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Courage, mateship, determination, resourcefulness and a sense of humour are identified as characteristics of the Anzac tradition and spirit.

Select one or more of these characteristics (mateship) and explore it/their significance to Gallipoli and in more recent times.

The start of the twentieth century saw the rapid accumulation of an important cultural phenomenon that had since been embedded in the heart of the Australian identity. Mateship, the subtle connection between Australians of all races and cultures, is a concept emphasising the core values of devotion, loyalty and, above all, equality. It is a virtue, characterised by its undauntedness in adversity, and its influence extends to the daily lives of Australians today. As described by a citizen, “a spirit stronger than steel and lasts as long as life itself.”

Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Anzac Landing at Gallipoli, 1990, pg 23)

In reality, however, mateship is frankly an exaggerated, glorified perspective of the desperate bond between men faced with the horrors of World War One. The media, in the hysteria to create a sense of national identity and pride for the newly Federated country, and gain the resultant recognition of the world, enhanced and overrated the perception of a strong courageous Anzac risking his life for a companion. Though based on true and numerous incidents during the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign, for instance, John Simpson Kirkpatrick who used a donkey to rescue hundreds of wounded soldiers despite the dangerous conditions of no man’s land, preoccupation was with the glory and bravery exhibited by such Anzacs, overshadowing the fraught circumstances which drove soldiers to perform the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. These were ordinary men, scarred by the sight of over 2000 of their own injured or dead on the first day of the disastrous landing at Anzac Cove, who out of sheer love, an un-masculine term overlooked by the media, and inability to bear the grief of losing a dear friend, preferred “to be killed than leave them to die”, as one World War One soldier stated (*The Anzac Spirit*). The term ‘mateship’ was coined to add a distinctively authentic Australian flavour to describe what would otherwise be more suitably known as devotion and compassion.

Henceforth the significance of mateship as an egalitarian and national principal has been overrated with many Australian groups being excluded from this idea. An ethos of

brotherhood and masculinity, women were ostracised from involvement in the so-called national attribute, which realistically was no more inclusionary than sexism as pointed out by historian Phillip Knightley, “But – and there is no sense denying it – Australian mateship is mainly for men’ (*Knightley P, 2000*). By the term ‘men’, it referred to the rose-coloured image of an elite, strong, rebellious, hard-working, hard-living white male. Homosexuality was a sacrilege shunned by mateship, along with Aboriginals, migrants and other ‘coloured people’ – xenophobic attitudes reflective of the White Australia Policy.

This misleads society to believe that mateship is a ‘uniquely Australian’ virtue. In this modern era, the term mateship has become overwhelmingly fabricated with claims of ‘true Aussie spirit’ that one feels compelled to accept that such a quality is only meaningful and evident in the thresholds of the Australian culture. No Anzac commemoration neglects to endorse the ‘esprit de corps’ (*Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Anzac Landing at Gallipoli, 1990, pg 30*) that characterised Australian soldiers. Indeed nor has mateship failed to make its way into the NSW Stage 5 History Syllabus. Why Australians so eagerly claim the notion of mateship can be explained by the self-assurance created that sufficiently boosts Australia’s ego about her distinction above the rest of the world. Yet further observation of recent events reveals that mateship is not an exclusive Australian principle. September 11th 2001 highlighted the extraordinary bravery and comradeship exhibited by everyday Americans as they worked at great personal risks to rescue trapped people, and the 2004 Asian Tsunami disaster resulted in the unity of the Acehnese people as the tragedy re-ignited the campaign for peace. Mateship, it seems, belongs to the entire human race, not solely the Australian people.

However, this does not stop politicians using the supposed ‘sacred and Australian’ mateship like a weapon when pursuing political motives. They have cemented mateship so deeply within the conscious minds of the Australian public that it has manifested into a national creed where it is sacrilege to mock or question the relevance of it. Anyone against the idea of mateship is attacked for lack of patriotism. In fact, in August 2005, a ban on security guards using the word ‘mate’ resulted in a heated commotion. Politics is assassinating any sacred value left in mateship, with the attempts of politicians to associate themselves with the idea, especially evoking it to appeal to the public when Australian troops are due to participate in action. This is evident in Prime Minister John Howard’s 2003 Address to the Nation after the declaration of war on Iraq: “we should all extend to them [Middle Eastern people] the hand of

Australian mateship” (*Hon. J. Howard MP Address To The Nation, 2003*). By describing mateship as ‘Australian’ Howard subtly manoeuvres the virtue into an obligation of all Australian people, using national duty as an excuse for war.

In this sense, mateship is becoming increasingly materialistic. What in 1915 meant a beloved person whom one would die for, a modern day ‘mate’ has degraded in significance, implying anything from a close friend to an acquaintance. Nowadays, it is becoming more of the latter, with the common usage of the familiar greeting “G’day mate”. Mateship no longer incorporates the code of conduct amongst soldiers nor the self-sacrifice of the original Anzacs, but rather has disintegrated into an idle term, offering no greater sense of spiritual meaning than does ‘buddy’ or ‘chum’. The word has diverged from a deep to a shallow implication.

Moreover, mateship has become responsible for limiting Australia’s potential as a country. It is a burdensome obstacle to the rise of Australia due to its philosophy of ‘mutual aid and support’ (*Watson, 2005*) that conflicts directly with national aspirationalism. This frequently sees Australia in relationships where the other country benefits, often at Australia’s expense. Such an example would be Australia’s alleged alliance with America. In the true spirit of blindly “sticking to a mate no matter what they have done” (*Day, 2003*), Australia gladly lent her troops to America on the War On Iraq (2003), a failed military campaign lacking substantial evidence for the motive and has become an embarrassment for nations involved. This is despite a similar humiliation in the American-led Vietnam War, in which most of the European countries had held back. Yet no such display of devotion was returned by the Americans, as recently as 2003 when they contributed only limited help to Australian forces in East Timor. Australia could accomplish greater things if not for the unrequited chains of mateship that she willingly bounds herself.

Mateship today has become unrecognisable in the face of the original concept forged in the crucible of human misery and mortal destruction ninety years ago. Distorted and exaggerated by the media, mateship is increasingly less relevant in spiritual meaning to the modern Australian society, manifesting into an acquired sense of an exclusive obligatory dignity, to be exploited by politicians in this world of commercialisation and materialistic values. Mateship is eternally immutable but its elements are not – they have changed and will continue to change in significance to the Australian people.

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