

## **Australia, New Zealand and ANZACS**

What *is* ANZAC? It seems a deceptively simple question with an apparently simple answer. In Australian popular culture it is shorthand for all things Australian. The historical meaning is a little different. In deference to the New Zealanders the acronym spelled out stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, an unwieldy formulation that was soon abbreviated to the more user friendly 'Anzac'. Under an improvised arrangement the two national forces combined operationally in 1915 to form a joint New Zealand and Australian Division led by General Alexander Godley in their first action during the Great War.

Was Gallipoli a turning point? 1915 and the shared experience of Australian and New Zealand troops in the ill-fated campaign on the slopes of the Gallipoli peninsula is frequently taken as the foundational moment in the Australian-New Zealand relationship. In many respects Anzac *was* an important tuning point for both nations as it was for other combatants, notably Turkey, but for different reasons. Much ink for instance has been spilt especially in the older histories on the masculinist conception of Anzac as the birth place of the nation. According to this understanding, Gallipoli represents the genesis of the national spirit for the Commonwealth of Australia and the Dominion of New Zealand. On this side of the Tasman the people then had, and continue to have, no emotional engagement with federation, and the Boer war began when the colonies enjoyed a separate but parallel relationship with the mother country.

Despite its envelopment in layer upon layer of national mythologies, even the best spin on Gallipoli could not see it as anything other than a stunning reversal for Britain and its empire. Publicly the empire remained unified following the war despite some grave misgivings. Indeed, Gallipoli – and later Singapore in 1942 – would both be seen as notorious events in Australian eyes. At an official level New Zealand was always more circumspect. For the smaller, more remote and more dependent Dominion there was no other viable option on the table than a close-knit imperial unity. It would take nearly 90 years before Colonel William Malone, the tragic New Zealand hero of the Gallipoli campaign, whose name was blackened by superiors, would be honoured in a ceremony hosted by former New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark. And in the same year Air Vice Marshal Bruce Jamieson, then Chief of Defence Staff, speaking at the 90<sup>th</sup> commemorative dawn service at Anzac Cove, would be the first New Zealand military commander to publicly and forcefully rebuke British command and its handling of the campaign. And yet this was a conclusion that privately New Zealand diggers who served there had come to during the war as their diaries and letters home reveal. It was also a conclusion that most Australians had already come to during the interwar period.

In another important respect this was a turning point more specifically for encounters at war between New Zealanders and Australians. In more recent times historians have begun to talk of a Tasman world with extensive networks of exchange. This was a community of interest whose remnants long post-dated federation and the formal end to British Australasia comprised of seven loosely connected, competing colonies when Australia was but an imagined political community. In that configuration New Zealand

was the third most significant colony after New South Wales and Victoria. Prior to Gallipoli both national forces trained in Egypt where New Zealand commanders exhorted their subordinates to keep their distance from the wild colonial Australians in order to reinforce a distinctive New Zealand colonial identity neatly summed up in the New Zealand myth of their soldiers as ‘the gentlemen of the bush’. In the crucible of Gallipoli these imagined differences were quickly forgotten, and for any historian who has looked at primary source evidence the mutual respect felt by the two forces during the campaign is striking.

What is curious is the way in which Anzac has often functioned culturally as a form of *exclusion* rather than *inclusion* despite the popular rhetoric. There are many examples to draw on to support the point. This time last year I was one of a number of historians interviewed for a one hour television program called ‘Putting the “A” in Anzac’ whilst on study leave at the University of Auckland. This show was but a small part of Maori Television’s marathon 18 hour continuous and advertising-free schedule dedicated exclusively to Anzac. For Maori TV, the Anzac Day broadcast, now in its fourth year, has proved immensely popular and continues to be one of the channel’s defining moments.

To an Australian audience it may seem counter-intuitive or even perverse to suggest that Australians would need to be restored to centre stage in any Anzac commemorations. But it is all a matter of perspective. As Denis McLean, former New Zealand diplomat and author of *The Prickly Pair*, has observed, despite the shared nature of the historic

enterprise, Anzac Day on both sides of the Tasman has largely been commemorated along separate national lines. In the process each country has shown a tendency to airbrush the other out of its collective memory. McLean chose a clever double entendre for the title of his book to symbolise the trans-Tasman relationship. Among his more amusing anecdotes was the story of a nameless federal politician who took New Zealand officials by surprise when he confessed not to be aware that Anzac was a shared endeavour. Last year witnessed a few important steps in the effort to remedy a long history of benign neglect. Maori Television for instance played its part, and in Sydney a New Zealand Defence Force contingent witnessed the unveiling of a Kiwi soldier with his distinctive lemon squeezer hat who joined the statue of an Australian digger on the Anzac Bridge.

There is another problem that has a bearing on the dominance of Anzac and its place in the collective memory. Not only has it cast a long shadow in Australian military history over all other conflicts including those between indigenous and non-indigenous on the colonial frontier, but it has also displaced *the* foundational moments in trans-Tasman military tradition in the mid-1840s and 1860s when Australian (or, more precisely, proto-Australian) military settlers and hardware contributed decisively to the efforts of the British empire against Maori in what is now collectively known as the New Zealand wars. Queensland historian, Jeff Hopkins-Wiese, has explored this largely forgotten trans-Tasman military relationship in his recently released book, *Blood Brothers: The Anzac Genesis*. As the title suggests, his key argument is that Anzac was first forged in the forests of New Zealand's North Island, not Gallipoli.

At this time of year we make an important leap forward when we acknowledge the role of multiple perspectives in our military tradition. The excellent documentary *Gallipoli. The Frontline Experience* (2005) by Turkish director Tolga Örnek, now played regularly on tourist buses between Istanbul and the Gallipoli peninsula, recognised the ‘universal tragedy’ of the campaign. The film dismayed Turkish purists, and yet Örnek made his point very effectively: that the real enemy is *war* itself. In a similar vein Australian historian Bruce Scates has concluded that Anzac Day today ‘teaches us the folly of empires, the need for reconciliation and the human cost of war’.

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