

*The Second War in Every Respect: Australian memory
and the Second World War*

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The Second World War stands across the 20th century like a colossus. Its death toll, geographical spread, social dislocation and genocidal slaughter were unprecedented. It was literally a world war, devastating Europe, China and Japan, triggering massive movements of population, and unleashing forces of nationalism in Asia and Africa that presaged the end of European colonialism. The international order was changed irrevocably, most notably in the rise of the two superpowers and the decline of Great Britain.

For Australia too, though the loss of life in the conflict was comparatively small, the war had a profound impact. The white population faced for the first time the threat of invasion, with Australian territory being bombed from the air and sea in 1942.¹ The economy and society were mobilized to an unprecedented degree, with 993,000 men and women, of a population of nearly seven million, serving in the military forces. Nearly 40,000 of these were killed in action, died of wounds or died while prisoners of war.² Gender roles, family life and social mores were changed with the mobilization of women into the industrial workforce and the friendly invasion of possibly a million

¹ The heaviest raid was on the northern city of Darwin on 19 February 1942. Other towns in the north of Western Australia and Queensland were bombed across 1942; while on 31 May 1942 three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour and shelled the suburbs.

² <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/statistics/ww2.asp> ; AWM Information Sheet [www.awm.gov.au/research/inforsheets/war_casualites](http://www.awm.gov.au/research/inforsheets/war_casualites.asp) asp. The date range is 3 September 1939 to 30 June 1947.

American servicemen based particularly in northern Australia. Politically the war also transformed the landscape by giving legitimacy to the Australian Labor Party which had been confined to the opposition role at the federal level for most of the interwar years. The years 1941-49 are still seen as the golden age of Labor during which Prime Ministers John Curtin and Ben Chifley rose to the challenge of defending Australia, initiated the modern welfare state and re-aligned the federal balance of power permanently towards the national government at the expense of the states. Finally, in international relations, the war eroded Australian confidence in British imperial power, particularly because the seismic shock of the so-called British “betrayal” at Singapore in December 1941 initiated a new, if halting and problematic, realignment towards alliance with the United States, which remains the keystone of Australian defence policy today.³

Yet for all this, the Second World War is relegated to a secondary place in the Australian national memory of war vis-à-vis the war of 1914-18. It is a lesser war in every respect. Why this is so, when the war itself was fought on such a monumental scale globally, is one of the issues addressed in this article. The term ‘national memory’ is, of course, a construct, and one of considerable complexity. As Jay Winter has said, a term such as ‘national memory’ has the pitfall of suggesting that memory is ‘some vague cloud which exists without agency’.⁴ The term, therefore, is most appropriately used to mean the processes of remembrance and representation in the public sphere, processes which extend from ritual and commemorative practices to cultural production of many kinds.

No discussion of the national memory of war in Australia can begin anywhere but with the First World War. On 25 April 1915 15,000 men of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landed at a small beach on the Gallipoli peninsula as part of Anglo-French attempt to force Turkey out of the war. Although the Gallipoli campaign was a failure, for Australians it spawned a mythic narrative about the Australian soldier, the ANZAC legend, which to this day plays a central role in the national political culture. In essence, ANZAC, to use the common short-hand, claimed that Australians proved themselves not only at Gallipoli but also on the Western front

³ For further development of all this issues see Joan Beaumont (ed.) *Australia's War 1939-4* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

⁴ *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 11.

to be one of the best fighting units of the First World War. Moreover, and this is critically important, this military prowess was attributable to the distinctive characteristics of the society from which Australian soldiers were drawn. Supposedly, the egalitarian and classless nature of Australia, and the dominance of a rural (bush) ethos in pre-war society, had made its men intuitively resourceful, self-directed, and able to show initiative, to challenge authority and to ignore senseless orders. Above all Australian soldiers were driven to fight at such heroic levels by 'mateship', the Australian variant of comradeship.⁵

This mythic representation resonated immediately with a public that was experiencing grief and loss on a colossal scale. Between 1914 and 1918 some 60,000 Australians died, when the population was fewer than 5 million. The celebratory discourse of ANZAC, therefore, invested massive private loss with public meaning. Moreover, the achievements of the Australians in Gallipoli and France provided the elements of an emerging construction of national identity. It provided a grand narrative of nationalism as Australia, which had become a federation only in 1901, moved falteringly towards political and cultural independence from Great Britain in the inter-war years.

