



“REMEMBERING WITH ADVANTAGES”: THE MEMORY OF THE GREAT WAR IN AUSTRALIA

«Recordar con ventajas»: la memoria de la Gran Guerra en Australia

Carolyn Holbrook

Monash University
Faculty of Arts

E-mail: Carolyn.Holbrook@monash.edu



Autor

Australian memory of the Great War has always been expressed most enthusiastically in the rituals of Anzac Day: an occasion that recognises the anniversary of the Australians' first battle of the war in Turkey on 25 April 1915. In the decades after 1914–1918, the devastating effects of the war were assuaged in part by the pride that Australians felt in the fighting reputation of their soldiers. By the 1960s the rituals of Anzac were in noticeable decline. Young Australians were hostile to the values of the Great War generation and believed that the commemorative practices of Anzac Day glorified war. Despite the widespread belief that Anzac Day would die with the last of the old veterans, it has staged a remarkable resurgence. This can be explained by the remaking of the Anzac legend, from a myth anchored in British race patriotism and martial nationalism to one that speaks in the modern idiom of trauma, suffering and empathy. What remains of the original Anzac legend is the belief commonly held by contemporary Australians that their national consciousness was born at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.



Abstract

Australian war memory; Anzac Day; Anzac legend; martial nationalism; trauma.

Memoria de la Guerra australiana; día de Anzac; leyenda de Anzac; nacionalismo marcial; trauma.



Key words

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Fechas

La memoria australiana de la Gran Guerra siempre se ha expresado de modo más efusivo en los ritos del día de Anzac: un acontecimiento que reconoce el aniversario de participación en la primera batalla en la Guerra de los australianos en Turquía, el 25 de abril de 1915. En las décadas tras los años 1914-1918, los efectos devastadores de la Guerra se apaciguaron en parte gracias al orgullo que los australianos sentían en la reputación de sus soldados como combatientes. En la década de



Resumen

1960 los ritos de Anzac estaban en un declive palpable. Los australianos jóvenes eran reacios a los valores de la generación de la Gran Guerra y creían que las prácticas conmemorativas del día de Anzac glorificaban la Guerra. A pesar de la creencia generalizada de que el día de Anzac moriría junto al último de los veteranos, este ha resurgido de modo notable. Este hecho se puede explicar por la reconstrucción de la leyenda de Anzac, que ha evolucionado desde el mito anclado en el patriotismo racial británico y el nacionalismo marcial hacia uno que habla en el idioma moderno del trauma, el sufrimiento y la empatía. Lo que permanece de la leyenda original de Anzac es la creencia sostenida de modo global por los australianos contemporáneos de que su conciencia nacional nació en Gallipoli, el 25 de abril de 1915.

“How long will Anzac Day keep going?” asked a columnist in the *Canberra Times* newspaper in April 1986. “I’m pleased to see that we’re still having Easter once a year... and I’d like to think that Anzac Day could last as long. But you and I know that’s not possible” (Haupt, 1986, p. 48).¹ Lamentations such as this about the inevitable extinction of Australia’s premier occasion of Great War remembrance, Anzac Day, were commonly heard in the 1970s and 1980s. That Anzac Day not only defied predictions of its demise but has also become such a powerful symbol of national identity in contemporary Australian society has sent historians scurrying for explanations.

There are many ways in which to measure Australians’ appetite for Great War commemoration, including their penchant for battlefield tourism. The site of the Anzacs’ first battle of the Great War on the Dardanelles Peninsula has become a major tourist destination, particularly for young, back-packing Australians. On the occasion of the dawn service each Anzac Day up to 10,000 Australian “pilgrims” crowd around Anzac Cove, many of them visibly moved by the ritual.² The Western Front, on which Australia lost 40,000 of a total of 60,000 men killed, has also become a popular destination for travellers in recent years. Since 2008 a dawn service has been held each Anzac Day at Villers-Bretonneux in Picardy, France, where Australians resisted a German attack in April 1918.

Sport seems to have a particular affiliation with the Anzac tradition. In 2001 the Australian cricket team travelled to Gallipoli, where players re-enacted a match played by the soldiers on Shell Green and learned about the place “where the spirit of Australia really came from”, in the words of the team’s captain Steve Waugh (2012). The hugely popular “Anzac Day clash” between the Collingwood and Essendon Australian Football League clubs, devised in 1995, honours the soldiers with a minute’s silence and a rendition of the “Last Post”. The Anzac Medal is awarded to the player who “best embodies the Anzac spirit”. The Collingwood coach, Mick Malthouse, famously criticised his team for letting “down the Anzacs” when they lost the match in 2009 (Clark, 2009).

