

2017/08: Is Australia's attitude toward Anzac Day dangerous?

What they said...

'Yassmin should no longer be on the public broadcaster's tax-funded payroll. Self-deportation should also be considered'
Nationals MP George Christensen's reaction to ABC presenter Yassmin Abdel-Magied criticising Anzac Day

'Anzac Day is an important national day for Australians deserving of great respect and reverence. But we should welcome robust discussion from those who want to broaden the debate about what it means to people in this country today'
Herald Sun commentator, Susie O'Brien

The issue at a glance

On April 25, 2016, ABC presenter Yassmin Abdel-Magied made a post on Facebook which suggested readers remember on Anzac Day a number of other groups of people who are currently suffering.

The remark has been condemned as disrespectful of Anzac Day and as offensive to a majority of Australians. Abdel-Magied has been the subject of criticism and abuse on Facebook and through other media outlets. There have been demands made that she should lose any government-funded positions she holds, including her employment with the ABC. Some commentators have claimed that this is an understandable reaction to an attempt to politicise a sensitive and important national day of commemoration devoted to the country's war dead and injured and to their families. The inappropriateness of such comments being made by someone employed by the national broadcaster has also been noted. Others have argued that the hostile reaction Abdel-Magied has received is indicative of the dangerous and disproportionate place that Anzac 'myths' and Anzac Day are coming to occupy in Australia's national story.

Abdel-Magied took her original Anzac Day Facebook post down with an apology. She has not been dismissed by the ABC; however, Senator Abetz has written to Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, asking that Abdel-Magied be dropped as a board member of the Council for Australian-Arab Relations, run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Ms Abdel-Magied's position on the Council is under consideration.

Debate surrounding what constitutes an appropriate attitude toward Anzac Day has pre-occupied the media for some two weeks.

Reference has been made to a former SBS sports commentator, Scott McIntyre, who was sacked in 2015 following comments he posted on twitter on Anzac Day that were critical of the Anzacs and of some of Australia's military allies.

Background

(The information presented below is abbreviated from a Wikipedia entry titled 'Anzac Day'.

The full entry can be accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anzac_Day)

Anzac Day is a national day of remembrance in Australia and New Zealand that broadly commemorates all Australians and New Zealanders "who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations" and "the contribution and suffering of all those who have served". Observed on 25 April each year, Anzac Day was originally to honour the members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who fought at Gallipoli against the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Anzac Day is also observed in the Cook Islands, Niue, Pitcairn Islands, and Tonga, and previously was a national holiday in Papua New Guinea and Samoa.

Anzac Day marks the anniversary of the first campaign that led to major casualties for Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War. The acronym ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, whose soldiers were known as Anzacs. Anzac Day remains one of the most important national occasions of both Australia and New Zealand, a rare instance of two sovereign countries not only sharing the same remembrance day, but making reference to both countries in its name. When war broke out in 1914, Australia and New Zealand had been dominions of the British Empire for thirteen and seven years respectively.

Gallipoli campaign

In 1915, Australian and New Zealand soldiers formed part of an Allied expedition that set out to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula to open the way to the Black Sea for the Allied navies. The objective was to capture Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which was an ally of Germany during the war. The ANZAC force landed at Gallipoli on 25 April, meeting fierce resistance from the Ottoman Army commanded by Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk). What had been planned as a bold strike to knock the Ottomans out of the war quickly became a stalemate, and the campaign dragged on for eight months. At the end of 1915, the Allied forces were evacuated after both sides had suffered heavy casualties and endured great hardships. The Allied casualties included 21,255 from the United Kingdom, of which were some 4000 Irish soldiers from the Royal Irish Fusiliers, an estimated 10,000 dead soldiers from France, 8,709 from Australia, 2,721 from New Zealand, and 1,358 from British India. News of the landing at Gallipoli made a profound impact on Australians and New Zealanders at home and 25 April quickly became the day on which they remembered the sacrifice of those who had died in the war.

Though the Gallipoli campaign failed to achieve its military objectives of capturing Constantinople and knocking the Ottoman Empire out of the war, the actions of the Australian and New Zealand troops during the campaign bequeathed an intangible but powerful legacy. The creation of what became known as an "Anzac legend" became an important part of the national identity in both countries. This has shaped the way their citizens have viewed both their past and their understanding of the present. The heroism of the soldiers in the failed Gallipoli campaign made their sacrifices iconic in

New Zealand memory, and is often credited with securing the psychological independence of the nation.

Foundations of Anzac Day

On 30 April 1915, when the first news of the landing reached New Zealand, a half-day holiday was declared and impromptu services were held.

In South Australia, Australia's first built memorial to those killed in the Dardanelles was unveiled by the South Australian Governor on "Wattle Day", 7 September 1915, just over four months after the first landings. The monument was originally in an area called "Wattle Grove" on Sir Lewis Cohen Avenue in the South Parklands but was later moved to a lawned area off South Terrace near the junction with Anzac Highway.

The date 25 April was officially named Anzac Day in 1916; in that year it was marked by a wide variety of ceremonies and services in Australia and New Zealand, including a commemorative march through London involving Australian and New Zealand troops. In New Zealand it was gazetted as a half-day holiday.[8] Australian Great War battalion and brigade war diaries show that on this first anniversary, units including those on the front line, made efforts to solemnise the memory of those who were killed this day twelve months previously. A common format found in the war diaries by Australian and New Zealand soldiers for the day commenced with a dawn requiem mass, followed mid-morning with a commemorative service, and after lunch organised sports activities with the proceeds of any gambling going to Battalion funds. This occurred in Egypt as well.

Anzac Day was gazetted as a public holiday in New Zealand in 1920, through the Anzac Day Act, after lobbying by the New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association, the RSA. In Australia at the 1921 State Premiers' Conference, it was decided that Anzac Day would be observed on 25 April each year. However, it was not observed uniformly in all the states.