Through a range of political processes and commemorative practices which space does not allow us to fully explore, ANZAC became the hegemonic memory of the First World War during the interwar years. Nothing in the Second World War did anything to unsettle it. Rather, the experiences of this conflict were consciously integrated into the tropes of ANZAC. Cartoons in the press in 1940, for example, depicted the members of the 1st Australian Imperial Force (as the all-volunteer army of 1914-18 had been called) handing the baton over to a new generation of soldiers.⁶ The volunteer army that was raised in 1939 to serve overseas was called the 2nd AIF, in an explicit recognition of a continuing military tradition. Moreover, the servicemen and women of the Second World War constructed their experiences within the discourse of ANZAC. This was the case even for the 22,000 Australians who became prisoners of war during this conflict. Despite their being defeated, they represented captivity as an

⁵ For further discussion of the ANZAC legend see Joan Beaumont (ed.), *Australia's War 1914-18* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), ch. 6.

⁶ For example, *Bulletin*, 2 October 1940.

experience in which the ANZAC qualities of 'mateship', laconic humour, disrespect for formal authority and resourcefulness came to the fore.⁷

This dominance of the discourse of ANZAC was also perpetuated by the nature of the Australian involvement in the Second World War which was in some senses anti-climatic and ambivalent. Not only was the death toll considerably lower than in the First World War, but Australia's role in the Allied victory did not lend itself to mythologizing. A short summary of Australia's war is necessary. In 1939, the Australian government committed all three defence services to the support of the imperial war effort. In 1940-41, three of the four Australian infantry divisions (the 6th, 7th and 9th) were deployed to the Middle East, where they fought initially with spectacular success against Italian forces in Libya. But when, in April-May 1941, the 6th Division was committed to Greece to stem the Axis attack, the campaign ended in disaster and, for many, captivity. The 8th Division, meanwhile, had been deployed in Malaya and the islands to the north of Australia, New Britain, Timor and Ambon. Almost all of these troops were captured in early 1942 by the Japanese in their dramatic conquest of Malaya, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies.

In response to Pearl Harbor and the Japan's southward advance, the majority of Australian infantry forces were withdrawn from the Middle East to defend Australia (the 9th Division remained to take part in the battles of El Alamein in late 1942). A force of some 3,000 men from the 7th Division, sent to Java in the last weeks of the battle there, was again taken prisoner. A critical battle for the defence of Australia then ensued, in the seas off northern Australia and in Papua and New Guinea where the Japanese advanced in mid 1942 over the Kokoda Track, which crosses the precipitous Owen Stanley Ranges that form a spine along the island. Kokoda has become a core part of Australian national memory, ranking perhaps only after Gallipoli in iconic significance. But the subsequent campaigns in 1943 to 1945, fought along the north coast of New Guinea, and in New Britain and Borneo were marginal to the defeat of Japan. They were fought largely because the Australian government could not persuade the American Commander-in-Chief of the South West Pacific Area, General Douglas

⁷ Joan Beaumont, 'Prisoners of war in Australian national memory', in Bob Moore and Barbara Hatley (eds), *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming and Memory in World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 185-94

MacArthur, to include Australian land forces in his 1944-45 attack against the Philippines (some Australian naval forces were involved). Deeming it to be politically necessary, domestically and internationally, to keep its army in action in SE Asia, the Australian government committed itself to operations that even at the time were thought to be 'unnecessary wars'.⁸

The experience of the other services, the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Australian Air force, were similarly equivocal. The RAN, despite the personal courage of its personnel in convoy escort, minesweeping, naval gunfire support and supply missions, had a mixed record in terms of losses and victories that became invisible in Allied joint operations.⁹ The RAAF meanwhile was racked with unedifying leadership conflicts and implicated in the moral ambiguity of the strategic bombing offensive against Germany, in which nearly 3,500 Australians, trained via the Empire Air Training Scheme,¹⁰ died.¹¹

The fact that the Second World War generated little mythology that could unseat ANZAC is evident in the war memorials that populate the streets of almost every city and country town in Australia. These were initially erected during and after the First World War, and were in effect surrogate tombs, given that the Australian government refused to repatriate the bodies of the Australian dead, who were instead buried in Imperial War Graves Commission cemeteries in countries too distant for many Australian families to visit.¹² Overwhelmingly these war memorials took monumental forms: obelisks, statues of diggers in various poses; cenotaphs, and shrines.¹³

⁸ Peter Charlton, *The Unnecessary War: Island Campaigns of the South-West Pacific, 1944-45* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983).

