

WINNER — NEW SOUTH WALES

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‘But Anzac stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship, and endurance that will never own defeat.’¹

‘It is legend not of sweeping military victories so much a triumphs against the odds, of courage and ingenuity in adversity. It is legend of free and independent spirits whose discipline derived less from military formalities and customs than from the bonds of mateship and the demands of necessity. It is a democratic tradition, in which Australians have gone to war ever since.’²

Poorly trained and cared for, often very poorly led, he was unmilitary but exceedingly warlike. A citizen in arms, incurably individualistic even under the rod of discipline, combined frontier irreverence with the devout piety of an unsophisticated society; he was an arrant sentimentalist with a [tough] inner core... And when the faint hearts and the weaklings had been winnowed out he became one of the stoutest fighting men the world has ever seen.³

In all of these quotes, we see what we believe to be the true ANZAC spirit – what many believe to be the backbone of the Australian identity. Was this really, however, what the ANZACS were and are these values and behaviour present and relevant in today’s modern world?

The true ANZAC legend started at Gallipoli on April the 25th 1915, when the Anzacs landed at Anzac Cove. The legend was strengthened at the Western Front with magnificent successes and crushing defeats in France during 1918. Much of the legend of

¹ C.E.W Bean quoted in Dinkum Diggers

² Paul Keating quoted in Dinkum Diggers

³ Bruce Catton quoted in The ANZAC Experience

the ANZACS is based on the experiences of the first battalion of the AIF, with whom the famous and official war correspondent, Charles Bean travelled.

The idea of the ANZAC legend grew for many social and political reasons. Charles Bean saw his role as Australia's official war correspondent as to present '...the details as to the life, scenes, bearing of men, scenes that will swell Australian pride...which is what the nation I represent wants to hear.' This early spin doctoring of the true nature of war helped to create the ANZAC legend; the Australians back home only heard what they wanted to hear, that the ANZACs were brave strong men, better at fighting than men from any other nation. After the war, many men who fought were reticent to talk about their true experiences. AJ McGillivray illustrates this when he says: '...quite a few people didn't quite believe what we said, and from then on, unless we were amongst our own servicemen and that, many things were never related to others because of their attitude.'⁴ This reluctance to talk about ones true feelings still exists in Australia today and is also one of the contributing factors to Australia's high suicide rate in males.

The public pride encouraged by Bean back in Australia helped to keep Morale up, minimizing dissent at home while also keeping up a reasonable number of new recruits. In the same way, many of the qualities of the ANZACs are used today in modern politics to win over public support. One of the main qualities used by the government is the idea of mateship as a distinct part of the Australian identity.⁵ For example, John Howard recently considered the inclusion of the term mateship in a proposed preamble to the Australian Constitution. Similarly, the word 'un-Australian' has come to mean someone who does not subscribe to the ideals of the ANZACs, someone who is not loyal or brave, someone who does not believe in working together for the greater good of the country. In fact, un-Australian has come to be a term of abuse.

Not all Australian 'values' however, are admirable. Even in 1915 Charles Bean admitted: "I threw a cloak over 'the horror and beastliness, cowardice and treachery' of war."⁶ Our

⁴ AJ McGillivray quoted in ANZAC Memories

⁵ p.2 Dinkum Diggers

⁶ C.E.W Bean quoted in ANZAC Memories

soldiers were by no means angels, but that is not what the Australian public heard. The New Zealanders didn't approve of their behaviour either: 'These fellows have a tremendous hooligan element about them. The other day...a captain remonstrated with a soldier for molesting a native whereupon the whole crowd hooked him. Then another officer came to the rescue of the first and made an attempt to say something to them but the whole 'mob' again silenced him by counting him out in true ringside style.'⁷ To compare this to modern day Australia just recently there were the Cronulla riots, almost an exact clone of the past.

The ANZAC legend was obviously built around military experience. As Blair says in his Book *Dinkum Diggers*: 'Its approval of things of worth often revolves around acts of physical endeavour, violence, and comradeship peculiar to an extraordinary male world.' This masculinity still pervades many of our stereotypical Australian moments. The bloke farming against the odds in the outback, battling nature, the bronzed lifesaver protecting our beaches, and the Aussie larrikin standing around the barbeque with a beer in his hand, joking with his mates.

A central part of the ANZAC image was the egalitarian nature of the Australian armed forces. As one of the beginning quotes says: 'It is legend of free and independent spirits whose discipline derived less from military formalities and customs than from the bonds of mateship and the demands of necessity.'⁸ While much of this has been recognised as true, if you look closer at the major victories won by the Australian forces, you can see that they were all won when there was a clear chain of command and the officers in charge had much more experience. We like to believe now that we are egalitarian, just as we did in WWI, though still, just like in WWI we do not succeed when we do not have a predefined structure, a hierarchy which has control over decisions made for the public. Just like in WWI we think that we have more egalitarianism than we really do.

⁷ Lieutenant C.S. Algie, Auckland Infantry Battalion quoted in the ANZAC Experience

⁸ Paul Keating quoted in *Dinkum Diggers*

At Gallipoli, one of the greatest manoeuvres was surprisingly the retreat. Not one man was lost because of good old fashioned Australian resourcefulness and ingenuity. The ANZACS designed a plan which worked perfectly. This plan utilised automatic firing guns, a simple invention devised on the battlefield by Australians. They performed a magnificent decoy using fires and camps so that the Turkish troops didn't even notice the retreat. This Australian ingenuity can still be seen today. Many of the most simple but effective inventions on the market today have been designed in Australia. Even some of the most technologically amazing devices have been designed in Australia. The cochlear implant and artificial skin are two examples of Australian ingenuity which are giving people a whole new lease on life.

The sanitised version of the ANZAC experience was used to create the "Australian identity." Many of the ideals still prevail in modern life. Many of the more human failings of the diggers are also still present in our modern society. Much of the ANZAC experience was also the experience of young men fighting for a young country. The first two opening quotes were about the ANZACS, one written by Charles Bean at the time of WWI and one by Paul Keating at the entombment of the Unknown Soldier. The third quote however was written about the soldiers of the American Civil War. This shows how the experiences of war are amazingly similar all over the world, no matter what the identity of the people.