

Sikh and Indian Australians



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THEY ARE ALL AUSTRALIAN ANZACS

Australian identity and nationalism is closely connected to the Anzac experience and commemoration services held on April 25 each year. The use of the term ANZAC has changed since 1915. According to the Australian War Memorial “At first an Anzac was a man who was at the landing and who fought on Gallipoli. Later it was used for any Australian or New Zealand soldier of the First World War”. (See “AWM encyclopaedia, Anzac”) Charles Bean, the journalist who observed Australian and New Zealand soldiers on Gallipoli and then on the Western Front, described the Anzacs as strong, resilient, inventive, good-humoured, courageous and duty-bound, having similar traits to the traditional Anglo-Australian bushmen in the colonial era. Stories, press releases and the publication of the popular ANZAC Book were carefully edited by Bean to reinforce his perspective and to omit references to violence, fear and cowardice. Just as in all history books, the Anzac men described in 1915 reflected the context (a “White Australia” with a predominantly Anglo-centric culture) and views of those who wrote the story. The homogeneous, white Anzacs were extensively portrayed in recruiting posters, speeches and publications during the war.

Australian society has changed dramatically since the mid 20th Century, and, there has also been a growth of research into family history. These two factors have led to many Australians seeking connections to the Anzacs. A “new inclusiveness” in the writing and commemorations on Anzac Day has emerged over the past 20 years. It has included the recognition of the Indigenous soldiers who participated in World War One, the so called “Black diggers”, the Chinese Anzacs, Russian Anzacs and many other nationalities, all challenging the stereotype of the Australian Anzac. This resource will explore the motives and actions of Sikh and some other Indian Australians in the AIF. To some, challenging the traditional Anglo perspective of the Anzacs is a contestable issue.