⁹ For a summary of RAN operations in the Second World War see chs 5 and 6, by James Goldrick in David Stevens, *The Royal Australian Navy*, vol. III, *The Australian Centenary History of Defence* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Some 26 000 to 27 000 Australians served in the RAF as a result of the EATS.

¹¹ For further detail see Alan Stephens, *The Royal Australian Air Force*, vol. II, *The Australian Centenary History of Defence* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹² Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2007).

¹³ The definitive work on Australian war memorials is K. S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 1998).

In the Second World War, the Australian government again declined to bring home the bodies of the dead but by now monumentalism had gone out of fashion. The preference was for more functional and less visible memorials: halls, sports grounds, even swimming pools. Alternatively, First World War memorials were updated to incorporate the new conflict. The names of the dead and volunteers of 1939-45 were simply added to the lists of the dead of 1914-18.

There were, of course, exceptions. The people of Victoria, who had constructed possibly one of the most dramatic memorials to the First World War in 1934, the Shrine of Remembrance, erected a new tower to the Second World War in its forecourt. They also installed in the crypt of the Shrine a moving statue of Father and Son which manifestly affirmed the concept of a cross-generational transfer of ANZAC. In Perth, Western Australia, a concourse or amphitheatrical forecourt was installed in front of the First World War obelisk in King's Park which was lined with battle names 'intended to equate the military experience of both wars'.¹⁴ There were also a number of memorials to nurses erected in the decade after the war.¹⁵ Some 3,500 nurses had served during 1939-45 (as compared to 2300 in 1914-18). In February 1942 a group of nurses attempting to escape Singapore had their ship sunk by the Japanese: 12 drowned and further 21 were massacred as they struggled ashore on the beaches of Banka Island off Sumatra. This atrocity established itself in the cultural memory of the war by means of postwar memoirs of survivors such as Jessie Simons' *While History Passed* (1954)¹⁶ and Betty Jeffrey's *White Coolies* (1956)¹⁷. In another tragic incident, eleven nurses drowned when a Japanese submarine torpedoed a hospital ship, the *Centaur* off the coast of Queensland in May 1943.

Yet despite these examples, generally the Second World War is far less visible in the physical commemoration of war than the previous conflict. The national memory of the Second World War also became implicated in the controversies that were generated two decades later by Australia's participation in the Vietnam War. As the protest

¹⁴ K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 1998), pp. 389-90.

¹⁵ *Sacred Places*, pp. 365-67.

¹⁶ Jessie Simons, *While history passed: The story of the Australian nurses who were prisoners of the Japanese for three and a half years* (Melbourne: William Heinemann Ltd., 1954).

¹⁷ Betty Jeffrey, *White Coolies* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956).

movement against the war and the use of selective conscription to provide manpower polarized Australian society, attendances at ANZAC Day ceremonies declined. By the end of the 1960s its rituals seemed to be in a state of terminal decline, anachronistic, patriarchal, militaristic and irrelevant. As the pre-eminent scholar of war commemoration in Australia, Ken Inglis wrote in 1998: 'By 1960 or so, like almost everybody else who thought about the matter, I thought that the ceremonies of ANZAC would wither away and its monuments become ever more archaic'.¹⁸

But it proved not to be so. From the 1980s there was a major resurgence in the memory of war in Australia. In many ways this mirrored developments internationally where what Jay Winter has called 'a second generation of memory' emerged,¹⁹ fuelled by the ageing of witnesses to the world wars, the contested identity of politics of late-twentieth century nationalism and the pervasive *fin de siècle* mood of the end of the 20th century and the second millennium. In Australia the memory boom also owed much to a dynamic and symbiotic interaction between different carriers of memory, to use Henry Rousso's term²⁰, ranging from individuals, families and veterans' associations to agents of public cultural production, the mass media and the State.