During the 1920s, Anzac Day became established as a National Day of Commemoration for the 60,000 Australians and 18,000 New Zealanders who died during the war. The first year in which all the Australian states observed some form of public holiday together on Anzac Day was 1927. By the mid-1930s, all the rituals now associated with the day-dawn vigils, marches, memorial services, reunions, sly two-up games-became part of Australian Anzac Day culture. New Zealand commemorations also adopted many of these rituals, with the dawn service being introduced from Australia in 1939.

Anzac Day since World War II

With the coming of the Second World War, Anzac Day became a day on which to commemorate the lives of Australians and New Zealanders lost in that war as well and in subsequent years. The meaning of the day has been further broadened to include those killed in all the military operations in which the countries have been involved.

Anzac Day was first commemorated at the Australian War Memorial in 1942, but, due to government orders preventing large public gatherings in case of Japanese air attack, it was a small affair and was neither a march nor a memorial service. Anzac Day has been annually commemorated at the Australian War Memorial ever since.

From the 1960s, but especially in the 1970s and 1980s, Anzac Day became increasingly controversial in both Australia and New Zealand. Protests against the Vietnam War were common Anzac Day occurrences during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, two members of the left-wing Progressive Youth Movement in Christchurch staged a minor protest at the Anzac Day ceremony, laying a wreath protesting against the Vietnam War. They were subsequently convicted of disorderly conduct. In 1978, a women's group laid a wreath dedicated to all the women raped and killed during war, and movements for feminism, gay rights, and peace used the occasion to draw attention to their respective causes at various times during the 1980s. In the 1980s, Australian feminists used the annual Anzac Day march to protest against rape and violence in war and were banned from marching.

From about the late 1980s, however, there was an international resurgence of interest in World War I and its commemorations. Anzac Day attendances rose in Australia and New Zealand, with young people taking a particular interest. Protests and controversy became much rarer.

Internet information

On April 28, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by Clementine Ford titled 'The hypocrisy that lies behind the reaction to seven words from Yassmin Abdel-Magied'

The comment argues that those who claim to value freedom of speech should be prepared to accept Abdel-Magied's comments about ANZAC Day.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/news-and-views/opinion/over-the-top-reaction-to-seven-words-from-yassmin-abdelmagied-brings-this-country-into-disrepute-20170428-gvueno.html#comments>

On April 28, 2017, In Focus, the newsletter of the International Grammar School, Sydney, published a comment by the School's principal, Shauna Colnan, in which she argues that Anzac Day is an opportunity to promote peace.

The full text can be accessed at

https://www.igssyd.nsw.edu.au/assets/downloads/publications/InFocus28April2017_FINAL2.pdf

On April 27, 2017, Eureka Street published a comment by Rohan Salmond titled 'Identity on the line in the fallout over Anzac free speech'

The point of view argues against restrictions being posed on who can enter the debate around Anzac Day.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=51273#.WQZWu9wIFVc>

On April 27, 2017, The Australian published a report titled 'Abdel-Magied under pressure on DFAT role' The report details demands that Abdel-Magied should be dismissed as a board member of the Council for Australian-Arab Relations, run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The full text of this report can be accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/yassmin-abdelmagied-pressure-dfat-role/news-story/539e00208d5de4d1af8d97f388fd9407>

On April 27, 2017 The Australian published a news report titled 'Calls for presenter to be sacked' The report details demands from the public and some politicians for the ABC to dismiss presenter Yassmin Abdel-Magied for a comment she posted on Facebook about ANZAC Day. At the time of publishing this issue outline there were 99 reader comments in response to the news report, most critical of Ms Abdel-Magied and of the ABC. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/yassmin-abdelmagied-triggers-anger-with-Anzac-day-facebook-post/news-story/40123cfe7b0d7fb93ed7536aaf9f7824>

On April 26, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by lawyer and commentator Duncan Fine. The point of view is titled 'We should celebrate Yassmin Abdel-Magied, not attack her' The piece argues that Abdel-Magied's comments are an instance of the operation of free speech and as such should be commended rather than condemned. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/we-should-celebrate-yassmin-abdelmagied-not-attack-her-20170426-qvsp1k.html>

On April 26, 2017, The Australian published a comment by former Labor Minister, Graham Richardson, titled 'Yassmin Abdel-Magied shows what's up with ABC' The writer criticises the ABC for not espousing views supported by a majority of Australians. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/graham-richardson/yassmin-abdelmagied-demonstrates-whats-wrong-with-abc/news-story/dacf7349173af263577ea683890f6150>

On April 26, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published a report titled 'Yassmin Abdel-Magied: ABC activist's vile anti-Diggers remark slammed as 'deeply reprehensible'' The report gives an overview of negative responses to Abdel-Magied's ANZAC Day comment. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/yassmin-abdelmagied-abc-activists-vile-antidiggers-remark-slammed-as-deeply-reprehensible/news-story/a8707ae6efecff24806637eec5fc41a6>

On April 26, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published an editorial titled 'Lest Yassmin Abdel-Magied regret a hateful slur' The editorial argues that Abdel-Magied's comments regarding ANZAC demonstrate she is ungrateful for the generosity she has received from Australia and invites her to return the wages she has received as an employee of the ABC. The full text of this editorial can be accessed at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/editorial-lest-yassmin-abdelmagied-regret-a-hateful-slur/news-story/69b24a3b1f2e76e7a20f606734638e51>

On April 26, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published a news report titled 'Online petition calls for ABC to sack Yassmin Abdel-Magied' The report details a petition that has demanded Yassmin Abdel-Magied be dismissed because of comments she posted on her Facebook page relating to Anzac Day. The full report can be accessed at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/online-petition-calls-for-abc-to-sack-yassmin-abdelmagied/news-story/ce7c16d67e37e86892d68e5513346de4>
<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/online-petition-calls-for-abc-to-sack-yassmin-abdelmagied/news-story/ce7c16d67e37e86892d68e5513346de4>
<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/online-petition-calls-for-abc-to-sack-yassmin-abdelmagied/news-story/ce7c16d67e37e86892d68e5513346de4>

