



World War I

The Anzac Legend

Transcript

Narrator: The Anzac legend, born on the shores of Gallipoli in the early stages of World War I, has become such a key part of the Australian national identity. How have Anzac commemorations changed over time and what does the Anzac spirit mean to Australians today? The Gallipoli campaign was seen by some as the young Australian nation's first test, as well as an opportunity for the nation to come of age.

Ross McMullin: It was this sentiment, relatively widely-held yearning, for Australia to establish itself on the world stage.

Narrator: When the first news reached Australia, it was from British war correspondent Ashmead Bartlett. His praise for how superbly the Australians had done at the landing was warmly received.

Ross McMullin: There's a strong strand of relief that we have performed okay; spokesman from the British mother country saying that we did well, phew! Yeah, there's relief about that.

Paul Daley: Australia was a small part of an invading force on that finger of the Ottoman Empire. Eight-and-a-half thousand Australians were killed there over a nine month period. Really, it was the first time that the federated states had gone into battle in the one uniform, so it was really seized upon as a national moment, particularly by the politicians. I mean, it was a great tragedy, and I think we forget that sometimes. I think sometimes Gallipoli is portrayed as some sort of victory for Australia. Well, it certainly wasn't. I mean, the Australians were involved in a ten month stalemate.

In the end, they ended up retreating. This was a British loss. It was a big loss of Australian lives too: eight-and-a-half thousand Australians died there. But in the scheme of things, it was at the beginning of the war, and there were another four years to follow, and many more Australians died in other places. There were bigger tragedies.

Narrator: Anzac commemorations are held at dawn on the 25th of April to mark the moment when the ANZACs landed at Gallipoli Beach. First commemorated in 1916, Anzac commemorations have changed significantly over the years.





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Paul Daley: I think in the 20s and 30s, it wasn't a huge public deal. It was a thing for the Diggers, as they were called. Some decided to do it to get together with their mates, others steadfastly stayed away from it. And I think throughout the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s, it was reasonably low-key. You might get a couple of thousand people at the Australian War Memorial, perhaps a few hundred at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne.

Lucy Saaroni: During the Vietnam War, Anzac Day was actually a day where people came and protested, so it was used as a platform to protest war.

Ross McMullin: The significance of Anzac Day has altered over time, to some extent. There was a widespread expectation during the 1970s that 'Anzac' might even die out as a thing in Australia. It's experienced this great revival since. It's had its ups and downs over the journey.

Paul Daley: In the 1980s, Peter Weir's magnificent movie 'Gallipoli' really introduced a whole generation of Australians – my generation, and perhaps yours, too – to the story of what happened at Gallipoli and the tragedy of it. A lot of historians worked on that movie. Popular media started talking a lot more about Gallipoli and there were a lot of World War I veterans who were still alive at that point, and it coincided with Bob Hawke taking the veterans back to Gallipoli for – I think it was the 75th anniversary. Suddenly, the story of Gallipoli was really at the forefront of Australia's consciousness once more.

Narrator: As we have seen, the way a nation reflects upon its key historical events changes over time. What is the significance of the Anzac commemoration for Australians today?

Lucy Saaroni: The Anzac spirit is commemorated formally for us on Anzac Day, so that's a time when we stop and reflect on the courage, the discipline and the self-sacrifice of our past and current serving personnel. I think for me, it's taken on a much deeper meaning since I've served on operations.

Man 1: It's just a very important day. We're just so thankful for all these guys, what they did for us.





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- Woman 1: I guess because my husband's in the army, it means a lot because he served overseas. And also, my grandfather and my great-grandfather were also serving members of the army.
- Boy: I think that it's a good way to remember all the soldiers that fought in the war and risked their lives for us to be here today.
- Cadet: I feel like commemoration is more about not forgetting those who lived and served and died for you and for the peace that you have and what you have. And to me that commemoration is just making sure that you don't forget them, forget their sacrifice.
- Woman 2: Just how lucky we are that we live in a relatively free place without war.
- Lucy Saaroni: Having a day like Anzac Day, which is a day that's public for everybody to stop and remember: it's a really important thing for us because we can't do the work we do without the support of the public.
- Man 2: Just to remember those that died and those that fought, and also wars do not accomplish anything.
- Narrator: The military defeat at Gallipoli has forged something Australians often refer to as the Anzac spirit. What is meant by this?
- Lucy Saaroni: For me, the Anzac spirit is really a set of values and behaviours that were, I suppose, represented by Australian and New Zealand soldiers in the First World War. And those values included things like courage, teamwork or mateship, friendship, humour, initiative or innovation and pragmatism. We in the Australian Defence Force, certainly in the Australian Army, we try and maintain that legacy, and we see that in the way that we train our soldiers and officers. We see that in the types of people that we seek to come into our organisation.
- Ross McMullin: It is true that traditions of endurance and resourcefulness and the like, comradeship, were displayed at Gallipoli, and they were eulogised at the time but regarded highly since. Now, if that's what the Anzac spirit is, well, yeah, that certainly began at Gallipoli.

Some nations would say, 'Well, our soldiers weren't too bad either.' Is comradeship a uniquely Australian thing? Well, perhaps not.





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Man 2: The Anzac spirit is trying to keep this alive, get more and more people involved as some of the older ones pass on. It's trying to keep the spirit alive with the young ones and hopefully there's no more wars. So that's also part of commemorating, I feel.

Woman 3: Being part of your community and taking, extending that further into the wider world and representing your country and doing good for others.

Guide Leader: I think Anzac spirit really is about mateship. It's about teamwork. It's about representing your country but supporting all your fellow comrades, and just being kind and loving to all. That's what it is.

Paul Daley: I believe that 'Anzac' is a really important part of the Australian story, but I think it's been disproportionately clung to and I think there's a couple of reasons for that.

Narrator: Prior to the outbreak of World War I, the young nation of Australia was a world leader in socially progressive initiatives, including women's suffrage and workers' rights. While the White Australia Policy ran counter to this, in many respects Australia was the envy of the democratic world.

Ross McMullin: There may be a view that if our historic traditions looked back to that, as well as the Anzac spirit, so-called, then that might've shaped our history differently and perhaps that might have been a better thing. Who knows?

Paul Daley: I think it is valued institutionally enormously. So, we have the Australian War Memorial, which is dedicated to preserving what they call the Anzac spirit. If you listen to the director of the War Memorial, Brendan Nelson, he will tell you that it is the most important place in Australia. It is Australia's shrine, really. Politicians are very deferential to the notion of the Anzac spirit. Indeed, on the opening of every parliamentary year, not only do they go to a church service, but they now go to the Australian War Memorial to pay tribute to those they call the fallen. So I think in Australian political, cultural consciousness, 'Anzac' has a terribly revered place.

Ross McMullin: Where that'll go in the future, who knows? That's for future generations to determine.