Over the past two and half decades this interaction has spawned an explosion of commemorative practices, some newly invented, many of them re-inventions of old traditions. There has been a new war memorial movement, both in Australia and across the world, and an explosion of so-called 'pilgrimages' to battlefields of iconic significance. Some of the latter have been organized by government agencies but many also owe their popularity to commercial tourist operators. Accompanying these commemorative activities has been a plethora of cultural productions about war: documentaries, docudramas, special newspaper editions on wartime anniversaries, and feature films socializing new generations of Australians into the mythic narrative of ANZAC. This socialization has been reinforced by government-sponsored educational resources designed for use in primary and secondary schools; booklets such as one entitled 'Why are they marching Daddy?' (presumably not because the marchers on

¹⁸ *Sacred Places*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 26.

²⁰ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome* (Cambridge: Mass, Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 219-21.

ANZAC Day are victims of false consciousness and dupes of the State); or another called 'Simpson and Duffy', which tells the story of John Kirkpatrick Simpson, a member of the 1st AIF who for some weeks during the 1915 Gallipoli campaign carried the wounded on a donkey down from the heights to the casualty clearing stations on the beach, before himself being killed by a sniper.

Over the past two decades almost every war in which Australians participated in the 20th century has come to be commemorated anew. In an evolving struggle in 'the politics of recognition'²¹ veterans and champions of different conflicts – the two world wars, Vietnam, Korea, peacekeeping operations – and of particular battles and armed services have competed to affirm or claim a place in the national memory of war. So too have some of the larger ethnic groups that have migrated to Australia since 1945, transforming the society from an almost exclusively Anglo-Celtic one to a complex multicultural and multiracial community.

This national memory of the Second World War that emerged from this contest is inevitably very particular to Australia. Firstly, it has given a privileged place to captivity: particularly those 22,000 or more Australians who were prisoners of the Japanese. To some degree, the scale of their disaster (36 percent of them died) guaranteed them a central place in Australian national memory of war but this primacy also owes much to a wider process in memory formation: that is, an interaction between the agency of individuals and the State. Individual carriers of memory initiate rituals and commemorative practices which, in turn, inspire or demand a response from cultural agencies and the State. For example, in the early 1980s, ageing Australian ex-POWs began to revisit sites of captivity as they sought to confront suppressed memories and invest their life histories with meaning. Encouraged by their families, as interest in family history grew, they also published their memoirs or wartime diaries. Academics and the mass media, in turn, were inspired to capture the testimony of these ageing witnesses to atrocity. Tourists then followed the sites reclaimed by ex-POWs, visiting, for example, Changi prison, where Australians had been interned in 1944-45, while transiting through Singapore on the much-used kangaroo route to the UK.

²¹ A term that can be usefully appropriated from the discussion of multiculturalism: for example, A. Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

By the late 1980s, new commemorative practices were emerging, sometimes serendipitously, sometimes more self-consciously. As an example of the former, 'Changi chapel' located outside Changi prison became a site of significance for visitors in the 1990s, even though it was in fact a 1980s reproduction of a wartime chapel and was located on a site that lacked historical authenticity in the history of captivity. This was because the actual POW camp where Australians had been interned, the Selarang barracks a kilometre to the east, had been mostly demolished after the war and was closed to the public because it was still in use by the Singapore defence forces.²² A contrasting example, of direct agency of ex-POWs, was the reclaiming from the jungle in the late 1980s of Hellfire Pass, a deep cutting on the Thai-Burma railway where thousands of Australians had suffered extreme privation in 1942-43. Initially, the clearing of the jungle and the building of approach steps was funded by the veterans assisted by expatriates at the Australian Thai Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok. However, as the scope of the commemorative activities became more ambitious and the veterans became frail, a 'crossover' to government agency occurred. The Labor government of Paul Keating, whose uncle had died as a prisoner in Borneo, approved the creation of a memorial museum at Hellfire Pass cutting, which was opened amid some controversy by Keating's successor, Prime Minister John Howard, in 1998. By this time Hellfire Pass had become the site of the traditional ANZAC Day rituals and something of an interactive memorial, with visitors planting flags and poppies in the crevices of the cutting.