Perhaps the most telling measure of Australians’ attachment to the memory of the Great War is pecuniary. The Australian national government is spending more than any other nation on

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1 Anzac is an acronym, first coined in early 1915, which stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

2 For a history of Australian battlefield pilgrimage, see Scates (2006) and Lloyd (1998). For a critique of Australian battlefield tourism, see Ward and McKenna (2007).

commemorating the centenary of the First World War, including those countries that were major combatants. The AUD\$145 million allocated by the Commonwealth will be augmented by another \$80 million from the states and territories. The private sector will contribute as much as \$170 million more through the Anzac Centenary Public Fund. The \$145 million that will be spent by the Australian government compares with \$90 million provided each by France and the United Kingdom, while the German government has allocated just \$7 million.

How do we account for the extraordinary currency of Great War memory in contemporary Australia, especially given that the Anzac legend was widely believed to be in terminal decline thirty years ago? Historians have offered various explanations, from the absence of suitable alternative nationalist myths to the role of government propagandising, and the ability of war memory to graft itself to the current predilection for tales of trauma and suffering. Before I scrutinise these explanations more closely I will outline briefly the history of Great War memory in Australia.

Australia was a newly established nation of less than five million people at the outbreak of war in 1914. Its six colonies had federated as recently as 1901 and the young nation had established a reputation internationally for its progressive social welfare measures and industrial arbitration system. Although it was an independent nation, Australia's foreign policy was determined by Britain and a great proportion of its population still thought of Britain as "home". Like many other nations in the early twentieth century, Australia subscribed to the ideology of martial nationalism, which purported that war was the truest test of nationhood; thus Australia's official status as a nation would not be ratified psychologically until "her" men had been blooded in war. This muscular nationalism was given legitimacy by social Darwinism, which concocted a hierarchy of races in which the fittest and most morally courageous sat at the apex. The competitive ethos of such a concept raised a vital but vexed question for a colonial settler society such as Australia: how would the "mighty [British] race" fare "beneath bright and unclouded skies":

[Would it maintain] the determination, self-reliance, energy, and enterprise... that had been the guarantee of England's greatness... [Or w]ould Australians beneath the fatal influence of a warm but enervating climate degenerate into a weak, lazy, and inferior race of men, unfit to be classed amongst the world's great peoples? ("Our national character: The influence of climate", 1898, p. 11).

The question was especially pertinent for a country that was founded as a penal colony.

Australians responded with enthusiasm to Britain's declaration of war against Germany in August 1914: war would provide them with the opportunity to test their racial mettle against that of other nations. There was unqualified bipartisan political support for the decision to commit Australian troops to the Allied war effort and no shortage initially of volunteers. The dawn landing of Australian troops at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 as part of an Allied plan to force Turkey out of the war was sufficient for Australians to consider themselves to have passed the "transcendent test" of battle (Bean, p. vi). The British journalist, Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, celebrated the qualities of the Anzacs with extravagant phrases that rang loudly in Australian ears.³ His description of this "race of athletes" who had proved themselves "worthy to fight side by side with the heroes of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres, and Neuve Chapelle" (Bartlett, p. 19) was

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3 See K. Fewster (1982) for further information.

all the more significant because its author was an Englishman. Despite the reticence of the Australian Defence Minister, George Pearce, who thought that a later battle might prove to be “more worthy of remembering”, the failure of the Dardanelles campaign and the evacuation of Allied troops in December 1915 proved to be no barrier to what the historian Marilyn Lake described as the “new awakening of Australian national consciousness” (Pearce, p. 191). The nationalist boon that Australians derived from the First World War went some way to making its devastating effects more bearable. In all, 60,000 Australians were killed and 160,000 of the 330,000 soldiers who served overseas were listed officially as wounded.

Australian memory of the Great War has always evinced distinctive characteristics. By the 1920s, remembrance had coalesced decisively around Anzac Day, which marked the anniversary of the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915; an occasion on which the nation both mourned its dead and celebrated its martial baptism. The date had been gazetted as a public holiday in all Australian states by 1927, and the word “Anzac” had been protected against arbitrary commercial use as early as 1921. Australians’ preference for 25 April was in contrast to that of countries such as Britain, France, the United States and Canada, whose commemorative rituals revolved around the anniversary of the end of the war each November.