On April 25, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published an editorial titled 'Anzac Day and the march of Australian values' The editorial delineates the evolving nature of Anzac Day and warns against its politicisation. The full text can be read at <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/smh-editorial/Anzac-day-and-the-march-of-australian-values-20170421-qvpvza.html>

On April 25, 2017, The Conversation published a comment by Carolyn Holbrook, Alfred Deakin Research Fellow, Deakin University. The comment is titled 'How Anzac Day came to occupy a sacred place in Australians' hearts' The opinion piece traces the evolution of Australian attitudes toward the Anzac legend. The full text of the article can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/how-anzac-day-came-to-occupy-a-sacred-place-in-australians-hearts-76323>

On April 24, 2016, The New Matilda published an opinion piece by the magazine's publisher and editor, Chris Graham. The comment is titled 'Anzac Day: We've Already Said Thanks, It's Time To Move On' The piece discusses a number of the negative aspects of Australia's pre-occupation with its military past. The full text can be accessed at <https://newmatilda.com/2016/04/24/Anzac-day-weve-said-thanks-enough-its-time-to-move-on/>

On April 16, 2016, Independent Australia published a comment by editor and speech writer Evan Williams titled 'The Seven Sacred Cows of Australian Politics'. The comment looks at a number of Australian customs and attitudes which neither political party is prepared to challenge.

The full text can be accessed at https://independentaustralia.net/article-display/the-seven-sacred-cows-of-australian-politics_8891

On April 11, 2016, Mumbrella published an article titled 'SBS and Scott McIntyre announce confidential settlement over Anzac Day tweet sacking'. The report includes some of the criticisms Scott McIntyre's lawyer, Josh Bornstein, made of those who had called for McIntyre's sacking for challenging the popular view of Anzac Day.

The full text can be accessed at <https://mumbrella.com.au/sbs-and-former-reporter-scott-mcintyre-announce-confidential-settlement-358995>

On December 17, 2015, The Sydney Morning Herald published a report titled 'Scott McIntyre not sacked for controversial Anzac Day opinion: SBS'. The article gives the view of the management of SBS regarding the sacking of its sports reporter.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.smh.com.au/business/media-and-marketing/scott-mcintyre-not-sacked-for-controversial-anzac-day-opinion-sbs-20151217-qlpwkt.html>

On April 29, 2015, The Conversation published a comment by Professor Philip Dwyer, Director of the Centre for the History of Violence, School of Humanities and Social Science, University of Newcastle. The comment is titled 'Anzacs behaving badly: Scott McIntyre and contested history' and argues that McIntyre's comments were essentially accurate and that his sacking by SBS was inappropriate.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/Anzacs-behaving-badly-scott-mcintyre-and-contested-history-40955>

On April 27, 2015, the ABC's current affairs opinion site The Drum published a comment by Greg Barns, barrister and a spokesman for the Australian Lawyers Alliance. The comment is titled 'Tim Wilson should speak up for Scott McIntyre' and argues that the Australian Human Rights Commissioner should have defended McIntyre's right to freedom of speech.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-27/barns-tim-wilson-should-speak-up-for-scott-mcintyres/6425154>

On April 25, 2015, The Conversation published a comment by Peter Cochrane, Honorary Associate, Department of History, University of Sydney, titled 'The past is not sacred: the 'history wars' over Anzac'

The comment outlines the range of views there are among politicians, historians and the general public regarding the significance of Anzac.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/the-past-is-not-sacred-the-history-wars-over-anzac-38596>

On April 11, 2014, The Adelaide Advertiser published a comment by 17-year-old student, Rhys Harrison, titled 'Anzac Day should symbolise peace'

Harrison argues that the commemoration of Anzac Day is an incentive to avoid war.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/rhys-harrison-anzac-day-should-symbolise-peace/news-story/d314b728c35031ad0bc87e67811fc8db>

On April 24, 2012, Crikey published a comment by Guy Rundle titled 'Anzac Day and why we need to question "myths" of war'. The piece questions a number of what it claims are 'myths' surrounding Australia's past military involvements.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.crikey.com.au/2012/04/24/rundle-anzac-day-and-why-we-need-to-question-myths-of-war/>

Arguments suggesting that Australia's attitude toward Anzac Day is dangerous

1. Anzac Day cannot be publicly challenged without penalty

Those who argue that Australia's attitude toward Anzac Day is dangerous are concerned that the day has become a 'sacred cow'. A sacred cow is an idea, custom, or institution that is held to be above criticism. On April 16, 2017, Independent Australia republished an opinion piece by Evan Williams, a newspaper editor and political speech writer, who argued that Anzac Day was among Australia's 'seven sacred cows'.

Critics of popular attitudes toward Anzac Day argue that seeing the day as beyond debate undermines freedom of speech and prevents negative aspects of the institution being challenged.

On a number of occasions in recent years citizens have been reprimanded and either sacked or threatened with dismissal for having criticised aspects of the Anzac tradition. In 2015, SBS sports journalist, Scott McIntyre, was sacked for tweeting remarks about Anzacs that were considered 'inappropriate' and 'disrespectful'. Among McIntyre's tweets was one which read, 'Remembering the summary execution, widespread rape and theft committed by these "brave" Anzacs in Egypt, Palestine and Japan.'

A number of historians have since commented that McIntyre's remarks do no more than reflect an aspect of historical reality that Australians do not want to recall. McIntyre's sacking has been seen as a suppression of free speech.

In an opinion piece published in The Conversation on April 29, 2015, Professor Philip Dwyer, Director of the Centre for the History of Violence, School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Newcastle stated, 'The decision made by the managing director of SBS is disappointing. Are journalists, academics and public figures only ever to tell people what they want to hear?'

Scott McIntyre's lawyer, Josh Bornstein, stated in 2016, 'The vigilantes and hypocrites who sought to have Scott sacked and his freedom of speech suppressed after the event included (then Communications Minister) Malcolm Turnbull, (News Corp columnist) Chris Kenny and (Australia's Human Rights Commissioner) Tim Wilson.'

Bornstein further stated, 'These are people who speak loftily about freedom of speech and when it is inconvenient to them ditch it and try and crush someone whose views they disagree with. They should be ashamed of themselves.'

