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*“The young dead soldiers do not speak.
Nevertheless they are heard in the still hours
(Who has not heard them?)*

...
*They say,
Our deaths are not ours,
They are yours,
They will mean what you make them.*

...
*They say,
We leave you our deaths,
Give them their meaning.”* (MacLeish, 1969, p.64)

The spirit of the ANZAC legend was born in the cold pre dawn light on the forbidding and lonely shores of the Gallipoli Peninsula on the 25th April 1915. The heroic actions of those selfless Australian and New Zealand soldiers created the ANZAC legend - the characteristics of courage, mateship, determination, sense of humour and resourcefulness that bind this nation and inspire Australians to achieve impossible goals and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Today, we as Australians must be aware of the necessity to uphold these hallmarks of our national identity by not merely paying lip service to these ideals but by actively demonstrating these qualities in our everyday lives.

Across Australia between 1914 and 1918 over 400,000 men volunteered to join the Australian Imperial Force to help defend the British Empire. While this cast of thousands of brave young men are now all gone, their actions have made an indelible mark in the forging of our national identity. These original Anzacs, ordinary men such as Ted Smout, Eric Abrahams and Alec Campbell, endured the living hell of warfare. The characteristics displayed by these men are just as significant in today's world as they were during the horrors of the Great War. While the concept of the qualities necessary to the Anzac legend continues to evolve and incorporate new elements such as the role of women in wars, and the ideals of compassion and humaneness,

“Anzac stood and still stands for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance that will never own defeat” (King, 2003,p.1)

Originally based on the belief that these characteristics were those of the typical Australian bushman, the Anzac stereotype was idealized by reports from war correspondents such as C.W. Bean, Ashmead Bartlett and Compton McKenzie. This article was written for the first peace time celebration of Anzac Day: “...reckless and gallant in the spirit of their pioneer forebears...An army of warriors, these Anzacs, of, perhaps, the greatest physical perfection that the world has seen...these laughing paladins of the South... bloodied their maiden steel in one irresistible rush...with the dawn light in their resolute laughing eyes...” (Blair, 2001, p.172). While reports such as this created an impossible ideal, it must be remembered that it is the actions and deeds of the Anzacs themselves which forged the legend. C. W. Bean commented, *“What motive sustained them? ...It was in the mettle of the men themselves...to be the sort of man who would fail when the line, the whole force and the Allied cause required his endurance...that was the prospect that these men could not face.”* (Mason,1975, p.72)

What is inescapable is that the examples of courage, determination and resilience of those original Anzacs have become a benchmark for subsequent generations to emulate. Colonel Alexander White, wearing a locket with a picture of his wife and child, led his men into battle at The Nek. Fully knowing it was suicide he refused to let his men die without him. His bravery is as inspiring as that of Corporal Alfred Shout. One of seven Victoria Cross winners at the battle of Lone Pine, Shout maintained a barrage of hand thrown bombs at the enemy until both hands were blown off and his serious injuries proved fatal. The resourcefulness of W. C. Scurry, who created a time delay self firing mechanism on rifles, helped cover the evacuation of over 80,00 troops from Gallipoli. Capturing our irrepressible sense of humour, General Monash wrote of the successful evacuation after a doomed campaign *“a most brilliant conception... and*

will, I am sure, rank as the greatest joke in the whole range of military history." (Carlyon, 2003, p.162).

Actions such as these created the Anzac legend, not mere words.

There are critics who claim that Australians today have developed a cheerleader mentality to Anzac characteristics. A close look at the countless quiet achievers, working either as individuals or as part of a team, negates this concept and illustrates that Anzac characteristics are actively part of our modern day life. Our defence forces are respected throughout the world as professional, caring men and women who not only serve our country but also participate as peacekeepers to countries which have suffered the horrors of war or natural disasters. *"Of all the things a soldier may be asked to do, bringing peace to a troubled region is the most noble."* (Husband of Major Susan Felsche, killed in the Western Sahara. 21st June 1993). Over 35,000 peacekeepers have served in areas such as the Middle East, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, East Timor and Iraq. In my family we have two generations of peacekeepers, my father (Middle East), my uncle (Iraq) and my brother (East Timor), of whom I am very proud. This epitaph on a tombstone of an Australian soldier in one of the many war cemeteries in The Somme is just as relevant today as it was ninety one years ago. *"He was just an Australian soldier, one of God's bravest and best, he died the helpless to defend, an Australian soldier's noble end."* (Thomson, 1994, p.6)

Australians from every walk of life form a vast army of volunteers, helping organizations to provide help and support to their fellow Australians and the world community. The S.E.S and fire brigade volunteers responding to local, state or national emergencies, the medical aid teams working in the areas destroyed by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami and earthquake devastated Pakistan, doctors and nurses volunteering for duty in Third World countries, the blood donors at the Blood Bank and the hundreds and thousands of tireless workers for charities bear witness to the fact that the Anzac characteristics are quietly present in our everyday lives.

The actions of individuals today, not mere words, illustrate the significance of Anzac qualities in our lives. The determination of people such as Gerard Gossens who attempted the first ascent of Mt Everest by a blind man, the bravery and good humoured resilience of twelve year old Terry Vo who lost a foot and had both hands surgically reattached after a freak accident, and the resilience of the anonymous Melbourne medical student who worked in a morgue in Phuket after the tsunami to help families identify their dead, reflect the significance of the Anzac spirit today. *"I've also discovered that the spirit of Anzac lives on ... in all Australians and not just ones in uniform."* (Major General Peter Cosgrove, 2000.)

The increasing numbers participating in and observing Anzac Day is evidence that the significance of the Anzac spirit is a strong part of our national ethos. Far from extolling war, Anzac Day is a time to remember all the men and women who have selflessly contributed to the freedom of our nation. Eric Abrahams' comment that war is *"a waste of time – a shocking useless waste of time"* (The Courier Mail, 21st March 2003) reflects the feeling of all those who have been involved in conflicts. Anzac Day ceremonies attract an ever growing number of people who come to reflect and give thanks . We recognize that the courage, determination, mateship and resourcefulness these men and women possessed have been passed on to us to emulate. Today it is our actions, not just words, that will keep the significance of these Anzac characteristics alive.

Ninety one years ago the Anzac legend was born. The torch has been passed to succeeding generations who have emulated the spirit of those young Australians at Gallipoli. Today we hold the torch and what we give of ourselves to our local community, the nation and to the world will decide whether the Anzac legend will endure. With global terrorism posing a real

threat to our way of life and freedom, now more than ever, we need to look towards what we can achieve for the well being of all, not just the individual. We must not pay lip service to the memory of those brave young soldiers. Our actions must keep their memory alive. Otherwise, their deaths have been in vain. Lest we forget.

“We were young, they say,

We have died.

Remember us.” (MacLeish, 1969, p.64)

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