Ernest Scott was the first to write the history of Australians in the Great War. Scott was an Englishman who had risen from lowly beginnings to become the inaugural professor of history at the University of Melbourne.⁴ Along the path from Fabianism and theosophy to liberalism, he had become an ardent advocate of the British imperial project. His *Short History of Australia*, first published in 1916, eschewed the nationalist rhetoric that had pervaded the press and thrilled the public after the Gallipoli landing. In Scott’s imagining, Australia was a dutiful member of the Empire, whose interest in defeating Germany and its allies could not be distinguished from that of Great Britain. The Anzacs’ splendid military endeavours in Turkey had proved them worthy members of the British race rather than a distinctively Australian offspring of the mother race. Gallipoli comprised a dramatic episode in the history of “imperial relations”, rather than a watershed moment in the making of the Australian nation. So removed from public sentiment was Scott’s imperial interpretation of the Great War that it was, however, quickly forgotten.

The official Australian historian of the war, Charles Bean, was also a devoted imperialist. Yet under his editorship the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918* (1921–1942) presented a very different interpretation of the Australian experience from that suggested by Scott.⁵ Bean had been developing a thesis of Australian distinctiveness during his travels as a journalist through rural New South Wales during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁶ Imbued with the racial philosophy of social Darwinism, he came to believe that the British race was evolving in a distinctive way in its Australian setting. The demands of the rural environment were producing a man who was suspicious of authority, resourceful, independent and loyal to his “mates” beyond all others. This Australian type responded magnificently when faced with the ultimate test of manhood: the test of war. Bean’s account of the Australian experience of the

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4 See Macintyre (1994).

5 For a discussion of Bean’s role in creating the Anzac legend, see Thomson (1989, pp. 462–478).

6 See Bean (1910, 1911, 1913).

war was aligned with that held by a majority of the public, who remained steadfast to Britain but took immense pride in their own soldiers' fighting skill.

While Bean's *Official History*, along with public ceremonies of mourning and commemoration, dominated Great War remembrance in the first decades after the war, the Australian academy remained mostly silent. Scott's colleagues in the history departments of the six Australian universities showed no inclination to scrutinise the conflict. Military history was not considered a suitable subject for academic historians, no matter that Bean's *magnum opus* had covered the subject in depth. More surprising was that the official historian's thesis regarding the realisation of an Australian national consciousness was neither countered nor seconded by academic historians: it was ignored. The identity of the "Independent Australian Briton", famously described in Professor Keith Hancock's *Australia* (1930), did not derive from events on the Dardanelles Peninsula in April 1915.

The silence of academic historians matched that of former soldiers in the years following the Great War. While veterans determined the form of commemorative ceremonies, mostly through their membership of returned soldiers' organisations, there existed a broadly felt desire to forget about the war and to "get on with life". This reticence was put aside briefly in the early 1930s by a number of former soldiers who published books about their wartime experience. The boom in Australian war books followed a few years behind that begun in Europe, with publications such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That* (1929). While a dominant theme of the best-selling European books was disillusionment and futility, the most popular Australian war novels and memoirs were those in which the tragedy and brutality of the war were redeemed by the nobility of the soldiers and the cause for which they fought.⁷ A catastrophe for which veterans like Remarque and Graves could find no redemptive purpose was replete with meaning to Australian authors such as Williams (1933, 1935) and Jim Maxwell (1932). Experience may have tempered their martial nationalist rhetoric, but the tragedy of the war was ameliorated by the righteousness of its cause. Those Australian soldiers who wrote sensitive and disillusioned books about their war experience failed to find a readership.⁸

The international peace and pacifist movements of the inter-war years were legacies of the Great War, just as the chest-beating martial nationalism of the pre-war period was a casualty of it. The unanticipated destruction of the "war to end wars" lent credence to Marxist analysis, which argued that the proletariat had been sent to die for the profit of its capitalist masters. The collapse of international investment, trade and finance between 1929 and 1931, and the rise of fascist regimes in Spain, Germany and Italy, gave further impetus to Marxist ideology. When war came again in 1939, young Australian radicals fought willingly in the belief that the defeat of fascism was the prelude to the establishment of a new social order. A group of intellectuals that was born between the wars and served in the Second World War established a school of historiography that became prominent in Australia in the decades after 1945. Historians such as Russel Ward, Ian Turner and Geoffrey Serle sought to challenge the orthodox interpretation of Australian history that regarded Britain as a benevolent colonial power.⁹ According to their

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7 For a discussion of British war literature, see Bracco (1993). For an analysis of Australian war literature, see Holbrook (2014, pp. 213-231) and Spittel (2007, pp. 121-139).

