

Great Debates: The Anzac Legend

That the Anzac legend is an idealised version of the truth

THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE

Joan Beaumont



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Source Analysis Worksheet

Source	What is the source? Who created it?	What information does the source provide?	What argument does this provide your character?	What questions are you left asking?

Background Information

Joan Beaumont

‘The legend is ... about values and ways of imagining the national identity.’



Image courtesy of Joan Beaumont

Joan Beaumont is a historian and academic at the Australian National University. Much of her work focuses on Australia's wartime experiences, including how the nation remembers war and the Anzac legend. Her publications include the award-winning *Broken Nation: Australians and the Great War*, which was published in 2013. It explores the experiences of Australians who served overseas and how those on the home front dealt with the loss and hardship inflicted by the First World War.

Beaumont is a frequent media contributor to discussions regarding the Anzac legend, which she regards as a 'signifier of national identity'. She has suggested that the characteristics and values highlighted by the legend are not always reflective of how the Anzacs saw themselves or of Australian society today.

■ Source 4.1

The legend is also, and primarily, about values and ways of imagining the national identity. These values ... are currently courage, endurance, sacrifice and mateship.

Intriguingly, these do not mirror exactly the values that the original Anzacs embraced. They were often staunch British imperialists and prided themselves on being effective killers – something we tend to forget today when soldiers are often depicted as victims of catastrophe and trauma. But these values are arguably those which Australian society needs to affirm in the 21st century when, for all our materialism and rampant individualism, we still need at least some individuals to volunteer to subordinate their personal interests to the collective good. Anzac, in this sense, can validate not only the men and women of the Australian Defence Force who are the direct heirs of the legend of Gallipoli, but also the service of police officers, civil defence forces and fire fighters.

Joan Beaumont, 'Is the Anzac legend still the core of Australia's national identity?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 2015
smh.com.au/opinion/is-the-anzac-legend-still-the-core-of-australias-national-identity-20150420-1moxfc.html

■ Source 4.2

... within a space of fifteen feet, I can count fourteen of our boys stone dead ... Men and boys who yesterday were full of joy and life, now lying there, cold – cold – dead – their eyes glassy, their face sallow and covered with dust – soulless – gone – somebody's son, somebody's boy – now merely a thing ... God, what a sight. The major is standing next to me and he says 'Well we have won'. Great God – won ... then may I never witness defeat.

Cyril Lawrence, Lone Pine, 7 August 1915

Joan Beaumont, *Broken nation: Australians in the Great War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2013, page 131

Source 4.3



Sydney Nolan, *Gallipoli* (1963, oil on hardboard panel, 159.9 x 243.8 cm, AWM ART19581.002)

awm.gov.au/collection/C177780

Source 4.4

... for much of the twentieth century the history of war developed in the shadow of C.E.W. Bean, war correspondent, spirit behind the Australian War Memorial, and self-appointed custodian of the ANZAC legend. This is hardly an original comment but it needs repeating that Bean's official history acquired such stature that to this day no one has tried to replace it with a comprehensive history of the AIF during the First World War ...

Joan Beaumont, 'ANZAC Day to VP Day: arguments and interpretations', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* – Issue 40

awm.gov.au/articles/journal/j40/beaumont

■ Source 4.5

Anzackery *n.* Aust. the promotion of the Anzac legend in ways that are perceived to be excessive or misguided.

Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, sixth edition, Australian National Dictionary Centre, 2017

Note: the term Anzackery was coined in 1967 by historian Geoffrey Serle, and first added to the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* in 2017.

■ Source 4.6

Some submitters suggested that Simpson deserved a VC [Victoria Cross] because he represented what it means to be Australian, and there was strong community support for such recognition. While this might be a popular proposition, the VC can only be awarded for valorous conduct in the presence of the enemy. The Tribunal found that Simpson's initiative and bravery were representative of all other stretcher-bearers of 3rd Field Ambulance and that bravery was appropriately recognised as such by the award of an MID.

Inquiry into unresolved recognition for past acts of naval and military gallantry and valour (Valour Inquiry), Defence Honours and Awards Appeal Tribunal, 2013, page 184

defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au/inquiries/completed-inquiries/valour/private-john-simpson-kirkpatrick/

Glossary of terms

Anzac:	Originally used to describe the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) that first formed in 1915, 'Anzac' was soon used to describe the men themselves.
Dardanelles:	A narrow strait of water in Turkey which lies along the Gallipoli peninsula. During the First World War the Gallipoli campaign was also referred to as the Dardanelles campaign.
Gallipoli:	A peninsula located in Turkey where Australians fought in 1915.
Western Front:	The central area of operations in Western Europe during the First World War.
