

RUNNER-UP — VICTORIA

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I am an Australian, and it is an important aspect of who I am and how I choose to live. We have so much freedom, and many more opportunities than other people. The freedom to openly practise a religion of our own choosing, to publicly state our point of view, and to access education that opens up so many doors which people in other countries do not have. Yet despite this, I find myself looking at Australia today and questioning whether we are as free as we think and as open-minded as we believe we are. I believe that all the freedom we have is often taken for granted by many, and in some cases, abused by a small minority in our Australian society. More recently I have felt that if our forefathers were to look at Australia today they would feel that their sacrifice at Gallipoli, and later the Western front, has been taken for granted.

When I consider the values and characteristics of the ANZACs, I find it quite difficult to compare the ANZAC spirit with the way that Australians conduct themselves as a nation today. Many things have changed. We live in a different cultural setting. In our multiculturalism the spirit of the ANZACs is, to me, often hard to see, and yet there are still some things that have been carried on through the generations.

The young men who were from a young country approached the prospect of war with mixed emotions. Not just eagerness to prove themselves, but also pride in representing and defending a country that was from a distant corner of the globe. Farm boys from closely-knot country towns, who were unsure if they would ever return home again, left their loved ones to fight in a land they knew nothing about. Men like those of the 1st AIF who fought to establish a beach hold from 25 April 1915 to 20 December 1915¹. It was as though they weren't just fighting for a foothold on a foreign land, but the very nature and role Australia would play in foreign affairs in the years to come. They were caught up in a bloody conflict that would shape Australia as a nation.

Imagine the prospect of war, a threat to your freedom, the safety of your family and the livelihood of your country. The ANZACs were human, and realised all of these things. They were young and not highly trained. Yet they mustered up courage and went to war, not knowing what to expect. Gallipoli, the Charge of the Light Horse at the Nek in 1915, is to me, a cornerstone of courage. Despite impossible odds and the likelihood of death, the 8th Light Horse 'went over the top' and was struck down in two successive waves². This would reoccur later on the Western Front, the ANZAC spirit was once again carried into the trenches at Fromelles, by the boys of the 5th Division AIF who were assigned the left flank of the Sugar Loaf³. According to the official Australian war historian Charles Bean, the sight of the Australian trenches on the morning of 20 July 1916 'packed with wounded and dying, was unexampled in the history of the AIF'⁴.

I can still see courage in our nation today, but perhaps for different reasons. Our military forces are now highly trained and have more knowledge of what to expect in a crisis. They have become unconsciously competent. The mateship and camaraderie which typified the ANZACs has given our forces international respect and formed strong alliances. Consequently, Australians know they are relatively safe. As the 'AIF was not just a regular army, but a force raised especially for overseas service'⁵, so too now do we rely upon another specialist force, the SAS. It is these men and women who now protect us in overseas deployment, protecting our freedom and way of life far from our shores.⁶

Even though the values of freedom, safety and quality of life from a simpler time still influence Australians today, other values such as respect for human life, caring for a

neighbour and true friendship are seemingly being swallowed up in a modernization and the materialism of today's culture.

The ANZACs showed enormous respect, not just for their fellow soldiers in their platoons, but also for the others on the opposing side. We need to learn this from them again and again. For, to me it seems that the amount of respect shown for others by Australians has disappeared and died on a beach in a Sydney suburb⁷. It seems quite ironic that a value that was born on a beach in a foreign land would give evidence of its death on native soil.

As Australians today how do we bring about a revival of ANZAC values? Think of something gruesome and frightening that you have to face day after day, only to find yourself getting weaker and your comrades falling down around you. The ANZACs were caught up in all the blood and nightmares of the battle fields. It is impossible for Australians today to understand how or why these men did what they did. I believe it was their determination to fight for what was right and their will to succeed. The ANZACs never forgot why they were there, and that they were protecting their loved ones back home. I can still see determination in Australians today. We are keen to keep our freedom and to encourage others during hard times. We are determined to stand by what we believe, even though this may mean standing alone.

ANZAC day is a day that we show our national pride and remembrance. But, the memories and values need to be taken beyond these days and embedded in our national identity, beyond the confines of the military. I see this in small country towns where everyone knows everybody. Those who know the raw emotion of war, of fighting for another's wellbeing, reinforces the significance and the contribution of the ANZACs to others in their community.

While the remembrance parades impress upon us the loss of life and the hardship of the diggers who lived through those years, they are also a celebration of what they did for us and for our own freedom. We need the marches, the laying of wreaths, but we should think how we can publicise the mateship and sacrifice of the ANZACs so that the legacy lives on in generations of Australians.

The way that the world views Australia has changed since the ANZACs taught us so many great values with courage, persistence and pride. We cannot live off their reputation. The *bugle* is calling us to examine ourselves, to rethink what is right and to put our whole heart and soul into living to uphold it.

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¹ Laffin, John 1982: *The Australian Army at War*, Osprey Publishing

³ French Embassy and Consulate General, http://www.ambafrance-au.org/article.php3?id_article=533

⁴ Ibid

⁵ *Australians on the Western Front*, Department of Veterans' Affairs, 2006

⁶ Department of Defence,
<http://www.defence.gov.au/media/download/2006/sep/socb060927/images/gallery/20060927/index.htm>

⁷ The 2005 Cronulla riots were a series of ethnically motivated mob confrontations, which originated in and around the beachfront suburb of Cronulla in Southern Sydney. The violence soon spread to other regions around Greater Sydney.