



THE SIMPSON PRIZE



SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 Students

2024 Winner | South Australia

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SEYMOUR COLLEGE

“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.”

The Anzac landing on the Gallipoli peninsula during World War I (WWI) on April 25, 1915, brought many challenges, which the Anzacs faced with courage, endurance and mateship; known as the Anzac legend.^{1, 2, 3} The nature and significance of the legend is the commemoration and reflection of the Anzacs. There are interpretations and debates seeking to erode or downplay the nature and significance, for example, the legend represented a divided country. This essay will argue despite controversies about the significance of the Anzac legend to Australia, there has been widespread commemoration of Anzac traditions. Diverse support of the Anzac legend has allowed wider demographics to commemorate the legend. It is evident that the Anzac legend has remained incredibly relevant throughout Australia's history in how the nation persevered through natural disasters. Attendance at Anzac commemorations has strong support however, it is important to note over time, supporters have chosen varying events to attend. More recently, Anzac Day commemorations have been modified to remain relevant by commemorating other wars. The Anzac legend is widely commemorated in Australia and is significant in different ways to different people.

Anzac commemorations have been attended by more diverse population groups including Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians were first allowed to officially enlist in Australian defence forces in 1949, notwithstanding their involvement in WWI.⁴ Growing recognition for the contribution of Indigenous veterans culminated in 2017 when they were given the honour of leading the Anzac Day march in Canberra.⁵ Increasing support for

¹ Acton, C 2016, 'First Anzac Day', *Nma.gov.au*, viewed 25 October 2023, <<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/first-anzac-day>>.

² Genge 2015, *The Anzac legend*, Anzac Portal, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/personnel/anzac-legend#:~:text=The%20Anzacs%20on%20Gallipoli%20helped,courage>>.

³ *Australian Permanent Mission in 2022*, Embassy.gov.au, corporateName= Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, viewed 26 October 2023, <https://austria.embassy.gov.au/vien/AnzacDay_background.html>.

⁴ *Indigenous defence service | Australian War Memorial 2021*, Awm.gov.au, viewed 30 October 2023, <<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/indigenous#:~:text=Once%20the%20intense%20demands%20of,in%20which%20Australia%20has%20participated.>>>.

⁵ in 2017, 'Remarkable' Indigenous diggers take the lead on Anzac Day at last, NITV, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/remarkable-indigenous-diggers-take-the-lead-on-anzac-day-at-last/i4nvso9n3>>.

Indigenous Australian involvement encouraged more people to support the tradition, despite claims the legend is divisive.⁶ A commemorative window in Raukkan, South Australia, was erected to commemorate the Ngarrindjeri men who served in WWI, who were previously unrecognized for their involvement.⁷ However, it is argued, that a vast number of people still do not commemorate the tradition due to its exclusion of people from non-European backgrounds.⁸ A report by Belinda Lowe 2012 addresses Anzac Day structures “[reinforcing] war... not peace [and] [promoting] a white Australian identity rather than a multicultural one”.⁹ This statement fails to recognise efforts to increase the diversity of Anzac Day. The Australian War Memorial is researching the Indigenous people who served during wars and has been working to recognise their contributions.¹⁰ Past Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, stated in her 2012 Anzac Day speech at Gallipoli that “the legend of Anzac... belongs to every Australian.”¹¹ The message conveyed by the Prime Minister affirmed the Anzac legend applies to all Australians regardless of age, sex or ethnicity. Anzac commemorations have there for received more diverse supporters, as Australians recognise that the nature and significance of the legend is integral to the fabric of Australian society.

The nature of the Anzac spirit is widely recognised and seen amongst Australians when faced with hardship, specifically natural disasters. The attitudes of Australians when faced with adversity is representative of the Anzac's good spirit, demonstrated when they fought at Gallipoli. More than 100 years later, parts of Australia have been inspired by how the Anzacs were relentless in their efforts whilst showing great spirit. In 2015, a community in Northwest New South Wales experienced a prolonged drought and the people showed mateship,

⁶ ARPA: *Conscripting the Anzac myth to silence dissent* 2023, Australianreview.net, viewed 29 October 2023, <<http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2006/09/smitht.html>>.

⁷ *Photograph of the commemorative window in the village church at Raukkan, South Australia. This window was erected by local First Nations people in 1925 to commemorate the service of Ngarrindjeri men who served in the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War. (1925)* [image], accessed 25 October 2023. <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/simpson2024>

⁸ Anzac Diversity | Australian War Memorial 2020, Awm.gov.au, viewed 29 October 2023, <<https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/resources/anzac-diversity>>.

⁹ Lowe, B 2012, *The ANZAC day lie* - THE ETHICS CENTRE, THE ETHICS CENTRE -, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://ethics.org.au/the-anzac-lie/>>.

