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Abstract

Rarely, in the annals of historical memory does one find a story as compelling and depressing as the narrative of the ANZACs. Never have men fought so bravely and ultimately so futilely to protect a land they only knew from history and geography books. With a deep sense of responsibility and youthful nationalism, these Australians and New Zealanders volunteered for service to the British Crown. Few knew their actions and the actions of their comrades and enemies would result in the war to end all wars, World War I. Few Australians knew their engagements would be covered in many of the major newspapers of the day. The *New York Times* was one of these papers. Through their coverage of Australian maneuvers, Americans were, for the first time, exposed to Australia and its people.

Keywords

ANZACs, Australia, World War I

WHAT IS AN ANZAC? AN AMERICAN RESPONSE TO AUSTRALIAN WARRIORS



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Rarely, in the annals of historical memory does one find a story as compelling and depressing as the narrative of the ANZACs. Never have men fought so bravely and ultimately so futilely to protect a land they only knew from history and geography books. With a deep sense of responsibility and youthful nationalism, these Australians and New Zealanders volunteered for service to the British Crown. Few knew their actions and the actions of their comrades and enemies would result in the war to end all wars, World War I. Few Australians knew their engagements would be covered in many of the major newspapers of the day. The *New York Times* was one of these papers. Through their coverage of Australian maneuvers, Americans were, for the first time, exposed to Australia and its people.

On January 1, 1901, the Earl of Cornwall publicly announced the formation of a sovereign Australia.¹ After one and a quarter century of colonial rule, the British government removed the shackles of colonialism and allowed the Australians to pursue self-rule. Thus, the Federation of Australian States was born. With this self-government came more responsibility to the Empire. The first test of initiation came with the Boer War of South Africa in 1900.² The combined Australian expeditionary force served as reinforcements to the British in their fight of Dutch settlers. Their actions while in South Africa, foreshadowed their role later in the first World War and their desire to prove themselves in battle.

As diplomacy deteriorated in Europe and Britain declared war on Germany, the Australians were also in preparation for war. Joseph Cook, the Prime Minister at the time, was quoted as saying, "If the Old Country is at war, so are we," He remarked later that, "Our duty is quite clear – to gird up our loins and remember that we are Britons."³ This statement rang true as the Crown soon called for volunteers. The Federation, much like the Americans during the Civil War, took to the streets in a massive recruiting effort. It was said that teenagers falsified documents in order to gain admission and men roamed towns, all the while gathering recruits like sheep from the fields. With the massive recruitment effort in full swing, the Australians were able to exceed their original pledge of twenty thousand and field an army totaling three-

¹ Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2000)

² *Ibid.*

³ "The Anzac Story". <<http://www.anzacs.net/AnzacStory.htm>> March 8, 2005.

hundred and thirty thousand men.⁴ New Zealand also contributed a total of one-hundred and ten thousand troops over the course of the conflict.⁵ Both of these forces were combined to form a unit entitled ANZAC, or Australian New Zealand Army Corps. The ANZAC's first major engagement would also serve as their greatest defeat.

The Turks, an enemy of the Triple Entente, had to be defeated in order to cut off the Entente's main European enemies. A strategic plan was drafted and carried out on April 25, 1915.⁶ Gallipoli was the target of this plan, leaving the ANZACs and their British and French allies to carry the supposedly insignificant Turkish force. However, the Turks were in much greater number than previously anticipated and, much like D-day during the Second World War, every foot of ground was hard fought and narrowly won. The *New York Times*, much like today, was one of the most read papers of the era. It published numerous articles on the subject of the Gallipoli campaign. The tone of these articles follows a curve similar to the morale and casualty numbers of the allied forces. As the armies prepare for battle, the tone is rather upbeat, but this soon changes as the conditions worsen in Gallipoli and in the Dardanelles in general. Unfortunately, many of the articles only make mention of the ANZAC army as part of the British force. However, this trend changes as the engagement drags on and the ANZAC force encounters stiffening resistance. In an article dated September 3, 1915, the correspondent talks at length concerning the Australians maneuvers and battle results.⁷ Interestingly, the subtitle of the Australian column reads, "Colonials' Reckless Bravery," which would be incorrect considering that Australia was no longer a colony.⁸ Despite the lapse in terminology, the correspondent writes a rather thorough account of the ANZAC movements against the heights surrounding Gallipoli. Throughout the article he mentions the "gallant" nature of the men from the Antipodes. As a reader of this piece one might, for the first time, here of the Australian fighters and their travails. This glowing account of their actions would stick out against the dim background of British and French defeats and withdrawals. Even though the ANZACs were eventually overwhelmed and routed, the initial praise of their actions would cement itself in the minds of American readers. Trench warfare soon took hold on the Gallipoli peninsula and casualties mounted. The Allies fought bravely, but rarely held on to conquered lands for any length of time. There are quite a few contingencies that caused the withdrawal of the Allied troops. However, none were as important as logistics. Simply said, the Turks had reinforcements and supplies close at hand and the Allies did not. One article from the *Times* expresses this quandary simply by divulging the troop numbers. The title gives much

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ellis Ashmead-Bartlet, "How the British Lost Sari Bair," *New York Times* (1915), <www.godfrey.org>

⁸ Ibid.

of the story away by stating, “Gallipoli outlook gloomy 7 weeks ago.”⁹ The article compares the troop movements and effectively describes the grueling task the Allies faced by saying,

Allies have landed in the Anafarta region about 115,000 men, a large part of which force has already been used up. It is safe to say that they are opposed by about 135,000 Turks, who are actually entrenched, with about 80,000 effectives in reserve. Every advantage in terrain is held by the Turks . . .¹⁰

American readers, through this article and others like it, were beginning to see how this battle was playing out and the overwhelming odds that the Allied troops faced. This would help champion the ANZACs prowess in the minds of Americans. As reports continued to circulate about the “gallant Colonials,” *Times* readers would be able to use the aforementioned statistical data to critically analyze the articles and form an opinion of the Australian warriors. So far, in the news media, the ANZAC troops had been portrayed in a positive light. Thus, it would be easy to surmise that the average American’s opinion would be positive.