8 See, for example, Mann (1932) and Spittel, (2011, pp. 187-220).

9 See Turner (1965, 1968), Ward (1958, 1973) and Serle (1982).

socialist philosophy, these scholars contended that the working class embodied an authentic and radical Australian nationalism which was thwarted by bourgeois Australians and Britons who sought, for their own material benefit, to maintain a rigid class structure and a dependent relationship with Britain.

The Great War made an awkward fit for such radical nationalism. Not only did notions of a martial baptism seem irrelevant but also, as Ken Inglis argued in the mid-1960s, the conflict demonstrated that the characteristics of the iconographic working-class Australian male — larrikinism, anti-authoritarianism, mateship, independence, practicality — did not necessarily chime with political radicalism or anti-British sentiment.¹⁰ Eventually, after searching for lessons about working conditions and industrial strife, the radical nationalists came to see the First World War as the wrecker of the progressive zeal of Australian inter-war governments.¹¹ According to this analysis, the conservatives demonised the Labor Party by associating it with Communism and hostility to the cause of the war, which doomed it to opposition until 1929. Furthermore, the conservatives took advantage of Labor's incapacitation by gaining a stranglehold on Anzac commemoration that the left was never able to break.

By the 1960s, when Inglis (1965) began raising questions about the meaning of the rituals of Anzac Day, those rituals were in noticeable decline. The “diggers” (as the Australian soldiers were known), most of whom were born in the last decade of the previous century, were dying away. The generation born in the decades after the Second World War was willing to challenge the social and moral values of their parents and grandparents. On Anzac eve in 1958 an article appeared in the Sydney University newspaper, *Honi Soit*, which described the events of 25 April 1915 as: “a rather speculative and routine beach landing”, which has spawned “a festival of hero-adulation unequalled anywhere in the world”.¹² The writer noted that returned soldiers who attended the dawn service on Anzac Day “did not feel obliged to continue their weeping in the afternoon and headed with as much reverence towards the racecourses as they did towards the memorials”.¹³ The article was condemned by ex-servicemen's associations and the Chancellor of Sydney University, but it had struck a generational nerve.

The article in *Honi Soit* inspired Alan Seymour to write his famous play, *The One Day of the Year* (1958), which crystallised in highly controversial fashion the baby boomers' critique of the values of their parents and grandparents. To the play's protagonist, the university student Hughie Cook, old diggers like his father, Alf, were not deserving of respect, let alone adulation (p. 77). Hughie was ashamed of Alf's xenophobic philistinism and questioned his adherence to the legend of Anzac: “Do you know what that Gallipoli campaign meant? Bugger all... A face-saving device. An expensive shambles. The biggest fiasco of the war” (p. 79). The occasion on which, according to Alf, Australia became a nation was in Hughie's eyes a day of “bloody wastefulness” perpetuated year after year by a “screaming tribe of great, stupid, drunken, vicious, *bigoted* no-hopers” (pp. 80, 86). Alf felt equally bewildered by his son, describing him as a “jumped up little twerp”, who was filling his head with fancy ideas at university (p. 80). The play was banned from the Adelaide Festival in 1960, following the objection of board members,

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10 See Inglis (1965, pp. 25-44).

11 See R. Ward (1977, 1988), Turner (1974) and Serle (1965).

12 See “Morbid joy claim on Anzac day”, *Canberra Times*.

13 *Ibid.*

among whom were prominent members of the state Returned and Services League (Donaldson & Lake, 2010, p. 85). When it was performed instead by an amateur theatre group in Adelaide, police were present due to threats of violence. *The One Day of the Year* debuted in Sydney in 1961, where dress rehearsals were disrupted by a bomb scare (Jinman, 2003).