¹⁰ Indigenous service in Australia's armed forces in peace and war | Australian War Memorial 2022, Awm.gov.au, viewed 25 October 2023, <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/indigenous-service/report-executive-summary>.

¹¹ Gillard J (May 2012) *Dawn Service at Gallipoli* [video], Royal Australian Airforce, accessed 28 October 2023. Julia Gillard: 'So this is a place hallowed by sacrifice and loss', Anzac Day - 2012 — Speakola

endurance and perseverance, all components of the Anzac spirit.¹² Their community was inspired by the Anzac legend and parallels the relationship with the nature of the legend.¹³ There is international recognition of the Anzac legend, especially during the Australian bushfire efforts in 2020. New Zealand Salvation Army Officer, Gerry Walker said in an interview that “it’s that Anzac spirit. We’re mates and, when the chips are down, you’re there for us and we want to be there for you.”¹⁴ This further cements the idea that the Anzac spirit is incredibly relevant and is well recognised for its support. An article written by The Conversation in 2015, explored the idea that the Anzac legend is propaganda, promoting Australian nationalism.¹⁵ The author believed the Anzac legend is only relevant because it is used as a propaganda technique.¹⁶ This is not correct as there is evidence that the Anzac spirit existed during WWI. Further, in 2022 a Financial Review article written by geopolitical analyst Rory Medcalf, stated that based on prior experiences, “it is not so reasonable to assume that the story of Anzac Day is one all Australians can relate to readily”.¹⁷ Medcalf’s statement contains a flaw, as the significance of the Anzac legend is not limited to war experiences. The legend is about the ideals of persistence through tough times, which many people can relate to. The Anzac legend has become so much more than just about wars, it is about how people approach tough times and get through it as a team. The Anzac spirit is a big part of Anzac traditions and has ongoing and widespread support nationally as Australia persists through extreme challenges.

Anzac traditions have had an increase in popularity in Australia as the importance of the Anzac legend has become more influential. Anzac commemorations in Australia take place annually on the 25 April, and consist of dawn services followed by marches, sports games and

¹² Donoghue, J 2014, *The Anzac Myth and Australian National Identity*, E-International Relations, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/08/the-anzac-myth-and-australian-national-identity/>>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ ABC News 2015, ‘Anzac spirit in drought village in north west New South Wales - ABC News’, 30 April, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2015-04-30/anzac-spirit-in-a-drought-village/6424128>>.

¹⁵ Robertson, E 2015, *Why the Anzac legend has always been about branding*, The Conversation, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://theconversation.com/why-the-anzac-legend-has-always-been-about-branding-40300#:~:text=Yet%20the%20Anzac%20legend%20has,to%20modern%20Australian%20national%20identity>>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Medcalf, R 2022, *Rory Medcalf on why the ANZAC legend is not enough for multicultural Australia*, Australian Financial Review, Australian Financial Review, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/why-the-anzac-legend-is-not-enough-for-the-21st-century-20220421-p5af4n>>.

fairs.^{18,19,20} An investigation by Romain Fathi found attendance at dawn services dropped by around 70% in all Australian states and territories between 2015 and 2020.²¹ These statistics implied that dawn services are less relevant to the current population than 10-15 years ago. Those not attending the services believe it is wrong to glorify war and celebrate the soldiers' deaths.²² This is partially accurate, as the Anzac commemorations are also about honouring those who served, reuniting with friends and sharing experiences.²³ Although there has been declining attendance at formal Anzac commemorations, there was a noticeable increase in attendance at less formal commemorations such as sporting events. In 2023, the annual Australian Football League (AFL) Anzac Day round hosted 95,179 people, a new record.²⁴ This event included an army band performance, a motorcade with veterans, players wearing Anzac Guernsey's and a moment silence.²⁵ The increased attendance at the game indicates people want to take part in more contemporary Anzac commemorations, with the AFL being one of the most engaging and easy to attend Anzac Day events. An article published by The Conversation discussed Anzac Day dawn services declining in popularity.²⁶ One reason proposed was the Anzac legend is less relevant to the younger and more diverse populations in Australia. On the contrary, past Prime Minister Julia Gillard highlighted in an interview in

¹⁸ Genge 2019, *Anzac Day 25 April*, Anzac Portal, viewed 25 October 2023, <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/commemoration/days/anzac-day#:~:text=Australians%20commemorate%20Anzac%20Day%20on,are%20held%20around%20the%20country.>>.

¹⁹ *Anzac Day traditions and rituals: a quick guide* 2016, Aph.gov.au, viewed 25 October 2023, <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1617/Quick_Guides/TraditionsRituals>.

