

Your Shortcut to... Anzac Day

It started on the beaches of Turkey... it's been disrupted more than once by a pandemic... and if you want the full experience, you'll have to get up early. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to ANZAC Day—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Amanda Bower.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Every April 25, Australians all over the world commemorate ANZAC Day. Many rise before dawn, to spend some moments in silence reflecting on the sacrifices of war, on the anniversary of Australia's first big engagement in World War I.

Today, we'll take you through WHAT happened on April 25, 1915... WHY we celebrate ANZAC Day... and HOW the holiday has changed over the years.

Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

WHAT

When World War One started in 1914, Australia had only been a nation for 13 years. The Australian government was keen to win itself a strong reputation among other countries, so when Britain declared war on Germany, Australia joined the British side.

Our soldiers joined those from New Zealand to form the Australian New Zealand Army Corps - A-N-Z-A-C, and quickly became known as the ANZACs for short.

The ANZACs first major action in the war was the Gallipoli campaign, in Turkey, which was supposed to be a quick operation to knock the Turks - who were fighting on the German side - out of the war. And it was in the pre-dawn hours of April 25, 1915, that those ANZACs landed on the beaches of Gallipoli, at what is now known as ANZAC cove.

And it's fair to say things didn't go as well as their commanders had hoped they might ... No. They met FIERCE resistance from the Turks. On that first day alone, 2,000 ANZACs were killed. The battle for Gallipoli went on for eight brutal months, with about a quarter of a MILLION casualties on EACH side.

And instead of it ending with the British and their allies marching into the capital of Turkey, it ended with them admitting defeat and retreating.

More than 8,000 of the 50,000 Australians who fought at Gallipoli died - a terrible loss of life for the young country. In total, more than 400,000 young Australians fought in World War One, and a shocking 68% of them died, or were injured.

Most other countries celebrate holidays that represent big victories - Independence Days, or the days that mark the winning of a war. So WHY is ANZAC Day... a day that represents terrible loss... so important to us in Australia?

WHY

Well, one of the main reasons is that WWI was the first time that Australians really came

together as a nation... it was sort of the birth of the country, in some way. Aussie soldiers were highly respected by other countries, the "ANZAC spirit" was something we became famous for, and April 25, 1915 was in some ways when and how it all started. ANZAC Day was first celebrated the very next year, in 1916, while war was still raging. Throughout WWI, celebrations on April 25 were patriotic rallies, designed to recruit more soldiers for the war, raise money for the war effort, and also raise people's spirits as their husbands, sons, and brothers went off to war. On April 25, 1916, more than 2,000 ANZAC troops marched through the streets of London...

... and there was even a sports day in the Australian training camp in Egypt!

But there were more solemn - which means sad, and serious - moments. Just as the Gallipoli campaign had started right before the break of dawn, with ANZAC soldiers landing on the beaches in Turkey, returned soldiers would gather at dawn to remember their mates who had not come home with them.

Dawn is an important time in war - you're either gathering to attack, and surprise your enemy... or you're getting ready to be attacked.

That's exactly right. And when we have dawn services, it's a small bit of a sacrifice to pull ourselves out of bed early, and go and remember all those people who made the ultimate sacrifice - the sacrifice of their life - in war. Once the war was over, in November 1918, you might be surprised to hear that the next ANZAC Day didn't involve a huge victory parade. That's because there was a terrible global flu pandemic - the numbers of people allowed to attend was limited, they had to wear masks, and they had to stand one metre apart.

Well THAT sounds familiar. HOW, then, has the ANZAC holiday changed over the years?

HOW

More than 60,000 Australians died during the First World War, so in the 1920s and 30s, there were a LOT of Australian families who were grieving. Grieving means to be sad about having lost someone. ANZAC Day was a time for them to reflect, and for surviving former soldiers to get together, remember fallen comrades, and support each other. No one can actually say for sure when the first dawn service happened -- there is one lovely story about a group of former soldiers who went out together in Sydney on April 24 in 1927, had a big night, and were coming home at dawn when they saw a woman, alone, at a memorial. She was the mother of a soldier who hadn't come home, and together, they held a little dawn service - and organised a bigger one for the next year.

But actually the fact that we don't know might go to show that it was widely accepted that a dawn service was a good idea to remember the losses of life in the first world war.

Dawn services are almost always silent. You arrive, you reflect, the sun starts to rise, at which point a bugle plays something called The Last Post ... have a listen .. it's a haunting piece of music that is traditionally played to mark the end of a day's activities in a military camp ... and one that is heard at dawn services all over the country on Anzac Day morning. By the mid 1930s, the dawn service, the parade of returned soldiers, the reunions, and the two-up games were all part of a national ANZAC Day tradition.

Two-up is a gambling game that involves tossing two penny coins - ideally ones from 1915 - in the air, and betting on how they'll land. It's legal to play on ANZAC Day, because it was played so much by soldiers in World War One.

Of course, the only reason World War I is called that is because World War II came along in 1939 ... followed by the Korean War in the 1950s, the Vietnam War in the 60s and 70s, followed more recently by conflicts that Australian soldiers have served in including in East Timor ... Somalia... Afghanistan... Iraq... Fiji... Solomon Islands... ANZAC Day has come to be a day to remember all Australian soldiers, not just those who fought in World War One.

Fast forward to today, when ANZAC day celebrations include women, indigenous, and immigrant soldiers who have served their country, and you can see that it's a national holiday that has definitely changed with the times. But one thing that hasn't changed is the power of that silent dawn service, and the sound of that haunting bugle...

The S'Quiz

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. Which country did ANZAC forces fight in their first major military campaign?"
2. Why was there not a big ANZAC parade after the First World War was finally over?"
3. What gets tossed in the air during a game of two-up?"