Why the Centenary of ANZAC is Important for Modern Australia?

As the early morning light permeates the Turkish horizon, long tones of brass search the air, scouring winds ever so similar to the breeze that chilled the innocent faces of the ANZAC legends 100 years before. The powerful notes fall upon the ears of war veterans, who remember the terrors of living and fighting in fear and hostility, yet recall the determination and courage of the men battling by their sides. This sound of remembrance catches the attention of Australian men and women, who are reminded of who they are and what that truly means. The world hears this call of Australia and remembers the service and strength of their allies down south, a nation whom they can trust. Finally, the call to rest finds the sleeping heads of soldiers from 100 years before and from every day after, to assure them one simple promise: that we will remember them.

In the early hours of the 25th of April, 1915, thousands of Australian and New Zealander men sacrificed their lives for the price of good and the price of their nation, a sacrifice that allowed us the freedom and exciting future of our society. Amongst the silence of the forenoon, 11 rowboats of ANZAC troops landed upon the sandy shores of Gaba Tepe, or Anzac Cove, oblivious to the concentration of Turkish forces upon the cliffs above. According to Charles Bean’s record,

“So far not a shot had been fired by the enemy. The men leapt into the water, and the first of them had just reached the beach when fire was opened on them from the trenches on the foothills. The men did not wait to be hit ... they simply rushed up the steep slopes.”

As illustrated in the source, the ANZAC troops continued to fight in the face of bullets and brutality, digging trenches and running to new areas completely in the line of fire, yet they kept going. Over 900 lost their lives, and up to 2000 more wounded, sacrificing themselves for the price of good. Nations across the globe saw the power and ability of Australia as a courageous and determined power, and as English poet John Masefield wrote,

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“Then came stories of their extraordinary prowess in war. Not even the vigilance of the censors could keep down the accounts of their glory in battle...No such body of free men has given so heroically since our history began”

In that battle, Australia showed her true colours - to the world, and to herself.

The battle of the ANZAC legend, occurring at such a crucial time in our country’s history, initiated Australian culture as we know it, uniting us under this identity and putting it on international display, as From this point in our country’s career, we began to develop a unique identity, reflecting the values, actions and qualities displayed by the ANZAC soldiers. This identity revolved around what has come to be critical ingredients in our society, the likes of mateship and a ‘fair go’ for all, idealisms that are still strongly reflected in today’s politics, culture and social scene.

For example, the ‘fair go’ ideal, which was developed through the determination of ANZACs, is a huge influence on political decisions that revolve around giving every individual equal rights and opportunities. Our rights and freedoms are a defining factor of this country, and have dictated many facets of the evolution of our society, such as Aboriginal and women’s rights, Medicare and the public school system. Furthermore, it often the reason why so many people seek to live here.

In addition, the cultural norm of mateship is prevalent throughout Australian society, dictating our trustworthiness, loyalty and the undeniable pretence to coming together as a nation in times of need, and working together to make the situation better for everyone. Former Prime Minister Julia Gillard spoke about mateship and the fair go in her Australia Day 2011 Speech, discussing the strong egalitarian mateship found in the terror and struggle of the Brisbane floods of earlier that year, where Australia came together with notions of mateship and a fair go for all to help each other pull through. “We will hang on to our Aussie mateship and our Aussie fair go in the worst times and in the best,”, she concluded, “Because we are Australian.”

These cultural, social and moral ideas illuminated the young Australia amongst a sea of old powers who thought they had seen it all, and keenly grabbed the international spotlight. This lead to the development of Australia as an international power, one that had just as much say as another country federated many hundreds of years prior. As a strong society, at a new reach of the globe, Australia was able to

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3 Julia Gillard, 2011, Australia Day Speech, Adelaide, SA, 26 January
grow, attaining secure trade partners and powerful allies, as well as developing a stable and preeminent economy and society. Most importantly, we were looked to as a trustworthy and righteous nation in times of trouble or hardship, times where our ANZAC strength and courage shone through. For instance, in World War II, contrasting to our identity simply as a unit of Britain in the first World War, we were looked upon as a major global power that was especially prominent with aid in the Middle East and in protecting the South East Asia and Oceania from the Japanese. Then, through our alliance with the United States, we lent significant aid to Vietnam and Korea, and still today in modern military pursuits. As was said by American President Barack Obama,

“from the trenches of the First World War to the mountains of Afghanistan, Aussies and Americans have stood together, we have fought together, and we have given lives together”

Today, nearly 100 years on from the fateful day of April 25th, the world has changed substantially; our views of people and values, and the reality of society, with it’s technology, triumphs and troubles that have evolved us as the decades have passed. In this contemporary reality, where our perceptions and moral values are constantly changing, we are questioned on if the ANZAC values are still at all relevant to Australian citizens, and if living out the Anzac spirit really means the same thing as it did at it’s creation.

Yet for us as modern Australians, the relevance of the likes of mateship, courage and egalitarianism has not dropped or changed from it’s importance those many years ago, simply due to the fact that it’s who we are - it’s so much of what it means to be Australian. As this literary journey today has discovered, the ANZACs sacrificed their lives for the good of humanity and for the freedom of their home country, with these amazing ideals, values and characteristics that defined so many aspects of the Australian identity as we have come to know it. We proved to ourselves as a nation and to the international community the power of a young country that can unite in times of pressure and doubt, to pull through or die trying.

The brass tones slowly cease, and the cove goes quiet. And in that time, where nothing is heard but the waves crashing upon the shore and the cold wind exploring the rocky cliff-faces around, Australians and human beings alike remember a sacrifice made on that beach 100 years before. They remember them. And they remember what it means to be Australian.

4 Barack Obama, 2011, Address to the Parliament of Australia, Sydney, NSW, November 17
Jack Jeffries
Parramatta Marist High School
Anzac Youth Ambassador Competition, 2014