²⁰ Goodwin, S 2023, *NRL and AFL engulfed in Anzac Day debate over playing of Last Post*, Yahoo Sports, Yahoo Sport, viewed 25 October 2023, <<https://au.sports.yahoo.com/nrl-afl-engulfed-anzac-day-debate-playing-last-post-023435845.html>>.

²¹ Fathi, R 2021, *Crowds at dawn services have plummeted in recent years. It's time to reinvent Anzac Day*, The Conversation, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://theconversation.com/crowds-at-dawn-services-have-plummeted-in-recent-years-its-time-to-reinvent-anzac-day-157313>>

²² Coyne, J 2016, *Anzac Day: Why I won't go to the official dawn service any more*, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Sydney Morning Herald, viewed 25 October 2023, <<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/anzac-carnival-devalues-the-sacrifices-of-serving-veterans-20160420-goaww6.html>>.

²³ Anzac Day and the matter of meaning 2018, Lowyinstitute.org, viewed 29 October 2023, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/anzac-day-matter-meaning>>.

²⁴ Keating, M 2023, *2023 Anzac Day match posts record crowd*, Zero Hanger, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://www.zerohanger.com/2023-anzac-day-match-posts-record-crowd-136010/>>.

²⁵ *ANZAC Eve and ANZAC Day at the MCG* 2023, MCG.org.au, viewed 22 October 2023, <<https://mcg.org.au/whats-on/latest-news/2023/april/anzac-eve-and-anzac-day-at-the-mcg#:~:text=Melbourne%20hosts%20Richmond%20on%20ANZAC,the%20lighting%20of%20the%20cauldron>>.

²⁶ Fathi, op. cit.

2012, that “we see...kids who have insisted to their parents that they go to...Dawn Services”.²⁷ Julia Gillard saw that the Anzac legend has an intergenerational significance to people of all ages and appeals to them, contrasting the statement from *The Conversation*. The Anzac Day traditions of attending ceremonies and commemorations have changed in popularity, suggesting there is strong attendance, but not in the traditional methods.

Anzac traditions have evolved since the first commemoration in 1916, to stay relevant and ensure as many people as possible have the opportunity to support the legend. The first Anzac commemorations were established to recognise the symbolic landing at Gallipoli and its significance for Australia.²⁸ Following World War II, all Australian veterans were included in the commemorations.²⁹ By involving a broad range of people to support the Anzac traditions, more people of all ages are exposed to the Anzac traditions despite controversies about exclusion and national identity.³⁰ As Australia’s population expands, there are fewer people directly linked to WWI. Therefore, increasing the range of those involved in commemorations allows larger involvement and more opportunities to carry on the Anzac traditions and legend. In addition to this view, it allows more people to understand the true nature of the Anzac legend, and what it feels like to be a part of it. On the other hand, even though the commemorations are changing to be more inclusive, debates about the legend dividing Australia still exist.³¹ Consequently, the Anzac commemorations have been extended to reach and involve as many people as possible as fewer are involved with the defence force. The development of the Anzac traditions allowed a larger population to be involved, creating widespread support, and carrying on the importance of the Anzac legend.

²⁷ *Transcript 18534 | PM Transcripts* 2013, Pmc.gov.au, viewed 25 October 2023, <<https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-18534>>.

²⁸ Acton, op. cit.

²⁹ *The Anzac Day Tradition | Australian War Memorial* 2023, Awm.gov.au, viewed 28 October 2023, <<https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac-day/traditions#:~:text=Later%2C%20Anzac%20Day%20also%20served,which%20Australia%20has%20been%20involved.>>.

³⁰ *The ‘Anzac Legend’ and its influence on Australians* 2014, History Skills, viewed 28 October 2023, <<https://www.historyskills.com/classroom/year-9/anzac-legend/#:~:text=The%20Anzac%20Legend%20is%20a,courage%2C%20mateship%2C%20and%20sacrifice.>>.

³¹ Genge, op. cit.

The Anzac legend holds great significance to Australia culturally and has widespread commemoration despite debates about its polarising nature. The Anzac commemorations have had growing multicultural support, in particular from Indigenous Australians. The Anzac spirit has remained strong and has been used as inspiration for communities, as Australians were faced with natural disasters. Attendance at Anzac commemorations has grown, with more people being exposed to the Anzac traditions. Commemorations for Anzac Day have been developed to stay current and gain extensive support. The nature and significance of the Anzac legend is not without controversy, such as glorifying war and the inclusion of other cultures in commemorations. On the balance, however, it is still widely supported for its symbolism. The spirit of the Anzacs is a legend that will be treasured for all of Australia's history and passed through generations as Australians accept the nature of the legend.

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