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In 2005, Australia commemorates the 90th Anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign and the forging of the ANZAC tradition. What elements of the ANZAC tradition and spirit have remained constant in Australian society?

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The ANZAC spirit is unique, irreplaceable and centred around a struggle against all odds, against the world and against adversity. It embodies valour, eternal patriotism; willingness to sacrifice a soul for pride, mateship and the homeland. Unflinching in battle, the bravest of Australians forged the heart of the ANZAC spirit on the 25th April 1915, on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey. As stated by J.H.M , author of 'The Soul of Australia':

*'In the light of noon, in the bright sunlight,
They fought up the cliffs from height to height;
And the sun shone down on that scene of strife,
Where the 'Soul of Australia' came to life,
As the blood of Australian was shed on the sod,
For Australia, for Britain, Humanity, God.'*¹

Since this time the spirit has evolved, remaining constant in society in some shape and form. Overall, the quintessence of the ANZAC tradition is a formidable force, one to be reckoned with, and one which is eternal.

The tradition involves several elements, such as a desire to prove ourselves and display our abilities, a willingness to endure difficulty and never give in or complain, good humour (even in the most trying circumstances), a deep sense of mateship and loyalty, egalitarianism and refusal to blindly accept authority. Basic common sense, resourcefulness and immense courage also combine to maintain the tradition and spirit. There are a myriad of examples which communicate the continuity of many elements of the ANZAC tradition and spirit in Australian society.

¹ J.H.M, *'The Soul of Australia'*, The Brisbane Courier, April 25th 1916

We frequently see montages of athletes and sportspeople, fighting to prove their abilities. These people display several basic aspects of the ANZAC tradition. Sporting greats like Kieren Perkins and Cathy Freeman, as well as those not recognised, such as local football teams, willingly endure training, immersing enormous amounts of physical and mental effort into their sport. Teammates retain astounding mateship and loyalty to one another, treating each other equally and never giving in. These qualities epitomise the ANZAC tradition, upholding its noble features and unique stance.

The elements of the traditions are also maintained by many courageous travellers, who risk their own safety to honour fellow Australians, their equals, refusing to blindly accept authority in the process. Despite travel warnings regarding further terrorist attacks in Indonesia, more than 500 Australians travelled to Bali for the anniversary of the Kuta bombings. Even Prime Minister John Howard attended, showing the continuing egalitarian nature of Australian society and the desire to remain loyal to fellow Australians. Similarly, travel warnings and fears of terrorist attacks failed to deter travellers to Gallipoli for the 2004 Anzac Day Commemoration Ceremony. The sense of mateship among Australians has remained so binding that the number of Australian attendants actually increased from previous years, with many more young adults present. This has also been stated by Prime Minister Howard in his address during the ANZAC Day Parade in Canberra in 2003, where he acknowledged that *'the young of Australia in increasing numbers embrace the ANZAC tradition.'*²

Furthermore, courage, willingness to endure difficulties and a 'never say die' attitude are shown each year by the number of elderly veterans who brave the weather and march in ANZAC parades to honour their fallen soldiers and their country. Determination and the ANZAC spirit result in these brave soldiers exerting large amounts of physical energy and resilience to endure the marches – a strong indication of the elements of the tradition which have remained constant in Australian society.

Additionally, possibly Australia's best known song, and often referred to as the unofficial Australian Anthem, 'Waltzing Matilda' by Banjo Patterson, stirs some emotion in even the most blasé Australians. A refusal to blindly accept authority and even larrikinism has been clearly shown in recent times with the singing of 'Waltzing Matilda' at sporting events. In particular this can be seen in the Rugby World Cup of 2003, when the International Rugby Union Board (IRB) decided Australians were not permitted to sing the song during the competition matches, yet Australian supporters regularly broke out in spontaneous harmony with verses from the popular tune.

One of the most significant examples in society where elements of the ANZAC tradition and spirit have remained constant is in the work of the State Emergency Service (SES). A constant force of support, the SES has assisted victims of various natural disasters, such as cyclones, floods and bushfires. In the case of the 2001 bushfires, SES volunteers travelled across New South Wales to assist the Rural Fire Service battle the ferocious fires of Christmas Day; more than 450 volunteers assisted each day. They provided food and drinks to firefighters, staffed call centres, transported

² Australian Prime Minister John Howard, speaking at the ANZAC Day Parade, Canberra, 2003

equipment and assisted with evacuations, amongst other tasks. The work of the SES shows clearly that many elements, especially mateship, resourcefulness, resilience, egalitarianism and a willingness to endure difficulties, remain constant.

However, perhaps the best example of continuing ANZAC spirit and tradition in the community is in the Australian Defence Forces and RSL. The Retired Servicemen's League shows undying mateship to Australian soldiers and the community, treating everyone equally. It honours Australians for their courage and efforts for the nation, integral in ensuring elements of the ANZAC tradition remain in Australian society today and for years to come.

The armed forces embody many noble ANZAC qualities; they represent what it means to be Australian – showing the rest of the world our qualities and abilities. They also willingly endure hardship and risk their lives for their nation, never giving in. They maintain humour and confidence, equality, resourcefulness, courage and a deep sense of mateship. The current conflict in Iraq is a perfect example of the efforts of Australian soldiers and how they uphold the ANZAC tradition. Australian soldiers in the army, navy and air force have once again proven our power and reminded the world of our existence, position and beliefs.

One specific example from the Iraqi conflict occurred in November 2004. Nicknamed '*Captain Courageous*' by the Australian Media, Sydney soldier Scott Watkins personified the mateship, resourcefulness, courage and basic common sense elements of the ANZAC spirit, by saving the life of a British soldier. While on a mission over Iraq a British helicopter pilot was shot and as the Sydney Daily Telegraph reported: '*With his comrade badly injured, Captain Scott Watkins climbed into his seat and flew the aircraft back to base.*'³

Yet we must consider that the ANZAC tradition and spirit in society is not always upheld and that the ANZACS themselves had some less than favourable habits. Professor Manning Clark, in his opus, '*A History of Australia*', suggests the contrasting points of the ANZAC tradition. He communicates the brawling, drinking and fighting that was undertaken by some ANZACS in the training for the First World War and states that these elements too, while '*less than heroic*'⁴, are a part of the larrikin element of Australian behaviour and the ANZAC tradition.

In conclusion it is clear that terrorism, sporting competitions, natural disasters, Australian defence forces and RSL, along with current conflicts in the Middle East, display continuity of the soul and true spirit of Australia and Australian soldiers – courage, ingenuity in adversity, grace under pressure and overwhelming loyalty to our nation and its people.

³ C. Reid (Ed), *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 13/11/04, p1-2 '[*Captain Courageous*](#)'

⁴ M. Clark, '*A History of Australia*', Random House Group, Melbourne, 1995

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