

WINNER — WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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'Consider what values and characteristics demonstrated by the ANZACs at Gallipoli and later reinforced at the Western Front, continue to influence Australians today.'

The characteristics and values displayed by the ANZACs during the First World War were the product of warfare, death and destruction—it is impossible for more than a shadow of these attributes to have filtered down into the comfortable and contented lives we lead now. The ANZAC Legend demonstrates the heights which the human character is able to attain when under pressure and threat—and while this potential may still reside within us, it will not manifest itself in the same way until it is necessary for it to do so. War is a terrible and shocking thing, and the characteristics which arose in the trenches of WW1 are, and can only be, incongruous with those displayed in everyday life, and even in modern warfare.

Probably the most celebrated trait associated with the ANZAC Legend is that of mateship. Comradeship was indeed crucial for survival on the battlefield, both in the physical and medical assistance given, and the emotional and mental support shared—to 'trust each other blind'.¹ It rendered the shell-shock, trench foot, frostbite, vermin, mustard gas, meagre rations and the surrounding rotting bodies of friends and allies more bearable. What is interesting about the development of this trait in modern Australia, however, is that the form has remained while the essence has often disappeared. Whether at work or amongst friends, men will punctuate their sentences with 'maaaate...', now nothing more than an empty term of address. They will drink beer and kick around a football in accordance with the rituals of mateship, but they do not offer each other the true aid and assistance that was found on the battlefield, where men would literally risk their lives for each other—in

fact, it could rather be said that men today tend to be detached and unfeeling if one amongst them is in need of any emotional support or compassion. Mateship, moreover, is a concept that excludes women—'There is no sense denying it—Australian mateship is mainly for men. It was—and is—difficult to be mates with a woman'² —as well as with those from different ethnic backgrounds. Mateship, instead of being an inclusive and egalitarian relationship to help others in need, has merely become another social nicety which discriminates and excludes.

'In battle they were schoolboys, youthful, happy, and I admired them for their boyishness.'³ Larrikinism is both one of the most defining and appealing traits associated with the ANZACs. We easily forgive our Aussie Battlers their minor foibles (graffitiing the pyramids of Egypt; having the highest rate of venereal disease of any Allied force), and look upon them leniently as the natural excesses of a group of young men under pressure.

Yet, this September, when a video was published on YouTube featuring an Australian soldier in Baghdad pointing a gun to the head of a man dressed in Arab clothing (not to mention the display of pornographic pin-ups tacked to the wall behind the man holding the gun), the reaction was one of outrage and condemnation. The soldiers' antics were denounced by Time Magazine as 'serious wrongdoing'⁴ (and similarly by the Australian press) and have even been compared to the events at Abu Ghraib. This is exactly the same kind of lightheaded and irresponsible behaviour valorised under the ANZAC Legend. It is clear that while the behaviour of soldiers has not changed much, our reactions have become drastically less tolerant and infused with political correctness.

During the First World War, Australia's involvement was due largely to her loyalty to Britain—she was not under attack herself, and joined purely from a sense of duty to the Empire. Australians had a fervent devotion to the Mother Country, and the soon-to-be Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, promised their support 'To the last man and the last shilling'.⁵ Indeed, almost a tenth of the entire population (including women, children, the aged and disabled) enlisted. This loyalty has since been transferred to America.

America has replaced Britain as the greatest world power and most useful ally, and we now blindly follow her into wars, just as we formerly did the British. In order to form this new allegiance, however, we were necessarily disloyal to Britain, breaking our strong alliance and spurning her protection once she had economically crippled herself over the two world wars. Thus while we still cleave to more powerful nations, this 'loyalty' is now shown to be transitory—and dependant upon the economic and military ability of the country to retain it.

Another consideration must be the disparity between the ANZAC Legend and the actual events which took place at Gallipoli and at the Western Front. Most of the war correspondence was written by non-fighting personnel who had a distinct interest in portraying the soldiers as heroes. So many families had suffered a death, or many deaths, that it was a consolation to think that their boys had died heroically defending the Mother Country—moreover asserting Australia's strength as new nation. 'There has been no finer feat in this war'⁶—so insisted Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, regarding what would ordinarily be considered a bloody and horrific disaster. Such was the glamourisation of Gallipoli. However, the experience was drastically different for those personally involved in the war—in the words of an Australian nurse, 'One loses sight of all the honour and the glory in the work we are doing.'⁷ That the

ANZACs displayed bravery and heroism on the battlefield is undoubtable—but the shining image of the Aussie Battler that has been passed down to us is in many ways a shameless propounding of 'The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori'.⁸

This Remembrance Day, I was involved in a service at my school for Australian nurses who had died during the war. The service was quite beautiful—odes were read, music was played, poppies were worn and rosemary was deposited on gravestones. It struck me as rather like a funeral—the war killed many heroic men and women, but the end of the war killed the heroism.

Bravery is a trait that shines through only in desperate circumstances, and it is impossible for somebody standing quietly at a memorial sporting poppies to understand the daily horror that the nurses would have faced. We are reminded of the soldiers and their feats in battle, 'Lest we forget'—but in fact, we have never known and could never have known more than a shadow of the horror and heroism surrounding the war.

We retain the forms of the ANZAC characteristics, but the desperate necessity which underlay them in the past has all but disappeared. The ANZACs at Gallipoli had a real fear for their lives, and this could not have done otherwise than to have wrought enormous changes in the national character—Gallipoli is often referred to as our 'Baptism of Fire'⁹ for this reason. While the outward ideology can be transferred to times of peace, the desperation and passion cannot be. They can only remind us of our heritage, and let us know what we are capable of if such a major feat is ever again needed of us.