The protest movement, formed in response to the introduction of conscription for the Vietnam War in November 1964, exacerbated the decline of Anzac commemoration. In the minds of many of those opposed to the conflict in south-east Asia, Anzac commemoration became indistinguishable from the glorification of war. A young woman described the commonly held attitude in a letter to the *Australian Women's Weekly*:

I pose the annual questions of youth: What is Anzac Day? What does it stand for? The march is always very touching, but I object to the oldies' attitude. One is subjected to a barrier of intolerance when one tries to discuss Anzac Day logically. I admire the Anzacs' courage, but am appalled at the glorification of war. If Anzac Day were only to recall bravery in the face of defeat, it would be a true tribute to those killed, but it is inherently much more. It is a day when bigotry is displayed, as well as courage. ("Letter to the editor", 1969, p. 125)

It was from the 1960s that murmurings of the inevitable extinction of Anzac commemoration began to be heard. Those voices became louder during the 1970s as the ranks of the Great War veterans continued to thin and the crowds at Anzac Day services dwindled. After the Vietnam War, women's liberationists and gay rights activists continued to seek a platform at these commemorative events. On 25 April 1979 a Melbourne-based organisation, Women Against Rape, issued a statement explaining that: "Australian women are angry because... celebrations have concentrated on glorification of the role men play in wartime and have totally ignored the fact that in war, as in peace, women have always born [sic] the brunt of male violence" ("Women working together towards suffrage and onwards"). On the equivalent day in 1982 a group of men from the Gay Service Association was prevented from laying a wreath at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance by the president of the Victorian Returned and Services League, Bruce Ruxton. "Waving his umbrella like a sword", Ruxton "bellowed 'stop those men'" and formed a human barrier across the entrance to the Shrine (Scates, 2009, p. 244). He later told a journalist that he did not "mind poofers in the march, but they must march with their units". A separate "poofster" delegation was just a "denigration of Anzac Day" (Scates, 2009, p. 244).

Given the widespread hostility towards Anzac commemoration and the predictions of its passing, how can we explain not only its survival but also its revival to become the most powerful symbol of contemporary Australian identity? The key to understanding Anzac's resurgence is the transformation that has occurred in the legend itself; it has been made over from an idea grounded in ideologies of racial supremacy and martial nationalism to one that speaks in the modern idiom of trauma, suffering and empathy.

The seeds of this new Anzac narrative of "trauma nationalism" can be found in the work of Bill Gammage in the 1960s. This young historian swam against the historiographical tide when he resolved to write a doctoral thesis about the First World War. Though his interest lay in the emotional experience of the soldiers, rather than in more conventional military history, Gammage (2002) later recalled that anybody who professed a desire to study war at that time was likely to be perceived as militaristic. His subsequent seminal book, *The Broken Years*

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(1974), was based upon several hundred letters and diaries held mostly in the Australian War Memorial, as well as the author's correspondence with returned men. The decision to focus on the experience of ordinary front-line soldiers, and to utilise their records as source material, was novel; when Gammage looked around the world for precedents for using such an approach in historical writing about war, he found none (Gammage, 2010).

Though he was not blind to their faults, Gammage wrote about the Australian soldiers with obvious admiration, often in extravagant language. Like Bean before him, he found much that was uniquely Australian about the troops. The light horseman, for instance:

stood by his own standards firmly, remaining brave in battle, loyal to his mates, generous to the Turks, and pledged to his King and country. His speech betrayed few of his enthusiasms, and he accepted success and failure equally without demonstration, but the confident dash of the horseman combined with the practical resource and equanimity of the bushman in him, and moved him alike over the wilderness of Sinai and the hills of the Holy Land. Probably his kind will not be seen again, for the conditions of war and peace and romance that produced him have almost entirely disappeared. (1974, p. 153)

The perspective from which Gammage wrote about the Great War in *The Broken Years* presaged its revival. He brought to the subject a contemporary distaste for war which resonated with the sentiments of the anti-Vietnam War generation. But by distilling his book of a conventional military narrative, and allowing the soldiers to speak directly through their letters, diaries and oral interviews, he laid the foundation for a new consensus of First World War memory. The emphasis was no longer on the belligerent leaders of the Returned and Services League and their out-dated attitudes, but on the tragic experience of the young soldiers. The martial nationalism of Charles Bean had become, in the hands of Bill Gammage, a gentler story evoked through empathy and sadness rather than military or racial pride. By re-drawing the boundaries inside which it might be remembered, *The Broken Years* had rescued the Australian memory of the conflict.