In April 2017, critics of Australia's attitude toward Anzac Day have noted that ABC presenter Yassmin Abdel-Magied has been publicly abused and calls have been made for her sacking because she posted on her Facebook page, 'Lest. We. Forget. (Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine...)'

Within less than 24 hours of Ms Abdel-Magied's post 15,000 people had signed a petition calling for her to be sacked by the ABC. The petition included the claim, 'We, the taxpayers, who fund the ABC, call on its Managing Director, Michelle Guthrie, to sack Abdel-Magied for her despicable insult. It is bad enough that she would use Anzac Day to sully the sacrifice of our servicemen and women. To keep her on the public teat after this outrage would be to rub salt into the wound.'

Ms Abdel-Magied has received large numbers of abusive comments. One commentator posting after a report in The Australian newspaper noted, 'I will never watch the ABC programs again if they continue to employ Abdul-Mageid. She is clearly out of step with Australian values and clearly has no understanding or empathy for the soldiers who gave their lives for our freedom. Shame,shame,shame.'

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has also declared Abdel-Magied, a part-time ABC presenter, should not 'be paid anything from the federal government'. Senator Abetz has written to Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, asking that Abdel-Magied be dropped as a board member of the Council for Australian-Arab Relations, run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, saying she was 'unfit and lacked the judgement' for the role.

Some politicians also used the implied threat of a withdrawal of funding to the ABC to force its management to dismiss Abdel-Magied. Acting Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce commented, 'They [Abdel-Magied and those who support her in her views] make life exceedingly difficult for people like myself on the Expenditure Review Committee when we're fighting for funds when issues such as this are brought up to us. You can't just sweep it under the carpet. It starts to become a sense that the culture of the ABC is in some instances at odds with the culture of Australia.' Critics have noted that the implication of Mr Joyce's comment appears to be that the Government may reduce funding to the ABC if it voices views that are out of step with those held by a majority of Australians.

Some commentators believe that popular support for Anzac Day has become so unbalanced that anyone who criticises the commemoration is to be punished. Peter Cochrane, Honorary Associate, Department of History, University of Sydney has stated, 'Never has the Anzac tradition been more popular and yet never have its defenders been more chauvinistic, bellicose and intolerant of other viewpoints.'

2. Anzac Day is exploited for political purposes

Critics claim that Anzac Day has become increasingly incorporated into the Australian political landscape and is used for the advantage of individual politicians and to promote the policies of their parties.

It has been claimed that political leaders of most political persuasions seek to boost their personal popularity by associating themselves with Anzac Day commemorations and with Australia's armed forces. Praising the sacrifices of Australian soldiers and visiting the troops are commonly noted as means by which politicians seek to gain favour with the electorate.

An editorial published in The Australian Financial Review on April 25, 2017, noted, 'So Bill Shorten went to the Kokoda Trail in PNG this week while Malcolm Turnbull travelled to the Middle East.' The Prime Minister posted on Twitter 'It has been an honour to meet the servicemen and women in the Middle East, to thank the Anzacs of today for their service.' On his Facebook page Mr Turnbull noted, 'On behalf of all Australians, thank you, to all those at home and abroad today, as your ancestors did before you, in our uniform, under our flag, put their lives on the line to keep us free.' Bill Shorten commented similarly on Twitter, 'At Isurava, on the Kokoda trail. When the 39th dug in here, the average age of their soldiers was just 18. Lest we forget.'

As Anzac has acquired a growing place as Australia's central national myth, embodying values such as mateship and courage, it has been claimed that politicians of all persuasions have sought to associate themselves with these values. In a comment and analysis published in the Sydney Morning Herald, on November 9, 2014, Sonia Harford wrote, 'The lure is strong for politicians to align themselves with what they deem to be these uniquely Australian values.' The article quotes Australian historian Carolyn Holbroke stating, 'Given the potency of the Anzac legend, it is not surprising that politicians seek to harness that power to their own ends.'

What has been particularly condemned is the manner in which the popular regard in which the Anzac legend is now held has been exploited to justify Australian involvement in further wars. This claim has been made particularly in relation to former Prime Minister John Howard who both encouraged Australian commemoration of Anzac Day and committed Australian troops to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq after September 11.

In March 2006 The Monthly published an essay by Robert Mann in which he stated, 'during the Howard years, the commemorations on Anzac Day of the Gallipoli landings...have grown steadily in significance and solemnity.'

Robert Mann further stated, 'The sentimentalised version of the new Australian militarism provided a fitting atmosphere for romanticising the Australian involvement in the invasion of Iraq, for turning all Australian soldiers into instant diggers, and for legitimising all new military spending.'

In September 2010, International Political Sociology published a paper by Matt MacDonald in which the author stated, 'In justifying participation in military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the "war on terror," Australian Prime Minister John Howard invoked the memory of Australian sacrifice in war, linked most prominently to the so-called "Anzac myth."'

Critics note that the Anzac legend has repeatedly been used to support the foreign policy actions of Australian governments. It has been suggested that this is a strategy used to win support within the electorate for military action without discussing either the reasons for Australia's involvement or the military action's likelihood of success.

3. Anzac Day commemorations encourage a readiness to go to war

Critics of Anzac Day commemorations argue that Australia's current preoccupation with memorialising its war dead is part of a culture which promotes involvement in war.

In an opinion piece published in the New Matilda on April 24, 2016, Chris Graham stated, 'Australia has one of the largest

war memorials on earth, testament to our national fondness for slaughter. It also helps explain why Anzac Day has become an occasion of chest-thumping national pride...

I find our obsession as a nation with our role in foreign wars confronting, and while I think it's important to acknowledge the sacrifice of those who've fought to keep us free, I don't think our involvement in all wars had that noble goal at its core.'

Graham outlines the extent of Australia's military involvement in a series of conflicts, many of which had no direct bearing on Australia, and argues there is something ill-judged about this national preoccupation with military engagement. Graham states, 'For more than 100 years, Australia has rushed to involve itself in almost every major international conflict.