Bibliography:

Books:

Arthur, M. 2002, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, Ebury Press.

A collection of eyewitness accounts of those involved in the war—some shocking and moving descriptions. While covering the whole of the First World War, it includes five soldiers' first-hand accounts of their various experiences at Gallipoli.

Bean, C.E.W. 1991, first published 1948, *Gallipoli Mission*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Charles Bean, the Australian Official War Correspondent, revisits Gallipoli four years after the event, to investigate the truths of the situation and find out more about the events surrounding the Gallipoli campaign.

Broadbent, H. 2005, *Gallipoli: The Fatal Shore*, Viking.

This book covers many aspects of the Gallipoli campaign, with a final chapter on the influence the events have had up until today. The book is beautifully illustrated with paintings, photographs, propaganda and maps relating to the war and the soldiers.

Carlyon, L. 2001, *Gallipoli*, Pan Macmillan Australia.

A detailed account of the Gallipoli campaign, including several interesting and useful quotations.

Facey, A.B. 1981, *A Fortunate Life*, Penguin Books.

Albert Facey's biography contains his experiences of the war as a young man—from his original excitement at the thought of travelling the world, to the hard shock of reality when deposited at ANZAC Cove amidst the fire of the Turkish soldiers. His unprepared confusion upon going to war for the first time, and the gradual hardening experience, was probably representative of many of the younger soldiers fighting at Gallipoli.

Sontag, S. 2003, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Penguin Books.

Although not focused on the ANZAC involvement, this book discusses some of the pointless horrors of the First World War and examines the way we react to others' pain and suffering.

Ward, R. 1958, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press.

Although dealing with the Australian Legend pre-World War 1, this book gives information regarding the background of the national character, and therefore assists in illustrating how the Legend changed from gold-digger days to Gallipoli.

Welborn, S. 1982, *Bush Heroes*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

An account of the Western Australian contribution to the war, this book portrays the experience at Gallipoli and at the Western Front as the culmination of the national characteristics embedded in the Australian Legend as a consequence of the hard life in the bush.

Films:

Brothers in Arms (video recording), 1998, Chris Masters, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Eighty years after the war, a documentary on the Australian involvement with interviews with veterans and historians.

Gallipoli—The Front Line Experience (video recording), 2006, Tolga Ornek, Roadshow.

A portrayal of the lives and experiences of ordinary soldiers on the front line during the Gallipoli Campaign.

Articles:

Callinan, R. 18/9/06, Digger's Web, TIME Magazine website, available at <http://www.time.com/time/pacific/magazine/article/0,13673,503060925-1536301,00.html>, accessed 10/11/06.

An example of the reactions to the September YouTube scandal involving Australian soldiers in Baghdad. A serious condemnation of the soldiers involved.

Poems:

Binyon, L. 1914, 'For the Fallen', The Times, 21 September 1914, available at <http://www.firstworldwar.com/poetsandprose/index.htm>, accessed 10/11/06.

The Ode would hardly seem to need explanation— it is a memorable and beautiful tribute to the eternity and immutability of what the soldiers accomplished during the war.

Owen, W. 'Dulce et Decorum Est', available at <http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/>, accessed 12/11/06.

Owen's moving poem illustrates the disparity between the horrified and desperate viewpoint of the soldier and the energetic and ignorant valorisation of the events from those back home. It is a convincing and powerful condemnation of those who, knowing nothing of the matter, take it upon themselves to speak of the glory of war to an innocent younger generation. Finally, it offers a lasting and memorable image of the violent and painful death of a friend, and gives a glimpse of the sickening horror that such events held for those who experienced them.

Websites:

Duffy, M. 2002, Who's Who: Andrew Fisher, available at http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/fisher_andrew.htm, accessed 26/11/06.

A brief biography of the wartime Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher.

Mateship, Author unknown, available at <http://www.australianbeers.com/culture/mateship.htm>, accessed 10/11/06.

An interesting look at mateship from a variety of perspectives, accompanied by quotations from various sources.

A Place in the World—Culture: Imperial Ties and World War One, Author Unknown, available at www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep5/ep5_culture.htm, accessed 26/11/06.

A brief collection of contemporary quotations on Australia's involvement in WW1 and the birth of the national consciousness.

Stephens, T. 25/6/05, Blood, Guts, and the Stuff of Legend, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/blood-guts-and-the-stuff-of-legend/2005/06/25/1119321912142.html>, accessed 10/11/06.

A discussion on the Australian Legend and the birth of Australia's national consciousness through the events at Gallipoli.

Visit Gallipoli, Author unknown, available at <http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/>, accessed 10/11/06.

An informative and accessible site, with some particularly moving accounts of the wartime situation from nurses, disillusioned as to the glory of war in the face of trying to save as many lives as possible while running often overcrowded, understaffed and primitive hospitals.

Other:

Bean, C. 1915, 'The First Report', reprinted from Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. 39, 17 May 1915, available at <http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/1landing/bean.html>, accessed 10/11/06.

These, and the reports of Ellis Ashmead Bartlett below, illustrate aspects of the formation of the ANZAC legend at the hands of journalists and war correspondents, giving some of the shining examples of mateship and valour that have now come to symbolise the soldiers.

Bartlett, E. A. 1915, 'The first report in Australia of the Landing at Gallipoli', Reprinted from Hobart Mercury 12 May 1915, available at <http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/1landing/bartlett.html>, accessed 10/11/06.