

**French writer, Jean Cocteau, who drove ambulances during World War 1 once asked, "What is history after all? History is facts that become lies in the end; legends are lies which become history in the end." Is the war that everyday people accept as fact what actually happened? Is there any way we can separate the ANZAC legend from the facts? What are the consequences of the facts being hidden from the next generation?**

When one thinks of ANZAC they see what they want to see.

A brave, selfless soldier is what the ANZAC is 'supposed to be.'<sup>1</sup>

A man who, for any mate, will go the extra mile,  
never without humour nor a cheeky smile.

The legend tells of valiant soldiers that would never dare retreat.

These men had an 'endurance that will never own defeat.'<sup>2</sup>

The legend was formed on the beaches of Gallipoli  
where they 'shed their blood' as they fought the Turkish army.<sup>3</sup>

But this ANZAC legend views 'war as an epic rather than a tragedy.'<sup>4</sup>

It forgets the horror, when 'every 20 paces or less lay a body.'<sup>5</sup>

The terrible slaughter of men in 'absolute hell'<sup>6</sup>  
as they 'were both peppered by shrapnel and shell.'<sup>7</sup>

So is this legend that we accept as truth really that?

Is the ANZAC legend based at all on fact?

'Was [the soldier] scared and bewildered...as he isn't supposed to be?

Because these things don't sit too well with mythology.'<sup>8</sup>

We should by no means forget the heroic women and men,

those who demonstrated resilience, and those 'we can never see again.'<sup>9</sup>

The ANZAC legend was formed when soldiers were 'dropping like flies,'<sup>10</sup>  
yet still they kept advancing, even when "another comrade...sadly died."<sup>11</sup>

Heroes were born whenever the soldiers went into battle,  
they were the survivors and those killed by the 'rifles' rapid rattle.'<sup>12</sup>

The men were brave and selfless, always there for their mates.

One of the soldiers was my great uncle, William Thomas Yates.

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<sup>1</sup> Les Carlyon *Gallipoli*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2001, p9

<sup>2</sup> C.E.W. Bean *ANZAC to Amiens*, Penguin Books, Sydney, 1993, p181

<sup>3</sup> Quote from Ataturk, 1934, appears on memorial at ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli

<sup>4</sup> Les Carlyon *Gallipoli* Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2001, p23

<sup>5</sup> Frank Hurley, Official Australian War photographer, appears in: 'Byways to Hell' in *Wartime: Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*, No 1, Australian War Memorial, 1997, p7

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Lieutenant G. M. Carson, 33<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1917 (AWM 2DRL/185). Reproduced in 'The Battle of Poelcappelle' *Wartime: Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*, November, 1997, p11

<sup>7</sup> A. R. Perry, 'The Landing' in C.E.W. Bean's (ed.) *The ANZAC Book* Cassell, London, 1916, p4

<sup>8</sup> Les Carlyon, *Gallipoli* Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2001, p9

<sup>9</sup> Sir W. R. Birdwood, 'Introduction' in C.E.W. Bean's (ed.) *The ANZAC Book*, Cassell, London, 1916, p2

<sup>10</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 Volume 2: The Story of ANZAC*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1924, p30

<sup>11</sup> Sgt A. McFarlane, *Sunset Vigil*, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> W. Owen, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, September-October 1917

Yates was the typical soldier, devoted, courageous and dutiful.

"I always feel when I am with the Battalion I am doing something useful."<sup>13</sup>

He fought bravely from the start, and was awarded the DSO<sup>14</sup>

for personally conducting "the consolidation of the captured post."<sup>15</sup>

He showed "conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty" before a shell wounded him in the head.

"I am very lucky to be here at all, as I was left on the field for dead."

Two soldiers found him alive upon going to give a decent burial.

They were bringing him back to safety when they were tragically hit with a shell.

Lieutenant Dillow was severely wounded, Private Carrington died the next day.

Yet, for my Uncle's previous actions, he received an accolade.

The ANZAC legend does not focus on the heartbreak, the whole truth.

It is for this reason we send the wrong message about war to our youth.

While 'the tragedies of war' will be remembered year after year,<sup>16</sup>

a devastating conflict is something that should never be revered.

We should remember the overwhelming costs of going off to war,

then maybe we will realise it shouldn't happen anymore.

To the ANZAC soldiers, the legend was essential.

It helped them remember fallen mates, and to keep up morale.

The soldiers required this legend, abounding with grandeur.

It gave them hope when all was lost, and helped them to endure.

But now, we perceive this legend as being the whole reality,  
when desolation and suffering were the actuality.

We, today, weren't there, how can we possibly perceive

when the truth and the tragedy are being buried with those whom we grieve?

The ANZAC soldiers did not fight so that they would become heroes.

They 'battled and conquered and fell' so we wouldn't face war tomorrow.<sup>17</sup>

A future without war is what the ANZAC soldiers earned.

So instead of giving glory, let's give them what they deserve.

Whilst focusing on the ANZAC heroes, let's not forget their tragic deaths.

Only then will we succeed in holding back 'Pain's breath.'<sup>18</sup>

Why must we always seek to embellish a story?

When, in actual fact, war holds no glory.

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from W.T. Yates to sister, Jean. 15th May, 1917. Family archives.

<sup>14</sup> Distinguished Service Order. Awarded for highly successful command and leadership during active operations.

<sup>15</sup> Copy of extract from the Second Supplement No. 30188 to the London Gazette dated 17th July 1917. Quoted in the Base Record Office, A.I.F. Melbourne, 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Email from Major George Logan (personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2013)

<sup>17</sup> "Crosscut", 'How I won the V.C.' in C. E. W. Bean's (ed.) *The ANZAC Book*, Cassell, London, 1916, p98

<sup>18</sup> Leon Gellert, *Acceptance*, 1917, appears in *Songs of a Campaign*.

Soldiers killing soldiers does not solve the world's problems.  
Instead, brave men 'die like a dog for no good reason.'<sup>19</sup>  
What if the soldiers who fight for king, country and glory  
were instead 'loyal to love and not to [their] countries?'<sup>20</sup>

'War is the most despicable of acts [to which] human's resort.'<sup>21</sup>  
Yet still, 'such incredible good things' came as they fought.<sup>22</sup>  
But these 'good things' do not overshadow the calamity;<sup>23</sup>  
they just make us forget the truth, and repeat the catastrophes.

This war, this chaos, was 'the suicide of nations;'<sup>24</sup>  
to view it any other way would be a false interpretation.  
In some ways, it is not bad, heroics should never be downplayed.  
However, to overlook facts is never a good thing, because then mistakes will be remade.

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<sup>19</sup> Ernest Hemingway, 'Notes on the Next War: A Serious Topical Letter' *Esquire*, 1935. Appears in: Unknown, *Quotes about War*, 2013, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/war?page=2> accessed 22nd July, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Graham Greene, *Our Man in Havana*, 1958. Appears in: Unknown, *Quotes about War*, 2013, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/war?page=2> accessed 22nd July, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Email from Major George Logan (personal communication, 23rd July, 2013)

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Quote from unidentified German prisoner, appears in: Les Carlyon's *Gallipoli* Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2001