Unofficially, we sent men to fight the Maori Wars in New Zealand. We sent men to fight the Boer War in South Africa. We even participated in the Boxer Rebellion in China.

A decade and a half later, we marched off to the Great War in Europe. We were back there a few decades later for World War II.

We joined the attack on North Korea. We joined the attack on Vietnam. We've attacked Iraq twice since then, and we've attacked Afghanistan.'

Other historians and social commentators have argued that a focus on the virtues of those Australians who fought at Gallipoli and elsewhere creates a belief in the ennobling nature of battle. This view has been put by Hugh White, Professor of Strategic Studies at the Australian National University, who has stated, 'The Anzac ethos, as it is presented in Australia today, centres on the idea that the experience of combat brings out personal qualities that are unique to those who have fought, universal among those who have fought, and essential to Australia's national character. All this implies that there is something uniquely valuable about the experience of combat, for the soldier and for society.'

On March 2014, then Prime Minister Tony Abbott expressed his view of the noble purposes for which, he claimed, Australian soldiers had always fought. Addressing Australian troops returning from Afghanistan, the Prime Minister stated, 'Like your forebears, who fought militarism, who fought Nazism and Fascism and who fought Communism, you have fought for the universal decencies of mankind - the rights of the weak against the strong, the rights of the poor against the rich and the rights of all to strive for the very best they can. That's what Australians do; we always have and we always will.'

Historian David Stephens has argued, "'Soft" wars over the last 30 years - that is, wars with relatively low casualties - have made Australians more bellicose.' Stephens argues that our ceremonies glorify war rather than express regret for loss of life. He has written, 'We say that, beneath our commemoration of war, there is an abhorrence of war. We insist that we do not glorify war. These denials often come, however, as add-ons to moving, patriotic, feel-good...ceremonies with lots of flags, eloquent speeches, remembrance of heroic acts, sonorous hymns, wide-eyed children and, now, sound and light shows.'

Stephens believes that in a context where the Australian electorate has no lived experience of lives lost to war, the Anzac legend serves to romanticise the nature of battle, encouraging an enthusiasm for military engagements. There are many who believe that a readiness to commit to international conflicts is a dangerous and costly enthusiasm.

4. Popular attitudes toward Anzac Day distort Australia's national identity

Critics of Australia's current attitude toward Anzac Day argue that popular beliefs about Australians in war have attributed an exaggerated role in the formation of our national character to military actions.

Historian David Stephens has argued that Australia has a diverse history that has contributed to our national identity and that it is a significant over-simplification to suggest that Gallipoli and the actions of our soldiers in battle are what have primarily shaped the country. Stephens has stated, 'Australian history is made by women, men, individuals, families, artists, philosophers, scientists, unionists, business people, public servants, soldiers and politicians. We carry the imprint of the First Australians, the builders of the CSIRO, the Sydney Opera House and the Snowy scheme, the pioneers of the bush frontier in the nineteenth century and the urban frontier in the 1950s, and "boat people", whether they are convicts, post-war "ten pound Poms" and "New Australians" or asylum seekers. Australian history is to the credit - and the fault - of all of us, not just our Diggers.'

A similar argument has been put by Henry Reynolds, an Honorary Research Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania. Professor Reynolds disputes the emphasis on the action at Gallipoli as the birthplace of Australian nationhood. Instead, he argues, Australia came into being as the result of many actions performed in civic life. Reynolds has ironically presented the war-centred view that he disputes. He states, 'The implications fly off in all directions: nations are made in war not in peace, on battlefields not in parliaments; soldiers not statesmen are the nation's founders; men of blood are more worthy of note than negotiators and conciliators; the bayonet is mightier than the pen; a few fatal days on the shore of the Ottoman Empire outweighed the decades of civil and political pioneering by hundreds of colonial Australians.'

5. Anzac Day has become detached from the historical reality that gave rise to it

It has been claimed that popular beliefs about the Gallipoli campaign and the Anzacs' part in it are an oversimplification.

There are those who claim that they are in fact an exercise in national myth making and that while many soldiers were brave, many behaved in ways that would otherwise be regarded unfavourably.

In response to SBS's decision to sack Scott McIntyre for making critical remarks about the Anzacs and more general criticisms of the conduct of Australian troops and Australia's allies, Professor Philip Dwyer stated, 'The response to McIntyre's tweets is a demonstration that the popular perception of Anzac is completely out of step with the historical reality.'

Looking at the specific claims that McIntyre made, Professor Dwyer has noted that Anzacs stationed in Egypt during World War I are known to have behaved in a racist manner. The Professor has quoted racist remarks made by Australian soldiers, including, '[W]e thrash the black fellows with whips ... Every nigger who is impudent to a soldier gets a hiding ... I can't say how many I've belted and knocked out.'

Professor Dwyer has stated, 'Drinking and whoring, leaving bills unpaid, threatening, bullying and beating locals because they were "niggers", and generally behaving in ways that we now condemn our sportsmen for behaving was standard fair for these boys who had money, were far away from home, and had no one to control them.'

It has also been noted that some Australian soldiers fighting in New Guinea during World War II committed actions that would now be regarded as war crimes. Dwyer quotes one Australian soldier stating, 'Japanese are still being shot all over the place...The necessity for capturing them has ceased to worry anyone. From now on, Nippo survivors are just so much machine-gun practice. Too many of our soldiers are tied up guarding them.' Professor Dwyer has summarised the situation by stating, 'The Pacific theatre was a racialised war in which atrocities were committed on both sides.'

Professor Dwyer has also stated that after the occupation of Japan, Japanese women were sexually assaulted by Allied forces. The Professor claims, 'Every invading army, regardless of the side they are on, regardless of the war, rapes...Australians may not have behaved as badly as the Russians in Germany, but thousands of Japanese women were raped in the years after the war, some of them by Australian and New Zealand soldiers who made up the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan.'

Thus, critics of Australia's present attitude toward Anzac Day argue that it is based on a significant misrepresentation of the conduct of Australian soldiers, focusing exclusively on behaviour we consider admirable.

