

The Simpson Prize Competition

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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?'

In your response, refer to Gallipoli and at least one other event or time to support your argument.

Since the end of 1915, the deeds of the ANZACs on the Gallipoli Peninsula have been inscribed on the collective consciousness of the nation. The mad glory of the initial landing, the implacable ferocity of Lone Pine, the tennis court sized massacre at the Nek and the grim tenacity of Quinn's Post have all been established at the foremost of a litany of bravery and sacrifice. The neologism of 'ANZAC', the 'magic little word' as described by a journalist in 1916, had quickly implanted itself to a country desperate for proof of its nationhood fourteen years after Federation. The result is the creation of a legend – the traditions and spirit arisen from 'an intermingling of legends, deeds and national aspirations' (*Seal 2004*).

The ANZAC tradition is in fact a simple compilation of beliefs and mythology fostered through a nationwide fervour to affirm its existence and identity. It is an invented tradition; a deliberate ideological construction which operates predominantly with the accepted perceptions of a given time. The nature of the ideology itself is contradictory and thus inclusive – the larrikin behaviour of the 'Digger' is juxtaposed with the implicitly authoritarian and ceremonial usage of 'ANZAC'. This obscure definition allows for a much broader application of the word within today's political and social climate. From the Vietnam War to the 2000 Olympic Games to the American-led offensive in Iraq, the references to ANZAC have been repeatedly emphasized by politicians and the public alike. Therefore, it is impossible to establish the ANZAC tradition as a singular ideology comprising of set values – rather, it is a reflection of the esteemed values of Australian society, the high-lights of Australian achievement.

This open interpretation on what the ANZAC tradition entails arose out of an inability to maintain the strict, historical representation of ANZAC. Even in the 1920s, many were beginning to 'lose faith in that particular ideology and its ceremonial formalities' (*Seal 2004*). The imperial and religious rhetoric, the stereotyped image of the tall, tough, laconic, hard-drinking, hard-swearing, anti-authoritarian, manual labouring, itinerant white male soldier have alienated many within society. Following increased

immigration, recognition of Aboriginal rights, and more recently the spread of globalization, the stereotyped image of the Anglo-Celtic bushman can no longer apply for the increasingly diversified public.

The result is a changing view on the nature of the ANZAC tradition, both ceremonially and spiritually. Traditionally, ceremonial observances such as ANZAC Day have been constructed solely as rites of valorisation and of passage (*Falassi 1987*). The first official ANZAC Day on 25th April 1916 was marked by extensive ceremonies and services in Australia, a march through London, and a sports day in the Australian camp in Egypt. However, changing social values and the passing away of the last ANZAC veterans meant there was a need for an element of ANZAC Day that avoided the formalities – the pompousness and solely commemorative nature of the function. Increasingly, the emotional public rituals fostered through the personal understanding of the digger diminish as each succeeding generation struggles to identify itself with its history. In the 1980s, ANZAC Day became a public platform for lobby groups to make statements about war and society – gays, anti-nuclear and peace activists. The acknowledgement for the changing nature of the ANZAC ceremony came in 1996, with Prime Minister John Howard and New Zealand PM Jim Bolger suggesting that ANZAC Day have the additional function of celebrating nationhood.

The changing perception of the ANZAC tradition is further emphasized by the broadening of the spirit of ANZAC, the inherent qualities that define the Australian soldier and hero. Traditionally, as described by Beaumont in *Australia's War*, the ANZAC soldier is 'tough, ironic, stoical, sardonically humorous, the archetypal bushman' (*Beaumont 1995*). However, by the end of the war, the image of the ANZAC had already become an ideal – the image of perfection embodying all the admired qualities of society. Shown by L. Robson, the soldier of the legend 'showed up all other soldiers... to be lacking in initiative and go; they were rather undisciplined when that discipline was merely a formality, but really needed no controlling when it came to the deadly business of battle; they were a classless army...' (*Robson, McKernan & Browne 1988*). The ANZAC became the ultimate ideal of a soldier – exhibiting physical prowess, inexorable bravery and unanticipated resourcefulness.

In today's society, this aspect of the ANZAC tradition remains constant. ANZAC continues to symbolise the best of Australian ideology as opposed to any specific, singular attribute. Furthermore, present day 'ANZACs' are no longer confined to the image of the outback digger and the associated stereotypes of male-dominance and Anglo-Celtic background. Prime Minister Howard's move in 2001 to include 'mateship' in the Australian Oath of Allegiance arose out of the understanding that the ANZAC tradition is applicable to all aspects of the nation, regardless of background, ethnicity or religious association.

Some specific qualities of the original ANZAC have prevailed till today, most notably, the concepts of egalitarianism and mateship. The spirit of ANZAC – 'enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship

and endurance' (*Bean 1975*) – have also been attributed to Australian peace-keeping forces in East Timor. Lt General Peter Cosgrove AC MC, Commander of the International Forces in Timor, explained his belief in the ANZAC spirit – 'It's the innate Australian quality of wishing that everybody could get a fair go... I've seen these fine men and women... reach out a helping hand to Timorese of all ages and extend that hand of friendship with a smile – 'come on mate, I'll give you a hand' ' (*ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee 2004*). This perception of the ANZAC tradition is evidence to the vague usage of the concept. Friendliness with local inhabitants had never been a trait of the original ANZAC, notorious for their larrikin behaviour in Egypt – 'they burned the belongings of local people, brawled, got drunk and rioted' (*Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal 1997*). However, in the case of East Timor, the friendliness of the Australian troops is viewed by society as an admirable quality, deserving of the title 'ANZAC'.

The ANZAC tradition is not only evident in the military theatre of today, but also through the many individual communities contributing to the Australian well-being. Merry Makers Australia is a group of sixty performers ranging from five to fifty-five years old with a variety of intellectual and physical disabilities, mostly notably, Down Syndrome. Founded in 1978 by the late Rosemary Marriott AM, it provides song and dance classes free of charge. The group is a testimony to the ANZAC spirit, as recognized through its invitation to officially participate each year in the celebration of Australia Day as Ambassadors in New South Wales. The qualities of determination, mateship and sacrifice on the fields of Gallipoli are transposed into a charity organisation fighting against bodily discrimination.

It is impossible to define the exact elements of the ANZAC tradition that have remained constant in Australian society till today. The tradition itself is a creation of the collective national consciousness, born out of a desire to glorify and recognize the achievements of outstanding Australians. It comprises universally admired qualities such as loyalty which will continue to expand as the Australian identity expands. Developed from a set image of the Digger to an inclusive term of the general values of Australia, the ANZAC legend will continue to remain central to the Australian awareness and symbolise the utmost achievements of our citizens.

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