



The

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Simpson

year 9 and 10 students

Prize

**2009 runner-up
Queensland**

**Daniel d'Hotman
St Augustine's College**

World War I had a devastating effect on Australian society. Why should we commemorate our participation in this conflict?

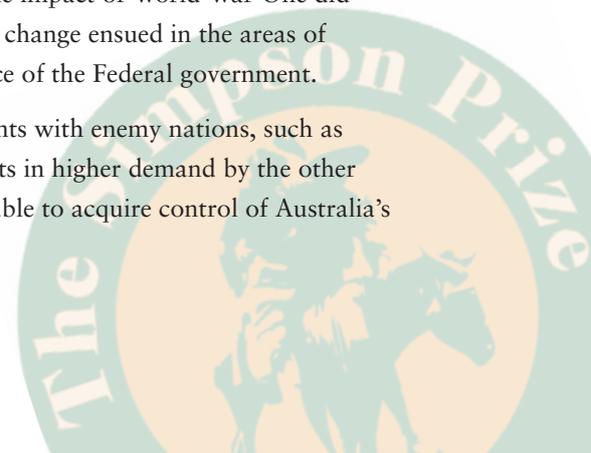
by Daniel d'Hotman, St Augustine's College

When the ANZACS landed at Gallipoli on a dreary morning in April 1915, to the harsh Turkish hospitality of machine gun fire and artillery rounds, none of those young men was aware of the legend that they were about to create. Their bravery and endurance in the face of overwhelming odds, became a legend not only in Australia, but throughout the world. Today, ANZAC Day is one of the most important, spiritual and solemn days of the year for Australians and New Zealanders. Referring to Gallipoli, Paul Keating recently stated that, "it is utter and complete nonsense to suggest that the nation was born again or even redeemed there." (Wikipedia, 2008) Many Australians would disagree. Australia's participation in the First World War and Gallipoli in particular, had a profound effect on Australian society. It scarred and shaped our nation and in the process altered what it meant to be Australian. The courage of the ANZAC soldiers helped to galvanise the nation and forge the character, culture and national identity by which Australia is recognised today.

The enormous impact of World War One upon Australia cannot be overestimated. The loss of life was both shocking and sorrowful. It is estimated that about 14 percent of the male population, or about half of the eligible men of Australia enlisted. Of those, about 155,000 were wounded and 62,000 were killed in all services. These casualties represent 65% of all soldiers who embarked; a higher percentage than any other nation that fought during the Great War (ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee, 1998). The number of casualties was so great, that it was not uncommon for every family in a town to lose at least one relative. Almost every community around Australia suffered. The bereaved families who lost sons, fathers and husbands found it hard to recover, both emotionally and financially, as the gruelling years of depression followed. These families were victims themselves and their sacrifice was their loss.

A generation of young Australians was decimated, but the impact of World War One did not end with this tragic loss of life. Economic and social change ensued in the areas of industry and export, female involvement and the influence of the Federal government.

Due to the allied countries cancellation of trade agreements with enemy nations, such as Austria and Germany, Australia found many of its exports in higher demand by the other allied nations. By enacting specific laws, the Senate was able to acquire control of Australia's

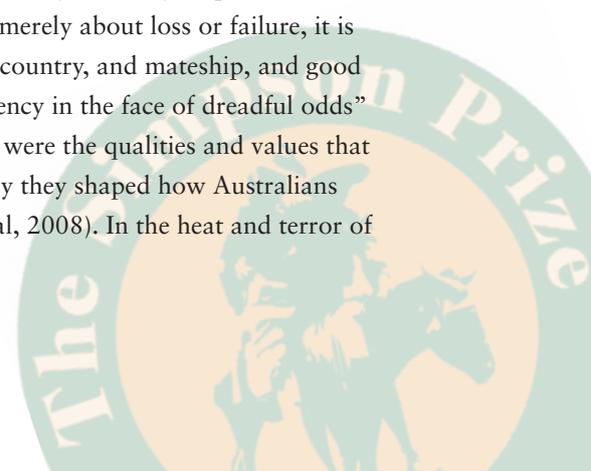


industry and commodities, thus ensuring maximum products reached England at sub economic prices. Resultant shortages, higher prices of Australian products and a decline in imports, contributed to many Australians being unable to afford basic necessities (Australian Commemoration Committee, 2001). Strikes in many major cities followed, as Australians at home reacted to the suffering and inequality of war. Some people profited from the war, while the majority suffered economic hardship. By the end of 1918, Australia was exporting over 400 new products as entrepreneurs seized the opportunities presented (ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee, 2001). Many established Australian industries such as wool, wheat and meat grew more prosperous due to reduced overseas competition. These sectors would help to pull Australia out of the Great Depression 20 years later.

Due to the dearth of young men back home, the role of women in the workforce became vitally important. The involvement of women rose 13% during the war years and led to the establishment of groups such as the Australian Red Cross and the Women's Peace Army (ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee, 2001). This was despite resistance from trade unions and the government to the increased involvement of women, in what was seen as a man's domain. Although women did not yet have the vote, the actions of brave women during World War One, ultimately led to universal suffrage and the women's rights movement.

Australia had not had a war of Independence or a Revolution to forge its character. The First World War was that forge. Australians began to think of themselves as Australians, rather than as members of individual squabbling states. Their strong emotional ties to Britain and their sense of adventure took them to war, but, by the time the war ended, the child had become a man, and the Australians were fighting for Australia. ANZAC forces gained the respect of the international community and as the ANZAC legend grew, a national identity began to emerge. No longer was Australia merely a collection of bickering states or a colony of Britain, but a proud and unified country.

The ANZAC legend defines what it means to be Australian. It has come to embody our national values. In the words of historian Manning Clark, "it is about something too deep for words" (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2005). On October 31st 2008, Paul Keating said, "The truth is that Gallipoli was shocking for us. Dragged into service by the imperial government in an ill conceived and poorly executed campaign, we were cut to ribbons and dispatched" (The Age, October 31st 2008). What he said was true, but on ANZAC day, as Australians recall the tragedy of that ill-fated campaign, they celebrate the values and mateship which made the ANZAC name great. When ANZAC Day ceremonies take place all over Australia, the nation honours the sacrifices made by brave young soldiers, the Aussie spirit that they represented, and the national identity that they helped to mould. In the words of Sir William Deane, "ANZAC Day is not merely about loss or failure, it is about the courage, and endurance, and duty, and love of country, and mateship, and good humour and the survival of a sense of self worth and decency in the face of dreadful odds" (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2005). These were the qualities and values that the ANZACS displayed on foreign battlefields. In this way they shaped how Australians view both their past and future (Australian War Memorial, 2008). In the heat and terror of



battle, they showed the true Aussie spirit: for this they deserve our respect, they deserve our honour, they deserve to be commemorated.

World War One had such an impact on the Australian people that it cannot be described in words. British General Sir Ian Hamilton demonstrated its everlasting effect by saying, “Before the war, who had ever heard of ANZAC. Hereafter, who will ever forget it?” (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2005) Australia may have been formed in 1901, but it was born in 1915, on the rocky ridges of Gallipoli and in the trenches of the Western Front. The ANZACS gave us a legend, something to be proud of, something to remember, something to commemorate. That legend defines who Australians really are. What that legend means to us can never be explained or totally understood, but by assembling at dawn on the 25th of April each year, by listening to the haunting solemnity of the last post, by hearing the stories from veteran soldiers and by placing flowers on the graves of unnamed soldiers, we are honouring their memory, recognising their sacrifice and embracing what it truly means to be Australian.

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