Arguments suggesting Australia's attitude toward Anzac Day is not dangerous

1. The significance of Anzac Day can be challenged and debated

Defenders of Australian attitudes toward Anzac Day argue that despite the reverence with which the day is commonly regarded, it is possible to voice a different point of view.

Although the conventional attitude within Australia has become to honour the sacrifice and commitment of Australian soldiers in all wars and to stress the value of the principal wars in which they have been engaged, there has remained a more critical perspective among some historians.

In an article published in *The Conversation* on April 25, 2015, Peter Cochrane, Honorary Associate, Department of History, University of Sydney, has outlined the range of divergent views among historians regarding the nature and significance of the Anzac legend and of Australia's involvement in war. Cochrane states, 'The centenary has galvanised...concern with numerous authors, several key titles and website *Honest History* raising the critical standard. In *What's Wrong with Anzac?*, edited by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, the contributing scholars sought to explain how this obsession with military history has been manufactured and to highlight how it eclipses a rich and diverse history of nation-making, civil and political traditions of democratic equality and social justice.'

Thus, defenders of Anzac Day note that although there is a prevailing orthodoxy regarding the respect which should be exhibited on the day, differing views exist and are published in a variety of forms. On March 26, 2012, Radio National's *Counterpoint* began a three-part series conducted by prominent Australian historians who challenged a number of myths popularly associated with the Anzacs and Australian soldiers generally.

Criticism of Anzac Day persists among commentators as well as some historians. On April 24, 2012, *Crikey* published a comment by Guy Rundle which concluded with the observation, 'Unpopular as it may be, we need to keep questioning the "ecstatic myths" of war in the hope that by doing so we may actually save some - Australian, Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian - lives to come, not those that have been.'

Virtually all the reader responses to Rundle's comment supported his opinion, with one poster, Cletus Purcell, stating 'As an ex-professional combat soldier and Senior Infantry NCO, I thank Mr Rundle for this piece. I too have problems with the ongoing "misuse" of Anzac Day and the very many myths it reinforces. His comments about how it is used as a de-facto or "disguised metaphor" for the ongoing scandal of our pointless losses in Afghanistan is bang-on.'

However, it is claimed, prominent media personalities are in a special position with regard to not bringing their employer into disrepute and that this obligation is part of their terms of employment. With regard to Scott McIntyre, SBS has claimed that it was his breach of the network's code of conduct that led to his dismissal.

The SBS Social Media Protocol states, 'While SBS employees have the right to make public comment and to enter into public debate in their personal capacity, it is important to ensure that SBS is not brought into disrepute. Individuals should consider how their posts will be perceived by the community, taking into account the standards which apply to their work. The SBS Code of Conduct applies to personal and professional use of social media ... These standards therefore apply to your professional and your personal use of social media.'

McIntyre had around 31,000 followers on twitter and his twitter account identified him as an SBS reporter. SBS maintains that under those circumstances he had made a commitment, as an SBS employee, not to make inflammatory comments regarding any issue. It is also claimed that McIntyre refused to apologise or retract when asked to do so. ABC employee, Abdel-Magied, did withdraw her Facebook post and apologised and did so without a request from her employer. The ABC has not terminated her employment, despite her poorly received comments about Anzac Day.

2. Anzac Day is a necessary commemoration of those who have died in battle

Those who support Australia's current observation of Anzac Day argue that it is a necessary commemoration of the bravery and the sacrifice of the more than one hundred thousand Australians who have died in war. Also being remembered are those who have been injured physically and psychologically, as well as those who have risked their lives in military action.

The number of Australians killed in war is offered as one significant reason for the commemoration. Supporters note that Australia needs to give public thanks to those who did so much and, in many instances, gave their lives at the behest of their country. The Australian War Memorial site indicates that 102,825 Australians had died while in military service as of November 11, 2016. 61,531 died during World War I; 39,652 died during World War II; 589 died during the Boer War; 521 died during the Vietnam War; 340 died during the Korean War and 42 have died so far in the Afghan War (in which Australian troops are still involved). These deaths are ranked in order of magnitude, not chronologically. Not only was World War I the most costly of all wars Australia has been involved in absolute terms, it was also the most devastating in relative terms. From a population of fewer than five million, 416,809 men enlisted, of whom more than 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner. One in five of those who went overseas to fight during World War I failed to return.

On April 25, 2015, the leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, was one of many Australians who visited Gallipoli to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Anzac landing there. Mr Shorten's comments are typical of those who stress

the importance of honouring the sacrifices and deaths of those who fought. Mr Shorten stated, 'Today marks the centenary of a day of extraordinary valour and tragic loss...'

This Anzac Day, a hundred years after the courage and chaos of the landings, Australia will pause to remember all those who have served. Anzac Day belongs to their honoured memory, and it belongs to all of us. At dawn services around our nation, we will stand in silence, bundled up against the morning cold. In small country towns we will lay wreaths upon memorials that bear the names of young men who never grew old. In neighbourhood RSLs we will raise a glass at the going down of the sun, in memory of the fallen.

However we mark this day, let all of us give thanks for the bravery of those prepared to risk, and lose, their lives for the country we love. Today, and always, we will remember them.'

On April 24, 2017, South Australia's Minister for Veterans Affairs, Martin Hamilton-Smith, similarly stated, 'On Anzac Day we honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice. We remember their families and communities, changed forever. We reflect on all in our community who endure the physical and psychological impact of war, and we take this moment to thank Australia's servicemen and women for their service and sacrifice in all wars, conflicts and peace operations to ensure the preservation of the way of life we enjoy today.'

The City of Canning's recently erected war memorial includes an inscription which attempts to explain the necessity of continuing to remember Australians who have fought and died in war. It states, 'For those of us spared the terrors of war, to be worthy of our dead, is to remember them. It is to remember that they died, the men and women of this community, in their thousands, in faraway lands, interred in the ground upon which they perished.

It is to remember those who loved them; their fathers and mothers, wives, children and friends. It is to remember that the pain in the hearts of those who loved them, who lived after them, never healed; the promise of their lives together, unfulfilled.'