In Australia, meanwhile, a memorial to POWs had been created in 1988 at the Royal Military College Duntroon in the national capital, Canberra.²³ Over a decade later another much grander national memorial was created through the agency of veterans and local government at the Victorian country town of Ballarat. As part of this memorialization of POWs, one of the surgeons who had worked on the Thai Burma railway, Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, was progressively transformed into a national icon. His statue stands close to the entrance of Australia's premier war memorial and

²² For further discussion of displaced significance see Joan Beaumont, 'Contested Transnational Heritage: The Demolition of Changi Prison', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2009), pp. 218-316.

²³ This is in fact an original chapel from the Selarang barracks camp, souvenired by Australians immediate after the war.

museum, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and heads another memorial to all POW doctors, on St Kilda Road, Melbourne.

This sanctification of Dunlop (a flawed if charismatic, man) and of prisoners more generally, was indicative of the way in which the memory of war in Australia has been both static and dynamic. In the late 20th century, ANZAC progressively shed its original masculine militarism and became increasingly a construction of civilian national identity, in which qualities such as 'mateship', sacrifice, courage and compassion for victims are emphasized. The statue of Dunlop in Canberra, for example, is matched on the other side of the Australian War Memorial by Simpson and his donkey, the First World War image of compassion. These two men have also featured on national postage stamps and currency. They, not any generals, are the national heroes.

The second notable aspect of the national memory of the Second World War in Australia is the degree to which it has become entangled with domestic politics of recognition. With the changing demographics of postwar Australia and the growth of cultural pluralism in the 1970s and 80s, the challenge was to reinvent the formerly mono-cultural construction of national identity. One act of this wider drama was played out in the building of new memorials in Canberra. At the heart of this planned city is the so-called parliamentary triangle, with the Parliament House, the business hub (Civic) and the defence establishment (Russell) positioned at the three corners of the triangle. A wide central axis, ANZAC Parade, provides the central, visual link between parliament and the Australian War Memorial. Over the past half century this axis been populated with war memorials and monuments, most of which have been installed since 1983.

The choice of the memorials speaks the politics of recognition rather than any objective assessment of the importance of episodes in Australia's history of war. They are, in order of chronological development: the Desert Mounted Corps (1968); Royal Australian Air Force (1976); the Rats of Tobruk (1983); the Ataturk memorial (1985); the Royal Australian Navy (1986); the Australian Hellenic Memorial (1988); the Australian Army (1989); the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial (1992); the Australian Service Nurses National Memorial (1999); the National Korean War Memorial (2000); and the New Zealand Memorial (2001).

The two memorials that relate directly to the Second World War are the Rats of Tobruk and the Australian Hellenic Memorial. The memorial to the Rats of Tobruk was initiated by veterans of the garrison who had held the Libyan port of Tobruk against the Afrika Corps in 1941. The siege of Tobruk was not an especially significant episode in the Second World War; and, indeed, under pressure from the Australian government, who was concerned about the health of its troops, the British high command withdrew Australian troops from Tobruk before the siege was actually lifted. But this awkward detail has been occluded in the national memory of war (that incidentally loves to demonize Winston Churchill as the architect of military failure in Gallipoli, Greece and Singapore).

The Australian-Hellenic memorial, in contrast, is a transparent exercise of the identity politics of multicultural Australia. One of the larger ethnic groups to migrate to Australia in the post-1945 era was the Greeks. In 2006 there were some 600,000-700,000 (including the second and third generations), 47 percent of whom were concentrated in Melbourne and 29 percent in Sydney.²⁴ Capitalizing on the fact that Australians had fought in Greece and Crete in April-May 1941, they secured a place on ANZAC parade for a memorial in memory of not only Australian servicemen and women but also civilians who died in these campaigns. The federal government, though it did not inspire the memorial, supported it because it had both the value of cementing diplomatic relations with Greece and also investing the ANZAC legend, and the construction of national identity that it represented, with greater cultural diversity and nuance.

