoli	10,000	1,200	1,000	1,178	1,434	cancelled	-85%
Villers-Bretonneux	6,000	3,000	2,130	8,127	1,900	cancelled	-68%

Source: Author provided

Fathi, R. (2021, April 21). *Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years. It's time to reinvent Anzac Day*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/crowds-at-dawn-services-have-plummeted-in-recent-years-its-time-to-reinvent-anzac-day-157313>

Appendix D

Extract from the Australian War Memorial's Last Post Ceremony

As Charles Bean said, 'Many a man lying out there at Pozieres or in the low scrub at Gallipoli, with his poor tired senses barely working through the fever of his brain, has thought in his last moments: "Well – well – it's over; but in Australia they will be proud of this."'

This is the concluding statement of the Last Post Ceremony. The first Last Post Ceremony was held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra on 17 April 2013. The ceremony occurs 364 days a year. Each ceremony tells the story behind just one of the more than 103,000 names on the Roll of Honour bronze panels that line the walls of the Commemorative Area. It will take nearly 300 years to commemorate every person on the Roll of Honour.

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