

War and Australian national identity

War and rumours of war have exercised a powerful influence on Australian nationalism. Paul Keating's Remembrance Day Address in 1993 captures the place of war in recent public life: the deaths of more than 100,000 serving men and women create a legend: 'a story of bravery and sacrifice and, with it, a deeper faith in ourselves and our democracy, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be Australian'.¹ The 'Anzac legend' fixes the birth of national consciousness at the Landing on 25 April 1915, and identifies the national character with the 'digger'. The experience of war continues to impact Australia's domestic and foreign policies, particularly as the Anzac legend, for many decades after the First World War, expressed both national aspirations and imperial loyalties. War created the national myth of the 'digger', along with a sense of Australian exceptionalism; yet after the war, Australians experienced decades of insecurity about the nation's place in the British Empire, and as a European nation in the Asia-Pacific. Even though the legend tends to exclude women, migrants and First Nation peoples, it has been appropriated into a nationalist agenda by governments from both sides of politics in recent decades. James Brown, a former soldier, observes that although 'Anzac is sacred, dissecting this sacredness reveals a series of political decisions that have moulded our efforts to remember'.² A mythology constructed during and after the First World War, the Anzac legend ensures that war has been both an expression of unity and a cause of division, a symbol of national consciousness even when its meaning is contested.³

The figure of an Australian infantryman,⁴ an icon of a century of conflict, stands in the Hall of Remembrance. Since 1980, the image of the 'digger' has become familiar in popular culture, through Peter Weir's Archie and Frank in *Gallipoli*,⁵ Pat Cleary and Robert Flanagan in the mini-series *Anzacs*,⁶ the engineer Oliver Woodward in *Beneath*

¹ P.J. Keating Remembrance Day 1993: commemorative address, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 11 November 1993, <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/speeches/keating-remembrance-day-1993>, accessed 12 May, 2022

² James Brown, *Anzac's Long Shadow: the Cost of Our National Obsession*, 2014 p.24

³ For convenience, we will use Smith's definitions of a nation as '... a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common legal rights' in A. D. Smith, 'The Origins of Nations', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1989 p.342

⁴ I make no apology for using a gender specific term in the context of the World Wars.

⁵ Peter Weir (Director), *Gallipoli* (Film), 1981

⁶ Geoff Burrowes, and Dennis Wright (producers), *Anzacs* (T.V. Series), Melbourne, 1985

Hill 60,⁷ *Kokoda*,⁸ and the professionals and ‘nashos’ in *Danger Close: The Battle of Long Tan*.⁹ All these films, in some way, reflect a central myth in the national response to war: a link between the power of mateship and the reality death in wartime in a manner which has an almost spiritual quality. Anthony Smith, in his study of the origins of nations, points to the importance of myths, mediated and politicised by the intellectuals and professionals, and of ethnic identity, in the formation of nations. The nation is neither static nor necessarily popular, but emerges through the re-presentation of the myths, symbols and customs of what he describes as the *ethnie* – communities which share specific cultural attributes.¹⁰ Australian identity has had, for much the century since federation, a distinctly racial component, based on distinctly white and masculine mythic characters like the Bushman and the Digger. Hobsbawm notes that nationalism must be understood through the ‘assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist’: national identity is appropriated from the population and expressed in ideological terms.¹¹

Benedict Anderson identifies an essential link between nationalism and the ‘religious community’ which it supplanted in the 18th century. The transformation of ‘fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning’, a connection of death and rebirth, is a key function of nationalism, which it shares with religious imaginings, but not with ideologies like Marxism or Liberalism.¹² War’s catastrophes are consequently central to national self-consciousness, particularly when victories, defeats and casualties became easily communicated in print. Anderson ties the development of the nation with what he describes as ‘print capitalism’, resulting from the ‘explosive interaction between capitalism, technology and human linguistic diversity’.¹³ It is no accident that war heroes emerged during the Napoleonic period and became even more recognisable when photography recorded the Crimean War. Reading his model of national consciousness with Smith’s, we can recognise that the words and images describing Australians at war must have had a marked impact on Australians’ understanding of their nation and its

⁷ Jeremy Hartley Sims (Director), *Beneath Hill 60* (Film), 2010

⁸ Alister Grierson (writer and director), *Kokoda* (Film), 2006

⁹ Kriv Stenders (Director), *Danger Close: The Battle of Long Tan* (Film), 2019

¹⁰ See generally Smith, “The Origins of Nations.”