3. Commemorating those who died in wars is an opportunity to promote peace

There are those who argue that rather than encouraging war, remembering those Australians who have died in military actions serves to promote peace.

On April 24, 2012, the literary journal, *Overland*, published a comment by former *Overland* editor, Jeff Sparrow, which argues that the peace movement must inevitably have a place in any event which commemorates those who suffered and died through war. Sparrow states, 'Some 16 million people died in the First World War. It is an extraordinary statistic. In the face of such overwhelming suffering, such tremendous devastation, the only decent commemoration entails ensuring that nothing comparable ever happens again.'

In an opinion piece published in the Australian edition of *The Spectator* on April 26, 2017, Satyajee Marar, stated, 'There is nothing 'glorious' about the imagery of Anzac day. War is a disgusting and ugly business. We remember the trenches at Gallipoli, infested with rats and the stench of dead bodies of those who didn't make it. We think of young men climbing 'over the top' and rushing into a hail of Turkish machine gun fire, cut into pieces, their potential wasted. We remember that amidst the poor decisions of those in power who insisted on going to war, these men gave up their lives. In honouring their sacrifice, we acknowledge the value of the lives they give up.'

Supporters of Anzac Day commemorations argue that a respect and desire for peace have been part of the day since its origins. A large monument at Anzac Cove bears the words of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish leader who led his troops to victory at Gallipoli. His words include the following, 'Today we honour the men who fought on both sides at Gallipoli. We honour the countries from which they came, but above all we honour the spirit of peace and friendship which has proved to be an enduring legacy of the Gallipoli conflict'.

It appears that for some young people the commemorations enacted on Anzac Day are an important means of ensuring that Australia is less likely to commit its soldiers to fight.

On April 28, 2017, Shauna Colnan, the principal of the International Grammar School, Sydney, wrote, 'Through all of these opportunities for learning [provided by Anzac commemorations], we encourage our students to think, to reflect on our history, to contemplate stories of individual courage against adversity, to meditate upon the heartbreak of war, to think of others, and finally to play their part, no matter how small, to develop a much-needed vision of peace for us all.'

Similar views have been put by young people themselves. On April 11, 2014, *The Adelaide Advertiser* published a comment by 17-year-old student, Rhys Harrison, in which he stated, 'As a young person, I think Anzac Day is not a chance to celebrate war, but peace. It is a chance to reflect on the great sacrifices of others in pursuit of a better future, a peaceful future.'

When we acknowledge the lives lost to the horrors of the First World War (and indeed the wars after it) we do not celebrate the sacrifice, but mourn it. As every April 25 passes, we are reminded again and again of the price of going to war, and the importance of not doing so lightly.'

Harrison went on to argue that commemorations like Anzac Day, by stressing the human cost of military engagements, ensured that young people who have not experienced war do not minimise its horrors and therefore approach it lightly. Harrison wrote, 'As the leaders of the future, it is important that we know the true price of war and conflict. As we become the Presidents, Prime Ministers and Secretary-Generals of the 21st century, we must understand the truly immeasurable cost of human lives spent in places like Gallipoli.'

On April 24, 2016, *Eureka Street* published a comment by Andrew Hamilton which similarly argues that Anzac Day serves as a discouragement to the waging of war. Hamilton writes, 'Anzac Day invites us to remember the soldiers who have died in war, those who have survived with scars to their body and spirit, and those who have grieved the loss.'

Conferences on war focus properly on the people and cultures that war damages. Both kinds of event [Anzac Day and conferences on war] at their best say, "Never again".'

4. Anzac Day is beyond politics

Supporters of Anzac Day argue it is a national commemoration which is beyond and removed from politics.

Commentators have noted that the increasing importance attached to Anzac Day has been a bi-partisan emphasis fostered by both Labor and Liberal political leaders. Jennifer Hewitt, in an opinion piece published in *The Australian Financial Review*

on April 24, 2017, noted 'It was Prime Minister Bob Hawke who took a group of Anzac veterans to Gallipoli in 1990 for the 75th anniversary.' She goes on to acknowledge the role John Howard has played in promoting popular enthusiasm for Anzac Day, noting, '[F]or John Howard, the Anzac myth helped many people define their feelings about what it means to be Australian.' Hewitt further noted that in 2017, to mark Anzac Day commemorations, 'Bill Shorten went to the Kokoda Trail in PNG...while Malcolm Turnbull travelled to the Middle East. Some commentators have claimed that the uniform importance each major political party attaches to Anzac Day makes it a commemoration that one party cannot use against the other. Supporters of Anzac Day argue that its commemoration should not be exploited to promote any political purpose. On April 26, 2017, the Nationals Member for Cowper, Luke Hartsuyker, stated, 'Anzac Day is about commemorating the service and sacrifice of generations of Australian servicemen and women.

It is Australia's most solemn day of remembrance. More than 100,000 Australians have given their lives defending our way of life. Many more have suffered physical and mental scars as a result of their service on our behalf.

Anzac Day is not about grandstanding. It is not about politics. It is not about personal opinions or religious arguments. On Anzac Day we stand side by side united as Australians: Left and right, white and black, male and female, young and old, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim or atheist.'

In an opinion piece published in The Daily Telegraph on April 24, 2013, Andrew Priestley criticised those who attempted to use Anzac day for party-political purposes. Priestley stated, 'Anzac Day is about remembering those who gave their lives in Australia's name.

The Anzacs, and the day we pay tribute to them, are not play things for politicians and pundits.'

Supporters of Anzac Day commemorations also argue that the day should not be used to make unrelated political points. In an opinion piece published in the Australian edition of The Spectator on April 26, 2017, Satyajeet Marar, stated, 'Every Anzac Day, it seems there is no shortage of talking heads ready to...signal to us that we shouldn't be celebrating. That what we are celebrating are bloodshed and atrocities. That we are only distracting ourselves from the real issues. What real issues? The issues championed by them, obviously. Because God forbid that a single day honouring the sacrifice of soldiers should be left sacred.'

