

EDITORIAL

Anzac Day

When I was a young man I didn't carry my pack, like the country boy in Eric Bogle's epic song 'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda' who 'Amidst all the tears, the shouts and the cheers' sails off to Gallipoli in 1915. Instead I felt like Hughie Cook, the student at odds with his digger father Alf, in the legendary Australian drama *One Day of the Year* (by Alan Seymour, 1962). This play deeply caught the generational conflict of our Vietnam era. I was on Hughie's side, and with the draft looming, I would joke that Anzac Day commemorated blunderous and stupid British generals who didn't even know April 25 was a public holiday in our countries when nobody did anything but get drunk. No wonder the Gallipoli landing was a disaster. Forget it.

But later, with Bogle's haunting lines of 'The forgotten heroes of a forgotten war', I started remembering. My mother showed me photos of two of her uncles in uniform. James and Walter were both teachers from East Gippsland, both enlisting in 1914, both rising to Lieutenant rank, both dead by 1918 on the Western Front. My father told me of his Uncle Jack who died at Gallipoli (there was no photo). And of others, in Bogle's words, 'The armless, the legless, the blind, the insane'.

Just this year my friend Rosie travelled to France to see her grandfather's name on the Monument to the Missing at Thiepval (Somme). He died on the first day of the Somme, July 1, 1915, a member of the Ulster Division. Rosie, who came from Belfast at age seven, goes teary with this story. So do I.

Anzac Day has become important to me. It may be the most powerful myth we Australians have, with a double meaning of how we acquired our sense of identity and terrible sense of loss at the same time.

It is the one day in Australia when public mourning and remembering is fully expressed and ritualised, in the solemn Dawn Service and morning march. At this time I think of my great uncles, with the eager, bright faces, dead before their time, their names remembered now only on a fading war memorial in Lakes Entrance. Every small town has its monument for the few dozen young men from the district, barely out of adolescence, part of 60,000 dead, of 330,000 who marched off to Europe. This was an enormous casualty rate. It has shadowed every generation since.

So I ask families now about Anzac Day: who went, who survived and how, who was left, who carried the burdens and who voted against Conscriptio or refused to fight. The stories tumble out, and the griefs. About grandfathers and grandmothers, and aunts left behind forever. Or about World War II, and fathers who screamed in the night, or drunkenly beat their wives, while everyone remained silent. Or Vietnam, when at last we began to take post traumatic stress seriously. And I ask about other wars or persecution. Armenia, or the Greek Civil War, or Warsaw, or Chile or Cambodia. Or Ulster, where not a single family was left unmarked by the Somme. Or lately Bosnia or Somalia. Our terrible Century.

On Anzac Day like no other day we can touch the national sadness and grief in our histories, wherever we may come from. This is surely an issue for all therapists. We are made by where we live, but this can also change as we change. If we are not to be haunted by our inheritance and our history, we must remember the dead in our private and our public lives, including the ghostly presence of those who we would forget. Only this way can we come to terms with where we live, to find justice, peace and reconciliation.

As I write I am particularly mindful of the indigenous people destroyed as white settlement was established.

One day on Anzac Day I hope we will start to ceremonially remember black Australians who also died in the defence of their country from warmongering Europeans. Henry Reynolds suggests that (if):

The dawn landings at Gallipoli [could] be juxtaposed with the many dawn raids faced by sleeping Aborigines ... then the truth would be apparent that it was as much the war with Aborigines that 'made' Australia as a nation as our involvement in World War 1.

Anzac Day, the saddest day in our calendar, is a day to remember the traumas and tragedies our family and national pasts were built on. There is a lot to remember. Lest we forget.

Brian Stagoll
17/10/98