¹¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, 1992 p.11

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 2006 p.11

¹³ *Ibid.* p.45

history, and the high levels of literacy and wide reach of newspapers played a central role in forming national identity.

The importance of newspapers in forming colonial identities is well-attested;¹⁴ and Inglis quotes Henry Mayer's figure that NSW alone had 200 country newspapers by 1900, in addition to the major city mastheads.¹⁵ The new Federation was primed with print but, as Putnis points out, there were a number of identities emerging:

Australian nationalism (unlike, recalling Anderson's argument, the eighteenth-century nationalisms of South America) emerged in a period during which the sense of the British Empire as an entity also grew particularly strongly, underpinned by the technological revolution in communication and transportation.¹⁶

From its formation, Australia found its identity in both national and imperial stories, which sometimes competed. Federation took place amidst an Imperial war in South Africa, and the reporting and poetry of Andrew Barton Paterson played a role in popularising the role of the colonial forces as an expression of the new nation; the cabinets of the first decade wrestled with questions of the structures and command of the Army and Navy while weighing the competing priorities of Imperial loyalties and Pacific security, with a strong sense that Australia would inevitably be drawn into a European conflict.¹⁷ War, when it came, allowed the native Australian to be fused with the British.

Australia's entry into war was greeted enthusiastically by the government in the midst of the election campaign – 'Australians will stand behind our own to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling'¹⁸ – and when Australian troops first entered combat in the First World War, it was celebrated in imperial and race-based terms by war correspondents. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's Gallipoli dispatch was the first detailed account of the Landing to arrive in Australia. Published in the major newspapers on Saturday 8

¹⁴ Anne Coote, 'Imagining a colonial nation: the development of popular concepts of sovereignty and nation in New South Wales between 1856 and 1860', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 1, 1999 p.6

¹⁵ K.S. Inglis, 'Questions about Newspapers', *Australian Cultural History*, vol. 11, 1992 p.121. For the Victorian perspective, see Elizabeth Morrison, *Engines of Influence: Newspapers of Country Victoria, 1840-1890*, Carlton, Vic, 2005

¹⁶ Peter Putnis, 'News, time and imagined community in colonial Australia', *Media History*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2010-3-30 p.167

¹⁷ Neville K Meaney, 'A proposition of the highest international importance': Alfred Deakin's pacific agreement proposal and its significance for Australian-imperial relations', *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1967 p.202

¹⁸ Douglas J. Newton, *Hell-Bent: Australia's Leap Into the Great War*, Brunswick, Vic., 2014 p.107: Newton points out that Fisher was deliberately invoking jingoistic slogans from the Boer War.

May, 1915, it was preceded by casualty lists and sketchy cable reports, and thus provided Australians with a positive narrative that explained and justified the already significant losses, and for the government's appeal for further recruitment.¹⁹ His words were stirring:

There has been no finer feat in this war than this sudden landing in the dark and the storming of the heights, and above all, the holding on whilst reinforcements were landing. These raw colonial troops in these desperate hours proved worthy to fight side by side with the heroes of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres, and Neuve Chapelle.

The acts of the AIF were embedded in the imperial narrative, and the despatch emphasised both the effectiveness of the Turkish defence and the courage of the 'Australasians'. Bean's despatch arrived later, delayed by military bureaucracy; it reinforced the imperial theme and gave it a heroic and religious cast with phrases such as 'it may be said that the Australian Infantry, and especially the Third Brigade, has made a name which will never die.'²⁰

His subsequent writings – official reporting, editing *The Anzac Book*,²¹ the first six volumes of the *Official History, Anzac to Amiens* ²²– are all credited with promulgating the Anzac legend, although Barrett raises the obvious caveat that perhaps more credit should be given to the thousands of letters home.²³ *The Anzac Book* enjoyed huge sales and was sent home by many serving soldiers, which in itself perhaps demonstrates the pains Bean took in collecting and editing the material, with its combination of anecdote and reflection, reflecting his determination to make sense, for himself and his nation, the casualties at Gallipoli:

We only know —from good and great
Nothing save good can flow;
That where the cedar crashed so straight
No crooked tree shall grow...²⁴

¹⁹ Ashmead-Bartlett, Ellis. 'Mr Ashmead Bartlett's Story.' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May, 1915, p.13

²⁰ First Despatch, *C.E.W. Bean*, Monday, 17 May 1915

²¹ *The Anzac Book, Written and Illustrated in Gallipoli By the Men of Anzac*, C.E.W. Bean, (ed.), London, 1916.