The politics of recognition was manifest also in the year-long celebration of the Second World War, the 1995 Australian Remembers campaign marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war.²⁵ This saga drew its inspiration from its Canadian equivalent but was, significantly, orchestrated by an immigrant from Italy, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Con Sciacca. The campaign was memory as spectacle and nostalgia, an ultimately wearying year of major exhibitions about the war; a media blitz

²⁴ Facts Sheet, Australian communities; Greek Australians, Australian Department of Education and Training <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/56.html/>

²⁵ The account that follows draws on Liz Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli, War, History And Memory In Australia* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2004).

of radio and TV clips; a deluge of educational materials for schools, and various heritage initiatives.

Sciacca's intent was, firstly, democratic mobilization. *Australia Remembers* was about the ordinary man, and the personal stories of Australians, who both in combat and on the home front, had helped secure Australia's victory. The official logo of the campaign depicted an affecting family scene, the reunion of an Australian prisoner of the Germans with his family in 1945. Sciacca was also intent on making the memory of war more ethnically and gender sensitive. An *Australia Remembers* poster depicted the first indigenous commissioned officer, Reg Saunders, shaking hands with a white mate, though this was a transparently synthetic attempt to suggest a racial equality in wartime that had never existed. Initially, indigenous Australians, who lacked full citizenship rights in 1939 were barred from enlisting in the defence forces. Although these restrictions were relaxed during the national emergency of 1941-42 only some 3,000 indigenous Australians did serve in the defence forces. Several thousand more served in quasi-military forces or as civilian labourers supporting the defence forces in northern Australia, securing better wage conditions than in the past but not immediately improved political rights.²⁶

There were also manifold efforts in the *Australia Remembers* campaign to celebrate the role of women in the defence forces and the war economy. Posters depicted women not only in uniform but cheerfully toiling in the agricultural labour force, the Land Army. Meanwhile, medal-bearing female veterans marched in Canberra and attended a service commemorating women who served in the defence forces. On International Women's Day in March 1995 another march aimed to promote awareness of the role of civilian women in the war effort took place. Women were constructed as heroes, equal to the men in their contribution to victory. Yet, the traditional gendering of roles remained resistant to change, particularly because the official logo depicts a woman who has seemingly been maintaining the home and family while awaiting her man's return.

²⁶ This account draws on Robert A. Hall, *The Black Diggers: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); and Alan Powell, *The Shadows' Edge: Australia's Northern War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988).

The *Australia Remembers* campaign also placed great emphasis on the Pacific War, signifying that it is the war against Japan, rather than the European theatre of operations, that is central to the Australian memory of the Second World War. Although there were Australian Remembers posters highlighting the roles of Bomber Command, Tobruk and nurses in the North African theatre, the remembrance of VE Day in Australia was a muted event. It was largely conducted by the media, through the televising of the celebrations of this day in Britain. In contrast, 15 August, VP day, was the climax of *Australia Remembers*; and the defence of Australia its *leitmotif*. For then Prime Minister Keating, this was Australia's story. Kokoda, Malaya, the prisoners of the Japanese and the defence of the continent in 1942 affirmed his vision of an Australia that was jettisoning its imperial past in favour of republicanism, turning away from the British who had betrayed them at Singapore and forging a new relationship with Asia.²⁷

This emphasis on the Pacific War predictably stirred the anti-Japanese sentiment that was still latent within the veterans' communities despite Australia's post-war economic engagement with Japan. The decision to declare 15 August VP Day (Victory in the Pacific) rather than VJ Day (Victory over Japan) caused dispute, with the media carrying cartoons implying that what had been won in the war had been lost in the peace: one cartoon in the *Melbourne Age*, for example, depicted a man of the war generation explaining to a child that 'we stopped them on the Toshiba track and pushed them back to Yamaha, sank the Daimaru near Sanyo and went on to take Hitachi, Honda, Sony, Toyota, Nissan and the Kumagai Gumi'²⁸ However, the VP Day celebrations neutralized this anxiety by employing a sanitized and sentimentalized mix of British, US and Australian cultural references and nostalgia: Vera Lynn, Lili Marlene, Glenn Miller and so on. No images of Japanese beheading POWs here.