5. Interest in Anzac Day varies in Australia

Those who argue that interest in Anzac Day in Australia is not an unthinking obsession point to the fluctuating nature of that interest over time. It has been suggested that attitudes to Anzac Day are frequently influenced by social and political developments occurring in Australia at the time.

Students of popular interest in and observance of Anzac Day have noted that this has varied significantly over time. An undergraduate piece of research by Kristy Hulm published online on Making History at Macquarie gave an overview of the fluctuating attitudes toward Anzac Day up to the end of the 1980s. Hulm states 'Anzac Day has been commemorated every year since the landing of Australian troops at Gallipoli on April 25, 1915. The trends of the popularity of these commemorations have varied throughout the course of the twentieth century. Throughout the inter-war years Anzac Day was seen as an opportunity to remember those who served in the war and a reunion for returned soldiers. Popular opinion towards Anzac Day began to decline in the post-war period and continued to do so until the beginning of the 1980s. In the 1950s and 1960s, this decrease was mainly attributed to ideas that Anzac Day was primarily one for veterans to get together for a drink. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s on the other hand, anti-war movements sparked by Australia's problematic involvement in the Vietnam War were one of the key causes of the decline in interest and popularity of the day.' Rather than being a determinant of popular attitudes, Hulm's overview suggests that attitudes toward Anzac Day are frequently influenced by external factors occurring in Australia's international relations and demographics.

Further implications

Commemorations of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli have occurred since the year following the event; the extent and significance of these ceremonies have varied. However, it seems an exaggeration to suggest that fervour surrounding Anzac Day and its associated legends have been a determining factor in Australian politics and the shaping of Australia's international policy positions and military involvements. Studying the evolution of Australian attitudes to Anzac Day would rather suggest that attitudes toward it are shaped by contemporary reality.

Since the September 11 attacks of 2001 and Australia's involvement in the 'War against Terror', Australia's attitude toward the world has become more cautious and marked (through our involvement in Afghanistan) by what is now the longest military engagement in the country's history. The apparent universality and immediacy of the terrorist threat, as perceived by many within Australia, has helped to legitimise in the popular mind military actions against it.

A September 2014 poll found that 62 percent of Australians supported the federal government's decision to provide humanitarian aid and weapons - including 50 tonnes of small arms and ammunition - to forces opposing Islamic State militants. In this climate a heightened interest in Anzac Day celebrations is understandable. Australians feel a need to honour their war dead and perhaps to reassure themselves of their capacity to defend themselves.

However, any generalisation about popular attitudes toward Anzac Day have to remain just that as the day has a widely divergent significance for different groups within the community, seen as a shibboleth by pacifists and militarists alike.

Anzac Day attitudes appear more a litmus test of the individual's views than a catalyst shaping those views.

An interesting subtext running through Australian attitudes toward Anzac Day has been a dramatic shift in popular feeling toward the military since the 1970s. The Vietnam War (1962 - 75) became, over its duration, arguably Australia's most unpopular military involvement. As the first widely televised war and one manned largely by conscripts, its barbarities were presented nightly on suburban television screens while many of the country's youth came to resent vehemently its potential demands on them.

The Vietnam War ended in defeat and was generally construed as a vicious, wasteful failure. Its immediate aftermath was a period of relative reluctance to become involved in further large-scale military action on the part of either the United States or Australia as its ally. Within Australia, withdrawing Australia's remaining troops from Vietnam was seen as a victory for the political Left and was one of the first actions of the Whitlam Labor Government. Paradoxically, popular hostility to the Vietnam War translated into popular indifference, if not hostility, to the returning troops.


By 1987 attitudes to the war had again changed: Vietnam veterans were given a welcome home parade in Sydney. Some 25,000 veterans marched to the cheers of several hundred thousand onlookers. Five years later, in 1992, a National Memorial for the Vietnam War was unveiled on Canberra's Anzac Parade.

Many of Australia's political leaders are either are of an age to remember clearly the treatment of returning Vietnam veterans. One of the marked changes since the end of the Vietnam period is that there is now a clear loyalty to the troops expressed from all sides of politics, irrespective of a particular political party's enthusiasm for a military commitment which an Australian government has made.

The widespread support for Anzac Day commemorations appears to be part of a general recognition that soldiers should be thanked rather than condemned for doing what their country has asked them to do.


Newspaper items used in the compilation of this issue outline

Pauline Hanson's Please Explain, April 25, 2017, comments by Pauline Hanson, *Pauline Hanson comments on Yassmin*

Abdel-Magied and Anzac Day 

Behind The News Australia, April 25, 2017, comments, *Paul Murray slams Yassmin Abdel-Magied for Anti-ANZAC*


Facebook post 


The SMH, April 26, 2017, news item **with video** by Broede Carmody, *With friends like Yassmin's, she doesn't need enemies* 


The Morning Show, April 27, 2017, interview, *Sarah Hanson-Young defends Yassmin Abdel-Magied's Anzac comment*




MamaMia, April 27, 2017, news item **with video** by Jessie Stephens, *The Yassmin Abdel-Magied witch hunt has to stop*

The Guardian, April 28, 2017, comment by Richard Ackland, *The Yassmin Abdel-Magied bash-a-thon is all part of the Anzac Day ritual* 

The Herald-Sun, April 29, 2017, comment by Andrew Bolt, *With friends like Yassmin's, she doesn't need enemies* 

The Herald-Sun, April 30, 2017, comment by Andrew Bolt, *Yassmin Abdel-Magied: Time to defend Australian values from Islam?s demands* 

The Age, May 3, 2017, news item (**with video**) by Latika Bourke Zed Seselja *criticises Yassmin Abdel-Magied over Anzac Day Facebook post* 

The Australian, May 3, 2017, comment by Gary Johns *The ABC needs to know its place and time* 

The Conversation, May 8, news item by Michelle Grattan, *Julie Bishop keeps Abdel-Magied on Australian-Arab board* 

The Age, May 8, comment by Amanda Vanstone, *Lest Abdel-Magied forgets, she created the problem* 