²² C. E. W. Bean, *Anzac to Amiens : a Shorter History of the Australian Fighting Services in the First World War.*, Canberra, 1946

²³ J Barrett, 'Historical reconsiderations VII: No straw man: CEW Bean and some critics', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 89, 1988 p.168

²⁴ C.E.W.B., 'Non Nobis', 'Anzac to Amiens : a Shorter History of the Australian Fighting Services in the First World War.', 1946

While Kent's analysis of the *The Anzac Book* archive suggests that 'Bean was an exceedingly selective editor who rejected anything which might have modified his vision or tarnished the name of "Anzac"',²⁵ Graham Seal points out he was writing for a wider audience at home, for whom he reworked the digger culture into something in which most Australians could at once celebrate and memorialise in the months after the Allied withdrawal from the peninsular.²⁶

None of Bean's efforts in portraying (or developing) the Anzac legend would have been effective had it not been for the commemorations of Anzac Day, and for popular accounts that were published before. Monash's account was published in 1918, years before Volume I of the *Official History*; C.J. Dennis, in *Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, placed Ginger Mick in the Gallipoli trenches, and the poet John Masefield eulogised the Anzacs.²⁷ Anzac Day and its main features were already established by the end of the war. John Moses has consistently argued that the origins of Anzac Day lie in the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, established in Brisbane by Canon David Garland, and ceremonies which supplanted the celebratory flavour of some earlier attempts at celebration. Garland, an Anglo-Catholic and Gladstonian imperialist, devised a secular requiem that attempted to deal with sectarian division and patriotic diversity. The commemorations of the first Anzac Day in 1916 established the sense of a national birth at the Landing, already implicit in Ashmead-Bartlett's and Bean's writing. Ken Inglis's extraordinary study of war memorials²⁸ reveals that there are between 4000 and 5000 in Australia, and those commemorating the fallen of the First World War were constructed as early as 1916. The creation of a 'civic' commemorative site, as opposed to a memorial in a church (of which there were many), reflected the need to find a 'common ground' in the sometimes feverishly sectarian atmosphere of post-war Australia.²⁹

Bean's clearest expression of his understanding of the importance of the Anzac myth had to wait until the publication of the sixth volume of the *Official History* in 1942, sentences

²⁵ D. A. Kent, 'The Anzac Book and the Anzac Legend: C.E.W. Bean as Editor and Image-Maker', *Historical Studies*, vol. 21, no. 84, 1985 p.380

²⁶ Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology*, St Lucia, 2004 p.71

²⁷ Joan (ed) Beaumont, *Australia's War 1914-18*, St Leonards, NSW, 1995. p.157

²⁸ K. S. Inglis, *Sacred Places War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Carlton, Vic., 2005

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.136

that deliberately echoed the language of heroic Greece, a deliberate invocation of both nationalist and imperial themes:³⁰

What these men did nothing can alter now. The good and the bad, the greatness and smallness of their story will stand. Whatever of glory it contains nothing now can lessen. It rises, as it will always rise, above the mists of ages, a monument to great-hearted men; and, for their nation, a possession for ever.³¹

Bean was certainly responsible for promulgating the link between the image of the Australian soldier and the bushmen, miners and pioneers of the colonial period, a theme developed from his early reporting on his forays into more remote parts of NSW before the war.³² In *The Anzac Book* and in the Volume 1 of the *Official History*, Bean expresses the belief that not only did the 'Digger's Creed' derive from the bush; but that it was soldiers from the country and the outer colonies that made the best soldiers.³³ However by Volume VI, Bean had determined that democracy was the central reason for the effectiveness of the AIF: the 'comparative equality of opportunity under conditions of "colonial" freedom', 'the absence of social barriers', and 'the habit of thinking for themselves and acting on their decision'.³⁴ Bean's social radicalism, almost ignored in previous decades, a poorly understood element in his mythologising, was re-examined in the eighties; and the image of Bean as an imperialist has now been modified to acknowledge that imperialism, nationalism and democratic idealism coexist in his Anzac legend.³⁵