The new interpretation of the Great War pioneered by Gammage, with its emphasis on the experience of the ordinary soldier, was developed in subsequent literature and film. Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* (1981) was especially significant in recasting popular attitudes; indeed Gammage, who acted as an historical adviser on the film, described it as "easily the most influential of all depictions of Australians at war" (Gammage, 2002). The film tells the tragic story of a fictional character, "Archy Hamilton", a promising young athlete who enlists in the Light Horse and is killed in the charge at the Nek on the Dardanelles Peninsula in August 1915. Weir sought to restore Anzac to its former status as the central myth of Australian nationhood, but in an altered form. In this respect, the historian, Stuart Ward, has written about the "rejection of Britishness" in *Gallipoli*; a theme that Jenny Macleod, Joy Damousi, Mark McKenna and Daniel Reynaud have noted elsewhere.¹⁴ The imperial element of Anzac commemoration had been problematic since the early 1960s, Ward noted, but *Gallipoli* portrayed the birth of Australian nationhood as a response to British bullying and incompetence, rather than as a product of heroic fighting

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¹⁴ Ward (2004b, pp. 59-72). Joy Damousi has written about the "post-imperial" generation of film-makers, among whom she includes Peter Weir and Bruce Beresford (the latter making *Breaker Morant*). These directors "cinematically restaged" Australian involvement in war such that the "Empire and the British [were] positioned as the villain". See Damousi (2008, pp. 308-309), McKenna (2010, pp. 110-134), Macleod (2004, p. 69) and Reynaud (2007, pp. 192-194).

against Turkish troops (2004a, p. 69). The real enemy at Gallipoli was thus not the Turk, but “the despicable British field officers who bungled the entire campaign” (Ward, 2004a, p. 69).

The anti-British elements of the film may have pleased Australian audiences, but its greater significance lay in the means by which it demilitarised the Anzac legend and presented the Australian soldiers in a highly sympathetic light. Though the film is ostensibly about war, it features very little fighting: of the film’s 111 minutes, 44 are devoted to the lead-up to enlistment in the Kimberley district of Western Australia and in Perth; 28 minutes to the training in Egypt; and 32 to events on the Gallipoli Peninsula itself. The only battle occurs at the end of the film when Archy and his fellow soldiers are ordered to make a charge across no-man’s land that will almost certainly lead to their deaths. As he climbs out of the trench and begins to run, Archy drops his bayonet. When he breasts an imaginary tape with his arms outstretched and his chest is pitted with machine gun fire, Archy becomes “Jesus in khaki”: a young anti-warrior sacrificed for the birth of Australian national consciousness. Weir’s capacity to remake the Anzac legend in the image of contemporary sensibilities also extended to racial attitudes. The racism that was common to practically all European Australians at the turn of the twentieth century is the subject of historical revisionism when Archy defends his Aboriginal “mate”, “Zach”, against the slur of an unsympathetic white character (Macleod, 2004, p. 225).

The film, which cost \$2.8 million to make (a huge amount at the time), took an estimated \$11.7 million at the Australian box office, making it the country’s highest-ever grossing film at the time (Bodey, 2006, p. 104). Mark Lee, who played Archy, told an interviewer that *Gallipoli* was outdrawing *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in Sydney and Melbourne (Thomas, 1891). The film was a critical as well as a commercial success. It dominated the Australian Film Industry awards, taking nine out of thirteen major honours, including best film, best director, best screenplay and best actor for Mel Gibson (who played Archy’s comrade “Frank Dunne”). *Gallipoli* also found favour in the United States, becoming the first Australian film to be given a full commercial roll-out and earning a nomination for best foreign film at the 1982 Golden Globe awards.

The success of the film gave impetus to another group of Australians who had begun to add their voices to the historical record during the 1980s: the descendants of Great War soldiers who sought to put the personal accounts of their ancestors into the public domain. The National Library of Australia catalogue records that 51 books under the category of “personal narratives” of the Great War were published during the 1970s.¹⁵ That number grew to 98 during the 1980s, 153 during the 1990s, and 215 during the first decade of the twenty-first century, when only a handful of survivors were still alive. Based on the 60 registered on the National Library database in the first two years of the following decade, the tide of such First World War texts continues to wax.

