“Consider a tree for a moment. As beautiful as trees are to look at, we don’t see what goes on underground…Trees must develop deep roots in order to grow strong and produce their beauty. But we don’t see the roots. We just see and enjoy the beauty.”

Joyce Meyer

The history of an event always gains something with the passing of time. Beginning as a record of a moment or action, as years pass, it is embellished and increasing relevance is given to it. Eventually, it is more than truth, even legend, and aspects are forgotten. This is analogous to the development of a tree. If we observe the growth of the Anzac legend from its inception at the Gallipoli Landing, we can see how it has become so significant to our nation.

Where does this tree begin? As a seed; of actions and events happening in the moment. Perhaps the seed of World War One was Britain declaring war against Germany on August 4th, 1914 or Australians pledging “our last man and our last shilling” to the Empire, signing Attestation forms below the words, “So help me, God.” Such events may have been fertilised by the ambitious, young politician, Winston Churchill convincing those in charge that invading the Ottoman Empire and capturing Constantinople would win them the war.

The seed, we know, was sown in failure. Churchill presented his plan in response to the stalemate on the Western Front; the land based Gallipoli Campaign began because the naval attempt to capture the Dardanelles Straits failed. Popular belief suggests that the collapse of the campaign was due to the incompetence of commanding officers. However, men like General Sir Ian Hamilton, Lieutenant General William Birdwood and Major-General Alexander John Godley had an impossibly challenging task, trying to gain control of the

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3 Ibid, P 16
5 Carlyon, L., Gallipoli, Pan Macmillan Australia, Sydney, 2002 P 16, 58, 126
peninsula. As seen in photos and descriptions of landmarks such as The Sphinx, Plugge’s Plateau and The Razor Edge, the terrain was treacherous.\(^6\)

The seed cracks open as the first Australians landed on Anzac Cove with orders to capture the heights of Chunuk Bair and beyond.\(^7\) Facing the ‘British’\(^6\) on the slopes of Battleship Hill, came Mustafa Kemal’s order to his men, ‘\textit{I do not order you to attack; I order you to die. In the time which passes until we die, other troops and commanders can take our places.}’\(^8\)

Confusion took hold and bodies of ANZACs littered the razor backed hills. Once casualty numbers, over 215,000,\(^10\) were certified, mourning settled like a shadow in the countries of the fallen and the romantic glow of war faded. As the darkness passed from those indirectly affected, it continued to hover over the participants and witnesses to the spectre of war.

Ivor Margetts, a lieutenant in the 12\(^{th}\) Battalion was among the first Australians to land at Anzac Cove.\(^11\) Margetts wrote in his diary, ‘\textit{Landed 0420…Captain Lalor killed. Pat killed on left flank near me. Slept with Col. Smith on beach till 4 am. Rained.}’\(^12\) His pithy statements underscore the unimaginable danger, fear and exhaustion of the landings. In a later conflict on the Western Front Alfred “Gus” Percival Brown, who served in the 40th Australian Infantry Battalion, along with Frank MacDonald, kept a diary of his own harrowing experiences. ‘\textit{It is hell on earth here… We are all too tired to sleep. I think it will take weeks to get over this…Nerves gone.}’\(^13\) I can never know if the shadow of the war entirely left “Gus”, my aunt’s great-great grandfather. It left Margetts far too quickly, when he was killed at Pozieres in 1916\(^14\). Such men are gone now. Their histories are the roots holding the tree in place.

Between the mirrored image of root and branch stands the trunk. Time and the attitudes of perception compress the realities of the Great War into a single totem, ANZAC, the hero and legend we remember and commemorate. However, there is a side commonly neglected by

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\(^{8}\) \textit{Ibid}, P 154

\(^{9}\) \textit{Ibid}

\(^{10}\) \textit{Ibid}, P 106

\(^{11}\) \textit{Ibid}, P 137

\(^{12}\) \textit{Ibid}

\(^{13}\) Brown, A.P, The diaries of Alfred (Gus) Percival Brown, my aunt’s great-great grandfather

adorers. My great-great-great uncle, William Percy Hynes was a driver in the AIF during World War One.\textsuperscript{15} On 30th October, 1917, he was charged with seven days Field Punishment No.2 for falsifying a clothing voucher.\textsuperscript{16} This side of the ANZACs - the deserters, the petty criminals, the men driven to infantile madness by the constant shelling, as did one man, who “kept calling for his mother to close the gate,”\textsuperscript{17} we do not commemorate. For us, the ANZACs and the war have become one story and ideology made strong by years of our nurture. This raises the question of why we cultivated this article of faith. Why are the ANZACs so important to us?