³⁰ Martin Ball, 'Re-Reading Bean's Last Paragraph.', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 122, October 1, 2003 pp.233-234

³¹ C. E. W. Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France During the Allied Offensive, 1918*, Sydney, 1942 p.1096

³² See for example, Bean, C.E.W. 'Australia: VI – The Country Problem. The Real Australian.' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1907, p.76e

³³ C. E. W. Bean, *The Story of Anzac : From the Outbreak of War to the End of the First Phase of the Gallipoli Campaign, May 4, 1915*, Sydney, 1933 p.46: 'The bush still sets the standard of personal efficiency even in the Australian cities. The bushman is the hero of the Australian boy ; the arts of the bush life are his ambition ; his most cherished holidays are those spent with country relatives or in camping out. He learns something of half the arts of a soldier by the time he is ten years old-to sleep comfortably in any shelter, to cook meat or bake flour, to catch a horse, to find his way across country by day or night, to ride, or, at the worst, to "stick on."'

³⁴ 'The Australian Imperial Force in France During the Allied Offensive, 1918', 1942p.1086: 'There is thus, apparently, strong ground for believing that the absence of social barriers and the comparative equality of opportunity under conditions of "colonial" freedom were among the prime causes of the effectiveness of the overseas forces.'

³⁵ Barrett, "Historical reconsiderations VII: No straw man: CEW Bean and some critics." p.113

While there have been studies of Bean, including Ross Coulthard's recent biographical evaluation of him as a war correspondent,³⁶ little has been done to explore the impact of the Anzac legend and the 'Digger' in the 1920s.³⁷ However, given the wide appeal of *The Anzac Book* and the *Official Histories*, Graham Seal suggests that the integration of the formal elements of Anzac with the informal elements of digger lore contribute to a powerful myth, a complex of perception, sentiment and national identity.³⁸ When the soldiers of the 2nd AIF volunteered, a factor in their decision would have been the desire to emulate their fathers (and, for not a few, to revisit the camaraderie of the old force).³⁹ The course of the war was to undermine radically both Digger mythology and Australia's place in the Empire. Early successes were matched by a series of defeats, in Greece, in Crete, in Singapore, all of which undermined the image of the dauntless Australian soldier in the minds of Churchill and the War Cabinet;⁴⁰ the retreat from Kokoda sowed doubt in the minds of Roosevelt and his advisers; and the relentless slog in the South West Pacific was neither glamorous nor celebrated as the United States sought to claim victory for itself. The imperial link with Britain, while not severed, was fundamentally changed by the Empire's political and military failure to provide the security guarantees Australia had sought throughout the interwar period, culminating in the 'betrayal' of Singapore. Curtin's 'turn' to the United States might not have been final, but it represented a watershed moment in Australian nationalism. However, the soldiers of the 2nd AIF and the Citizen Military Forces joined the marchers on Anzac Day after 1945, and there is little evidence to show that Anzac Day suffered any reduction in its popularity with returned men and women over the next thirty years.⁴¹

Why does Gallipoli have such a claim to the birth of national consciousness, when (as Humphrey McQueen remarks) there are strong alternative claims from both federation and the arts?⁴² He suggests that neither was effective in engaging the bulk of the population – for instance, only 48% of the colonial population actually voted in favour of

³⁶ Ross Coulthart, *Charles Bean*, Sydney, 2014-10-01

³⁷ Bart Ziino, 'The First World War in Australian History', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2016 p.122

³⁸ 'Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology', 2004 p.170

³⁹ Gavin Long, *To Benghazi*, Canberra, 1961 pp.57-58

⁴⁰ David Day, 'Anzacs on the run: The view from Whitehall, 1941-42', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1986 p.189