The work of these family historians has reinforced the emphasis on the experience of ordinary soldiers pioneered by *The Broken Years* and evoked so powerfully in the film *Gallipoli*. The narratives are often self-published and based on the letters and diaries of soldier-forebears. The majority of the compilers of these volumes conceive the significance of their projects within the boundaries of Australia’s national history: the stories of their fathers and grandfathers are worth preserving because they are “part of our historic literature” (Sinclair, 1996, p. xi). Janette

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¹⁵ The category of “personal narratives, Australian, World War, 1914-1918” includes books published by family descendants. There is, however, no means of distinguishing descendants from other authors.

Rogers echoed this in the introduction to *For King and Country* (1985), the war diary of her grandfather:

A decision came about to reproduce the diaries, firstly to ensure that a valuable and historic story will be further preserved and to introduce the reader to an account that will guarantee their memories of a great task done under difficult conditions by those gallant sons of Australia. (1985, foreword)

Meanwhile, the rise of trauma culture since the 1980s has suggested new ways of reading soldiers' letters and diaries.¹⁶ Family historians are now likely to approach their ancestors' writings with questions in their minds about trauma, shellshock and psychological well-being: questions that Australians would never have asked themselves half a century, or even a quarter of a century, earlier. In *With the Big Guns* (2006), Lynette Oates drew on the lessons of the post-Vietnam War era – wherein post-traumatic stress disorder replaced shell shock and combat fatigue as the diagnosis for psychologically distressed soldiers – in exploring her Uncle Ernest's experiences during the Great War. Hence, her dramatic conclusion that death was perhaps his best destiny "When one considers all that is now known about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder". Yet in perusing her uncle's diaries and letters, Oates probed not only her uncle's psyche but also her own:

Reading these diaries and letters almost ninety years after the first of them was written has thus done two unexpected things for me. Not only has it enlightened me on many details of that war, but more personally it has made me realise my identity far more deeply than I could have imagined possible. (2006, p. v)¹⁷

Nonetheless, the psychological readings of the Great War that are increasingly common in family histories do not signal the demise of a nationalist script. Oates (2006) grafted insights about trauma onto more traditional patriotic understandings of Australian involvement in the conflict. She concluded that the story of her uncle's "life has given me enormous pride in my nation and the values that have come down to me through my Australian family" (p. 173).

Family historians rival political leaders as the most enthusiastic proponents of Anzac commemoration. It has only been in the last twenty-five years that Australian political leaders have taken a central role in war commemoration. By the 1980s it was apparent that the passing of the Great War generation had created a breach in the leadership of Anzac remembrance, which the Labor Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, resolved to fill. In April 1990 Hawke became the first prime minister to visit Gallipoli on Anzac Day. He travelled with a group of elderly veterans on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the dawn landing. The success of the event, which was beamed live to Australian television audiences, emboldened Hawke's successors to associate themselves more closely with war commemoration; something they had been reluctant to do since the Vietnam era (McKenna, 2010, p. 119).

The rise of political interest in Anzac commemoration has, however, been looked upon with suspicion by some. In *What's Wrong with Anzac?* (2010), Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, Joy Damousi, Mark McKenna and Carina Donaldson claimed that not only did the drastically

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16 For more information about the role of trauma culture in the revival of Anzac, see Twomey (2013, pp. 85-108). For a discussion of family history and nationalist narratives of the war, see Thomson (1994). For a history of the rise of trauma culture, see Young (1995).

17 See also Paul (2005).

increased funding to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for educational materials serve to indoctrinate a militaristic and politically conservative view of the past in young Australians, but also – and most disturbingly – the obsession with Anzac was used to justify Australian military incursions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Certainly, the fact that the politicians appear to have jumped on the Anzac cultural “bandwagon” only after they detected a shift in the public mood does give some credence to those who contend that their interest is partly politically motivated.

Memory of the Great War, in the form of the Anzac legend, is the most potent symbol of national identity in contemporary Australia. The Anzac ascendancy reflects both the dearth of suitable alternative myths of national cohesion and the versatility of war memory. A memory grounded in imperialism and the military prowess of Australian soldiers has now come to embody motherhood ideals such as mateship and endurance, and to reflect the contemporary preoccupation with trauma. In a testament to the elasticity and utility of human memory, the First World War is traumatic and tragic, yet it still comprises a pivotal and proud moment in the history of Australia. The single element that survived the demolition and reconstruction of the Anzac legend is the belief in the martial baptism at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. There is no sign that Australians will abandon any time soon this bloody initiation on Turkish soil for the more prosaic political settlement that occurred on 1 January 1901 when six separate Australian colonies federated to form a nation.

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