In their article, ‘The Anzac Myth and Australian National Identity’, Donohugue and Tranter put forward the idea that with “notions of egalitarianism and a ‘fair go’ upheld as key aspects of the national character, hero-worship is discouraged…In Australia, individuals who achieve heroic status tend to be seen as ‘tall-poppies’ and are often quickly cut down”\textsuperscript{18} On foreign fields, amidst gunfire and tragedy, the ANZAC became our nation’s first and most favoured hero. In him we have found a national champion we can honour while still holding true to our ideals.

There is also the versatility of the ANZACs, a flexibility recognised in the branches of the tree, which are more easily altered by the dogmas and ideals of an era than the roots which are hidden. In 1915, Australians were captivated by Mr Ellis Ashmead Bartlett’s accounts of Australian soldiers at Gallipoli “…whose blood was up…rushed northwards and eastwards, searching for fresh enemies to bayonet.”\textsuperscript{19} Then, during World War Two, they were “muscular, grim-faced veterans…these men had the cool, quiet confidence of seasoned soldiers.”\textsuperscript{20} Today, in a peace focused world, emphasis is placed on accounts of mateship, courage, initiative and men like venerated ANZAC, John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who “knew no fear and moved unconcernedly amid shrapnel and rifle fire, steadily carrying out his self-imposed task day by day, and he frequently earned the applause of the personnel for his

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\bibitem{17} Davidson, L. \textit{Zero Hour}, Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 2010, P 34
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many fearless rescues of wounded men...”

From these accounts we can see that as society’s views have altered so too have the ANZACs; first eager hunters, then cool killers, now brave and selfless servicemen. We have chosen our history, chosen to commemorate the legend of the rising sun badge pinned on the brim of a slouch hat; shading a cheeky grin and twinkling eyes. We recognise the dry humour, the adamantine fellowship and the great bravery and courage shown in battle. We have chosen April 25th to be the most momentous day on the national calendar.

The heroic legends and traditions we celebrate on ANZAC Day are the leaves of the tree. And just as a tree’s leaves overshadow its roots, so too does the legend of ANZAC overshadow the outcome of the Gallipoli campaign. Possibly we “just see and enjoy the beauty” because most people do not have time or desire to search for the true series of events. Alternatively, we are just simply proud of being Australians, the descendants of the ANZACs.

Today, some believe we tend to treat ANZAC Day as a patriotic celebration. On April 25th, 1923, the first commemorative Dawn Service was held by Reverend Arthur Ernest White, ex-padre of the 44th Battalion. In the company of around twenty ex-servicemen, Reverend White spoke the words, “As the sun rises and goeth down, we will remember them.” As word spread, servicemen Australia-wide praised the simple, poignant service. Today, according to former Australian Army officer James Brown, over half a billion dollars are being spent to commemorate the Centenary of World War One, showing just how steeped Australia has become in the Anzac tradition. Many might justify this expenditure in the belief that the ANZACs shaped Australia into the nation it is today, through the blood, sweat and tears shed on Gallipoli. In the aftermath of national triumph or disaster, ‘Anzac Spirit’ is referenced. Why do we, a supposed peaceful nation, emulate the deeds and consequences of war so frequently?

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23 The Australian Army History Unit, The Australian Army: A Brief History, Big Sky Publishing, New South Wales, 2011, P 77

24 Ibid


Jacoba Sayers, Rose Bay High School.
ANZAC Day may suffer criticism because the legend we memorialise on this day disguises and minimises the sting of our failure on the Gallipoli Peninsula. But we also use it to congratulate ourselves on ‘our ANZACs’ and to recognise our national identity. Perhaps, as the Centenary of the Gallipoli landings approaches, we should reach for our roots and above all else, ensure the individual ANZACs with all their faults and virtues, are prominent in our commemorations. In doing this, we will undoubtedly find part of ourselves. I was always told that our family tree was devoid of ANZACs, yet when I cared to search, I found several relatives, ANZACs all. In conversation with a family friend, the words, “It makes you feel pride, doesn’t it?” were uttered. This is true. But the pride we possess should encompass all of the ANZACs, for the glory of a tree’s foliage would not exist save it were for the strength of its seed.

“The memory of what those men did has faded, but what they stand for has widened…The tradition of Anzac will outlive those who made it, because it is no longer simply about them. It is about us.”

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