⁴¹ Jeffery Grey, 'The fall and rise of Anzac Day 1956-1990,' in *Anzac Day Then and Now: Australia's Unofficial National Day*, ed. Tom Frame, 2016. p.164

⁴² Humphrey McQueen, *Gallipoli to Petrov: Arguing With Australian History*, Sydney, 1984 p.4

federation, as voting was not compulsory. He argues, however, that contrary to Anzac's 'digger' popularism, conservatives appropriated the developed legend — the Landing was a national still-birth, as the conscription debate, the Irish Easter Rising and general strikes led to the Labor movement abandoning Anzac. McQueen suggested that Anzac's inherent imperialism between the wars robbed it of its nationalist legitimacy; Richard White suggests the picture is more complex. Anzac remained a potent force dividing society, as Australia had, in the eyes of the returned men and most politicians, been 'made over into a land fit for heroes' rather than a worker's paradise.⁴³ For Billy Hughes, and many other Australians, however, there was no doubt that the Landing symbolised the entry of the new nation on the world stage, albeit within the bounds of the British Empire.⁴⁴ The separation of the imperial and national threads in Australian history, which occurred much later, perhaps after Suez, did not affect the popularity of the day. Australia lived for decades with a divided identity, and this was expressed in the Anzac legend as in so much else.

Whatever its power to unify and divide, without the Anzac legend central elements of Australian national identity like the values of egalitarianism, mateship and independence, could not have developed.⁴⁵ Yet it has not always been acknowledged as a national day: Ken Inglis has noted that Anzac Day became the focus of anti-war sentiment during the era of the Vietnam war.⁴⁶ However, after the relative neglect of Anzac among historians, and of Bean as both historian and mythologiser, began to be addressed when Inglis wrote a series of articles in the early sixties, a renewal in academic and popular consciousness began.⁴⁷ Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years* examined the soldiers' experiences and sought to redefine Bean's understanding of the birth of the nation, not in epic and imperial terms, but as a national tragedy that led to a new era, as the experience of war swept away older assumptions:

Although their spirits were rarely broken, they amended their outlooks to absorb the unexpected challenges they met, and returned to Australia

⁴³ Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980*, Sydney, 1981 P.139

⁴⁴ Joan Beaumont, "Unitedly we have fought': imperial loyalty and the Australian war effort', *International Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 2, 2014 p.409

⁴⁵ *Australia's War 1914-18*. p.xix

⁴⁶ For a retrospective discussion of Alan Seymour's *The One Day in the Year*, see 3

⁴⁷ K. S. Inglis, 'Reflecting on a Retrospective,' in *Anzac Day Then and Now: Australia's Unofficial National Day*, ed. Tom Frame, Sydney, 2016.

bearing the remnants of old ways, but also the seeds of a new world and a new century.⁴⁸

Interest in Australia's experience in the First World War was rekindled in the 1980s, in part because of a backlash against protests against the Day, in response to family histories, memoirs and unit histories, and the Labor government's formal welcome home to the Vietnam veterans.⁴⁹ Bob Hawke's decision to engage with the Anzac legend by attending the Dawn Service at Gallipoli on the 75th anniversary of the Landing began an era of political patronage, but also marked a period where successive prime ministers of both major parties appropriated the mythology of Anzac into new nationalist agendas, especially when Keating visited Kokoda:

The Australians who served here in Papua New Guinea fought and died not in defence of the old world, but the new world ... They died in defence of Australia...⁵⁰

The Anzac legend has been a 'neglected front' in the history wars, according to Bongiorno and Mansfield: the 'left orthodox' position holds that Australia's involvement in the First World War (and other 'British 'wars) held back the development of a truly independent nation, whereas Hirst, Moses, Robertson and others have justified Australia's involvement on the grounds that the imperial interest was also Australia's.⁵¹ But it has been suggested that the target of their objections is a straw man: there is little disagreement that the First World War was Australia's war. In fact, argue Bongiorno and Mansfield, the attack from the right was an assertion that the War, with all its death and destruction, had little meaning other than the political and strategic, effectively denying the findings of social historians like Gammage, lest they detract from gradualist and benevolent view of Australia's separation from Empire in favour of a more contested and nationalist view of the War.⁵² This nationalist versus imperialist debate found popular expression in Weir's *Gallipoli*: Bill Kerr's Uncle Jack is the British mentor who coaches Archie (and reads from Kipling's *The Jungle Book*), and the two heroes' are led by the very democratic Bill Hunter as Major Barton (an apt name for an Australian officer) who will,

