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## **Anzac Day observances change with the times**

By Ashley Zeldin

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*This is the last of the contributions from the University of Sydney media students. Its publication was delayed because it "went missing" in the system for reasons that remain obscure. Our apologies to Ashley, and thanks for an excellent contribution.*

### **Anzac Day observances change with the times**

by **Ashley Zeldin**

Thirteen-year-old Tim Spehr solemnly watched as wreaths were laid at the cenotaph at High Cross Park in Randwick; the medals of his great-great-uncle, World War I veteran Private Harold Walter Cavill, adorned his jacket. Spehr and dozens of local residents of all ages had gathered to commemorate Anzac Day, 25 April 2009.

“It’s very important that we recognise those who made Australia as it is today,” Spehr said. “Even people who are fighting at the moment,” he added, acknowledging Australian troops embattled in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The invasion of Gallipoli by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps on 25 April 1915 has become mythologised within Australia as the foundation for the nation, when Australia separated from Britain in terms of national identity.

Since 1916, Anzac Day has been a day of remembrance of the Anzacs and celebration of the Anzac spirit, encompassing Australian courage, ingenuity and mateship.

The traditional criticism of Anzac Day is that it glorifies war, creating “a holy trinity of men, war and nation,” said Dr Brad West, senior lecturer in sociology at Flinders University in Adelaide.

In the 1970s, backlash against the Vietnam War quelled participation in Anzac Day; but the 1980s signalled a change, with Australians deployed in the Persian Gulf and on peacekeeping missions.

“Australian[s] saw news stories of their servicemen and women and started to correlate them with their past companions in arms. They saw the spirit of Anzac in action, and pride began to swell,” wrote Megan McConnell in *The Resurgence of Anzac Day*. [1].

Despite cultural shifts in commemoration and celebration, interest in Anzac Day has remained high.

Tens of thousands of participants march to and spectators congregate at cenotaphs across Australia and New Zealand; others attend local services, such as the service Spehr and I attended in Randwick, organised by the Clovelly and Coogee-Randwick RSL Sub-Branched.

However, a modern criticism of Anzac Day is that it is marred by drunken revelry

As reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, just hours after that morning's service, 13 people were arrested for fighting [2] outside a Coogee hotel, and a man died five days after a brawl [3] with his brother outside the Clovelly RSL club where the deceased had been refused service.

The media sensationalises violent outbursts on Anzac Day, seemingly forgetting that they happen every day of the year without prejudice.

In recent years, Anzac Day has become more of a civic event with less emphasis on the military, allowing for a greater level of involvement.

“If you didn't have a relative who was a veteran, it wasn't your place to be involved. That has changed,” Dr West said.

And so, I – an American living in Sydney – felt the Anzac spirit as I contemplated the bravery and camaraderie of the Anzacs and all those who came after them.

Conversely, Tom Killen, 24, of Melbourne, who cites relatives in every war since the Boer War, respects the service of his ancestors and their contemporaries, but does not see the merit of dawn services.

“Most people just troll off the regular platitudes about ‘mateship’. It has almost nothing to do with the wars,” Killen said. “It's cock-and-bull to have a service about it. It makes more sense just to have some beers [with mates] which really embodies ‘mateship’.”

Dr West noted that people are increasingly eschewing formal commemorations in favour of social rituals, which he contends are just as meaningful because people are “more comfortable and likely to be involved.”

This more cosmopolitan understanding has sparked changes not only within Australia, but also at Gallipoli. The trend of Anzac Day pilgrimages and travel to the Anatolian peninsula throughout the year has fostered a greater, more international understanding of Gallipoli, including the previously unexplored Turkish role in the campaign.

Recent generations “have a greater ownership over” the mythology associated with Gallipoli, Dr West said. “There's a power in being on hallowed ground.”

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[1] [http://australian-history.suite101.com/article.cfm/the\\_resurgence\\_of\\_anzac\\_day](http://australian-history.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_resurgence_of_anzac_day)

[2] <http://www.smh.com.au/national/drunken-hoons-spoiling-anzac-day-police-20090426-ajd6.html>

[3] <http://www.smh.com.au/national/brothers-anzac-day-fight-ends-in-one-dead-20090430-ao8r.html>