...Age shall not weary them
Nor the year condemn
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
We will remember them
Lest we forget.
Anzac Day, commemorating Australian (& New Zealanders) lost in war, has been an Australian tradition of almost 90 years. Over that time Australia, its people, their lifestyle, thoughts and expectations have changed, so Anzac day has also changed.

At the time of the first Anzacs, Australia was a very young nation, unscarred and restless, showing:

‘That chilling urge towards a national baptism in fire and blood…..’¹

When Britain called for troops, Australia sent 333,000 men into some of the bloodiest battles of WW1.

April 25th, 1915, ANZACs landed at Gallipoli for an 8 month campaign that cost thousands of lives. Their courage was recognised,* twelve months later Australians spontaneously celebrated their memory. The training camp in Egypt held a sports day, 2,000 ANZACs marched through London earning the nickname ‘The Knights of Gallipoli’. Australia was not outshone; services and marches took place around the country. Wounded Gallipoli veterans, accompanied by nurses, paraded through crowded Sydney streets.

Until the end of WW1 in 1918, Anzac Day was used for patriotic rallies and recruiting campaigns, then it became a day when people came together to mourn the 60,000 Australians that had died. Those people were not just pictures in books, they had been brothers, fathers, cousins and friends, it was important that they not be forgotten.

Australian soldiers were not brought home for burial, even when their remains could be identified, so official war memorials took the place of their tombstones. Anzac services began to be held around these, rather than in town halls or churches, and to be led by returned servicemen or community leaders instead of churchmen. The service was almost a funeral, people of all faiths were welcome.

By 1927 all the states recognised some form of public holiday, and soon the traditions we now associate with Anzac Day were established … dawn vigils, morning services, reunions two-up games, and a solo bugler playing the Last Post.

Time passed, memories began to fade. The 1930’s brought uncertainty, political tension and economic depression. People did still honor the Anzac’s, but articles that had held pride of place on the front page of newspapers morphed into hard to find footnotes ……

*See appendices

¹ Barbara Penny
“Year by year, then, the mourning will be less, there will be fewer tears, until that day not so far distant when Anzac will stand with Waterloo and Trafalgar as a day of gallant deeds by brave men long gone like those who followed Hannibal, Caesar and Bonapart, into their wars and into their silence. Then it may be seemly to make that day as any other holiday”

Attitudes changed with the renewed declaration of war in 1939. Australia and New Zealand no longer combined their military forces but the ANZAC acronym had immense strength and was retained by both countries. Almost one million Australians served in WW2, Anzac Day grew to include those that fell, and though crowds were not encouraged for security reasons, interest in the Anzac services grew.

Australians experienced social stability and a buoyant economy after WW2 but felt threatened by communism. Troops were sent to the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation, a total of 359 Australians died.

The 1960’s brought full employment and high standards of living. War seemed distant, Anzac services were less well attended. In previous decades every adult had lived through at least one war, now fewer people had such direct experience.

Also Australia’s involvement (1962 – 72) in the Vietnam War affected people’s perception of Anzac Day. This war was watched as it happened by the entire nation courtesy of television. People saw the destruction, the death toll on both sides. A strong anti-war lobby organised peace rallies and criticised Anzac Day, calling it militaristic and a glorification of war. Defenders argued it was a day to express sorrow, not glorify conflict.

When the undeclared Vietnam War ended in 1972 its veterans did not receive the respect given those in previous wars. Their experience had been dreadful, and now seemed futile, “.....a messy Australian implication in a huge American failure.”

Not until 1987 were they invited to march on Anzac Day. Even now they are not called returned servicemen, but a singled out as ‘Vietnam Veterans’. This was summed up in a song released by Red Gum in the 70’s and which soon was at the top of the charts, ‘….god help me, I was only 19’.*

*See appendices

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2 The Advocate April 15, 1931
Soon people predicted Anzac Day would simply die out when the “diggers” did. But in 1981 Peter Weir released the movie “Gallipoli”, giving an insight into the lives of WWI soldiers, who again began to be thought of as heroes.