⁴⁸ Bill. Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Ringwood, Vic; Harmondsworth, 1974 p.xiv

⁴⁹ Carolyn Holbrook, 'Commemorators-in-chief,' in *Anzac Day Then and Now: Australia's Unofficial National Day*, ed. Tom Frame, 2016-04-01. p.221

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.223

⁵¹ Frank Bongiorno, and Grant Mansfield, 'Whose War Was It Anyway? Some Australian Historians and the Great War', *History Compass*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008 p.64

⁵² *Ibid.* pp.79-81

ultimately, decide to die with his men. The commander of the Light Horse is 'Colonel Robinson', whose orders condemn the young West Australians to death, and he is portrayed as unsympathetically British (whereas in reality the order at the Nek was probably given by an Australian, Colonel Antill). At once a profoundly anti-war film and a re-casting of an origin myth, *Gallipoli* is evidence of Smith's proposition that nationalism is created by artists and intellectuals placing myths in new contexts.

The Anzac legend is also divisive at the emotional and political level. Veterans of Korea and Vietnam have yet to see their service make a contribution to the legend, and more recent conflicts are contested and even more geographically and psychologically distant from most Australians. Historians have been increasingly concerned with emotional and psychological impact of war, not only on the returned soldiers, but on their families, and especially on the bereaved and grieving, as the effects of trauma on the soldiers returned from Iraq and Afghanistan become clear. Ken Inglis has demonstrated the importance of war memorials in nearly every Australian community. Feminist historians have examined the impact of grief and bereavement, and the cost of war, as remote death came to many households, or the mental and physical injuries suffered by returned soldiers affected their families economic and emotional well-being over the coming decades. Marina Larsson demonstrated that, by the 1930s, the disabled veterans were joined by 'burnt out soldiers', men who had reached middle age as the Depression hit and who found increasing degrees of incapacitation prevented them from keeping or finding work, leaving their wives and children with intergenerational trauma and poverty.⁵³ Women, in both wars, were caught up in both the anticipation of bereavement and in actual grief, made all the more poignant by the remoteness of the battlefield, from which bodies were not repatriated until Vietnam: their lives became a continuity with their dead child. Yet, as Joan Beaumont argues, when the war finished, grieving widows and mothers were marginalised, as the 'sacrifice' became not theirs, but that of the fallen soldiers, and their pensions seemed an inadequate compensation beside the glorification of Anzac heroism.⁵⁴ But of all groups for which the myths of war fail to express a national character, Australia's Aboriginal people are the most excluded: notwithstanding the identification of 1,500 soldiers in the First World War and over 5,000 in the Second, in a period in which they were denied full citizenship; while accepted into mateship overseas, the soldiers

⁵³ Marina Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs: Living With the Scars of War*, Sydney, 2009 p.208

⁵⁴ Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, 2014 p.162

were repositioned as inferior on their return.⁵⁵ Reconciliation has yet to be completely realised in the Anzac legend.

Given the contests that have been fought over the Anzac legend, publicly and in academia, it would not be accurate to describe Australia as a nation formed by war, let alone formed *in* war, notwithstanding the role of Anzac Day as a de facto national celebration and the increasing attempts from right-wing commentators and politicians to make Anzac the centre of the national story. War's role has been to force a mediation of sometimes opposing identities: the native and the imperial, the European and the Pacific, the autonomous and the dependent. However, we have seen that, when Bean initiated an integration of the legend of the Digger with older, colonial images of the Bushman and the Pioneer, and gave it the heroic cast of ancient and contemporary empires, Anzac became a vehicle for key elements of national consciousness. It may be an exaggeration to describe the Landing as the birthplace of the nation, but it operated as a symbolic representation of the new Commonwealth's independent place in the world and, as such, remains an integral part of national identity.

⁵⁵ Noah Riseman, 'Introduction: Diversifying the black diggers' histories', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 39, 2015 p.138

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