How much did this multimillion dollar commemorative fest reshape Australians' memory of war? Or, to reformulate the question, what are the capacities or limits of government intervention in the process of memory formation? The answer to this question, as always in studies of memory, has to be multi-layered. At the level of State-managed commemorative practices, the Second World War has continued to be given

²⁷ Don Watson *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A Portrait of Paul Keating PM* (Sydney: Vintage, 2002), pp. 120-2, 181-4.

²⁸ Quoted in Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli*, p. 108.

prominence in the decade after 1995. In 2003, John Howard unveiled a new memorial at Hyde Park in London, in memory of British and Australian collaboration during the two world wars. Kokoda has been placed on a Heritage List of Overseas Places of Significance to Australia and is a popular tourist destination for Australians, with about 6,000 completing the arduous hike each year. Considerable government investment continues in sites of war memory at Hellfire Pass, Sandakan, Borneo and elsewhere. The Australian government also now recognizes the first Wednesday in September as the anniversary of the Battle for Australia, although there was, in fact, no climatic military engagement in 1942 which can be said to have 'saved' Australia and historians have demonstrated time and again that the Japanese never intended to invade Australia.²⁹

However, at the level of cultural memory of war it is a different story. A personal story may be appropriate here: when drafting this article I tested my belief that the Second World War occupies a secondary place in popular memory on my daughter, a 22-year old student in her fourth year of university. To the question, 'What battles of the Second World War can you name?', the reply was D-day, Pearl Harbor, the Red Army in Berlin, and the bombings of Darwin, Dresden, and London. With the exception of Kokoda none of the battles in which Australian land forces were involved – Tobruk, El Alamein, Syria, Singapore, Buna and Gona – were known. To the question: where did Australians fight in the First World War, the answer was an immediate, Gallipoli and the Western front. In these answers can be seen perhaps the pre-eminent importance of cultural production in the shaping of individual memory. Each of the Second World War battles mentioned can be mapped onto a commercially successful film: *D-Day*, *The Saving of Private Ryan*, *Downfall*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Australia*, *Atonement*, and *Dresden*. The same daughter, when visiting Gallipoli in 2007, stood at ANZAC Cove and said "Show me where Archie ran". Archie is the lead character in the 1981 Peter Weir film, *Gallipoli* which has played an incalculable role in socializing Generation Y into the traditional mythic narrative of ANZAC.

Which returns us to the question with which this paper started: why does the Second World War remain second in Australian national memory, despite all the

²⁹ For the Battle of Australia, see <http://www.battleforaustralia.org.au/> On the myth of the invasion of Australia see Peter Stanley, *Invading Australia: Japan and the Battle for Australia, 1942* (Camberwell, Vic.: Viking Penguin, 2008).

invention of new rituals, new commemorative practices and educational campaigns at the public level? It is perhaps because these processes of memory formation are not as potent as their creators believe. Memorials are static, fixed in space; rituals similarly are located in time, impacting only on the participants or witnesses. Academic texts are often read only by peers. Visual popular culture and film, in contrast, knows no boundaries, particularly in the age of the internet.

However, beyond this there is the continued hegemony of the word 'ANZAC' not only in education in Australia but in all public discourse. ANZAC is now irrevocably entrenched in the national political culture as a complex secular signifier of identity and belonging to the nation. In the hands of both conservative and labor governments ANZAC also performs the function of legitimizing current commitments to overseas conflict, for example Iraq and Iraq.³⁰ Furthermore 'ANZAC' is routinely invoked to celebrate any social behavior, be it by police officers, civil defence forces, or even sportmen, that embodies the value of subordinating the individual interest to that of the collective.

The subordination of the Second World War then is ultimately attributable to the fact that the signifier of 'ANZAC' leads in the imagination and national mythic representation not to any battle or experience of 1939-45 but to 25 April 1915. The entrance hall to the Australian War Memorial, through which all visitors must pass, regardless of which gallery they intend visit, to says it all. In the hall is a boat from the Landing (always now capitalized). On the wall, behind it, faint images of men in the semi-darkness flicker. Water laps gently over the sound system. Inscribed on the wall are the words of the wartime prime minister W.M. Hughes, 'Australia was born on the shores of Gallipoli'.

³⁰ Mark McKenna, 'Howard's Warriors' in Raimond Gaita (ed.), *Why the War Was Wrong* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003), pp. 167-200.