In 1958, for the 50th anniversary of the Gallipoli landing, a re-enactment was staged in Turkey. Since then the Anzac Dawn Service at Lone Pine is attended annually by many Australians including official delegates and politicians.

On Remembrance Day 1993 an Unknown Soldier was entombed in the War Memorial in Canberra to represent and honor all Australians that had fought and died abroad. After the ceremony, the crowd clapped, something unknown to the solemnity of Anzac. You don’t clap at a funeral.

Australians are now fighting their second Gulf War, following America into what has been called a ‘second Vietnam’…. There is mixed feelings about our forces being deployed in Iraq. We have yet to see whether the returning combatants are viewed as heroes.

Every Australian child learns about Simpson and his donkey, a strong symbol of Aussie mate ship. Every Australian remembers Anzac Day. Nobody forgets. Ask them, they can tell you its meaning, although maybe, and increasingly, they express themselves differently. People embrace this 90 year old tradition, they respect the old diggers who rise at dawn, stand-to and reminisce. What would Australia be without them? The original men of Gallipoli have died, but their spirit lives on when the Anzac bugle plays The Last Post. The music cutting through the air, reaching out to every one.

-Claire Hanson
Those heroes that shed their blood
And lost their lives
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country
Therefore rest in peace
There is no difference between the jonnis
And the Mehemets to us where they lie side by side
Here in this country of ours
You, theirs mothers
Who sent your sons faraway countries
Wipe away your tears
Your sons are lying in our bosom
And are now at peace
After having lost their lives on this land they have
Become our son as well.

-Kemal Ataturk

from a memorial to Allied Soldiers at Anzac Cove Turkey
I WAS ONLY NINETEEN

Mum and Dad and Denny saw the passing out parade at Puckapunyal
(It was long march from cadets).
The sixth battalion was the next to tour and it was me who drew the card.
We did Canungra and Shoalwater before we left.

Chorus 1:
And Townsville lined the foottpath as we marched down to the quay.
This clipping from the paper shows us young and strong and clear.
And there’s me in my slouch hat with my SLR and greens.
God help me, I was only nineteen.

From Vung Tau riding Chinooks to the dust at Nui Dat,
I’d been in and out of choppers now for months.
But we made our tents a home. V.B. and pinups on the lockers,
And an Asian orange sunset through the scrub.

Chorus 2:
And can you tell me, doctor, why I still can’t get to sleep?
And night time’s just a jungle dark and a barking M.16?
And what’s this rash that comes and goes, can you tell me what it means?
God help me, I was only nineteen.

A four week operation, when each step can mean your last one
On two legs: it was a war within yourself.
But you wouldn’t let your mates down ’til they had you dusted off,
So you closed your eyes and thought about something else.

Chorus 3:
Then someone yelled out “Contact”, and the bloke behind me swore.
We hooked in there for hours, then a God almighty roar.
Frankie kicked a mine the day that mankind kicked the moon.
God help me, he was going home in June.

I can still see Frankie, drinking tinnies at the Grand Hotel
On a thirty-six hour rec. leave in Vung Tau.
And I can still hear Frankie, lying screaming in the jungle.
’till the morphine came and killed the bloody row.

Chorus 4:
And the Anzac legends didn’t mention mud and blood and tears.
And stories that my father told me never seemed quite real
I caught some pieces in my back that I didn’t even feel.
God help me, I was only nineteen.

Chorus 5:
And can you tell me doctor, why I still can’t get to sleep?
And why the Channel Seven chopper chills me to my feet?
And what’s this rash that comes and goes, can you tell me what it means?
God help me, I was only nineteen.

Written and performed by Australian John Schumann and his band Red Gum, soon number 1 in the 70’s popular with Vietnam Veterans.


www.awm.gov.au

1 Anzac Remembered, selected writings by K.S. Ingles (Melb. Univ. Press, 1998)

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http://www.hotkey.net.au/-marshelle/only19/only19.htm, I was only nineteen, The Red Gum

2 Kemal Ataturk, Commander of the Turkish forces defending the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915.

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And chats with

Tessa Frazer-Oakley
Madeline Hanson
President of the RSL Penguin