Not only was there increasing coverage of the Australian troops, but also news trickled in about their home front. In an opinion piece simply entitled “Australian Women and the War,” an Australian born woman offers an argument against mounting pressure. Apparently, it had been said that Australian women would vote unanimously against conscription because it would detrimentally decrease the male population of marrying age. This obviously outraged many women. The writer goes even further attacking America for its apathy in the conflict. She continues by stating, “it is assuredly not our women who will vote ‘No,’ and cast Australia into a slough of shame and ignominy from which it will be hard for her to ever rise . . . and we, thank God, have never been ‘too proud to fight!’”¹¹ This piece serves as a great testimony to the Australian women. As the modern world was exiting the Victorian era, many of the notions and ideologies were still firmly entrenched. One of these ideologies included the place of a woman. So, when one reads this article and finds that it is a woman writing, and in turn reprimanding a gentleman of the day, it strikes one as telling. This piece reveals the strength, suffering, and ultimately the character of Australian women. Through the text one can also glean where the Australian loyalties were. Nowhere in the text is Britain ever mentioned, hinting at their self government. Furthermore, it shows how determined they were not to have their integrity impugned or that of their fighting men.

As the time dragged on at Gallipoli, the situation grew even more desperate. Eventually over the winter of 1915 the allied troops withdrew without casualty from the peninsula. After the successful withdrawal, the allies assessed their losses. The ANZACs lost twenty-six thousand men at Gallipoli. Five hundred of the remaining troops were soon sent to the United States

⁹ “Gallipoli Outlook Gloomy 7 Weeks Ago” *New York Times* (Oct. 20, 1915) <www.godfrey.org>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Robbie Nederhoed, “Australian Women and the War,” *New York Times* (Nov. 3, 1916) <www.godfrey.org>

for furlough. They traveled the country, but spent a large portion of their time in New York City before having to ship back to the European front. The *Times* has left a lengthy account of their perceptions and activities while in New York. The physical account of these men from the Antipodes must have been of great interest to the reader, since it was covered in most of the articles. One article date May 6, 1918, describes the ANZACs as “rugged, sunburned” men.¹² Another article describes the men in greater detail when it states,

Five hundred long-legged, broad-shouldered Australian soldier lads in khaki, with jaunty slouch hats on their heads, marching with long, easy, rolling swing . . . At first glance they might have been mistaken for a regiment from Wyoming or Arizona . . . they had the Anglo-Saxon frontiersmen written upon them – but at second glance there were some differences. Their faces looked round and ruddier, and their heads were set closer down on their shoulders, in more British fashion, than those of the lean-jawed , lanky Westerners. . . .¹³

This rather anthropological description continues for the remainder of the article, defining every detail of their figure as they march down Broadway. This rich description, for the first time, allows many Americans to see an Australian with their mind’s eye. Thus, it is paramount in the shaping of an Australian profile and stereotype in American culture.

After the ANZACs layover in New York, they were once again shipped to the front. This time they were bound for France and the Somme. While in France they served with distinction. Once again, they made a regular appearance in the *New York Times*. This time, they were not alone, but linked to stories of American units. In one article entitled “Yanks and ANZACS fought As Comrades,” the writer explains how gruff, leather-faced Aussies take green Yankees under their proverbial wings and help them through their baptism-by-fire.¹⁴ Other stories swirled about the now legendary Australians. One story tells of an Illinois regiment, turned away from the battle by their European superiors, returned in ANZAC uniforms.¹⁵ These men were then able to participate in the engagement.¹⁶ Tales like these, no matter how outlandish they may seem, cemented the growing legend of the Australians.

As the war drew to a close, the ANZAC members counted their losses. For Australia, which had a population of approximately five million, fifty-nine thousand troops had been killed.¹⁷ New Zealand, with an approximate population of one million people, had lost one hundred and twenty-eight thousand men.¹⁸ These staggering losses also serve to promote the legend of the ANZAC.

¹² “ANZACS Find This Is Not A ‘Cold City’” *New York Times* (May 6, 1918) <www.godfrey.org>

¹³ “500 ANZACS Here On Way To Front” *New York Times* (May 3, 1918) <www.godfrey.org>

¹⁴ “Yanks and ANZACS Fought As Comrades” *New York Times* (July 7, 1918) <www.godfrey.org>

¹⁵ “Americans At Hamel Went Uninvited” *New York Times* (Aug. 15, 1918) <www.godfrey.org>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “The Anzac Story” <<http://www.anzacs.net/AnzacStory.htm>> March 8, 2005

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Due to the consistent coverage of the ANZACs at Gallipoli, the Somme, and beyond, the American populous was able to, for the first time, meet an Australian. Through tales of bravery and courage against all odds, the average American could have heroes, even though their government was isolationist. With the addition of physical details, one could sketch a picture of an Aussie in their own mind. When all of these factors were added together, the legend of the Aussie warrior was given life. So too, was the stereotype of Australia born through the American newspapers. These forces shaped the American perceptions during the conflict and still do the same today.

