Anzac is strongly associated with Australian nationalism and presents the strongest strand in our understanding of war. As we become more distant from large losses in war, so Anzac becomes less about mourning and more about nationalist celebration, writes MILES KEMP

Riding the rollercoaster of popularity

Anzac Day is an exciting event for Nikki Brennan, who will be at Gallipoli for the Dawn Service. Anzac Day was not yet four years old and already under significant attack. To paraphrase those to the left of centre of global politics, viewed as ‘The Great War’ as an economic struggle, in which those who controlled economic production also controlled the players in it and set them against each other in a winner-take-all contest.

Others were still in collective shock at the death toll, and didn’t want to remember. One in five Australians who went to war did not return, and half of the young men who died were dead within 20 years. The idea that WWI was a conspiracy of the relatively new global system of industrial capital took root in the thoughts of many who could find no other explanation for the carnage of two world wars, the more so as we become more distant from actual deaths in war, so Anzac becomes less a matter of mourning and more a matter of nationalist celebration.

Hard to believe, but that was Australia circa 1919, when the Australian Labor Party national convention wanted the elimination from all school texts any reference to any commentary ‘extolling wars, battles or heroes of past wars’. Anzac Day was not yet four years old and already under significant attack. To paraphrase those to the left of centre of global politics, viewed as ‘The Great War’ as an economic struggle, in which those who controlled economic production also controlled the players in it and set them against each other in a winner-take-all contest.

Students in Year 9 and 10 from Year 10 student Nikki Brennan of Adelaide yesterday morning, while an assembly of more than 170,000 people paid homage. Over 8,000 soldiers, airmen and members of the women’s services, representing between 50 and 60 units with overseas service, took part.

Twenty-five years later, death had taken its toll, and feminism, pacifism, and alternative youth culture were on the march. Anzac Day as Australians knew it appeared to have a limited life. Scottish/Australian folk singer songwriter Eric Bogle captured the solemn predication in his 1971 song And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda: ‘...the old men still answer the call, but as year follows year, more old men disappear. Someday no one will march there at all.

A year later Australia’s anti-war sentiment peaked when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, by popular demand, pulled our troops out of Vietnam War. On 26 April 1973, The Australian newspaper reported the passing of Anzac Day in lone story.

Fast forward to 2015, Anzac Day crowds have been building for a quarter of a century, and Australians have been on active military service around the world on and off for almost a decade and a half. This, the milestone of 75 years since Gallipoli in 1910, as well as successive Liberal and Labor governments cashing in on public sentiment 100 years after WWI this year, are cited as the main reasons for a resurgence in Anzac Day and attendances at the major ceremonies.

Australian Defence Force Academy Professor Peter Stanley, dates the revival of Anzac Day to the Prime Ministership of Bob Hawke. ‘The Anzac renaissance is generically dated from 1990, when Bob Hawke led the 75th anniversary pilgrimage to Gallipoli,’ he said.

Successive governments of both persuasions have encouraged commemoration, with Australia’s Defence Force Academy Professor Peter Stanley, dates the revival of Anzac Day to the Prime Ministership of Bob Hawke. ‘The Anzac renaissance is generically dated from 1990, when Bob Hawke led the 75th anniversary pilgrimage to Gallipoli,’ he said.

In primary school in Year 7 I had a teacher who is a world renowned author and we did speeches in front of veterans and I even laid a wreath,” she said.

The teacher mentioned is Australian author Peter Brougham, famous for his war-based books including Decent into Hell and We Band of Brothers.

Nikki is always a regular at the Dawn Service in the city and believes it’s one of the proudest days of the year for Australians.

“In the most impressive tribute ever paid in South Australia to the men and women who gave their lives in the service of their country, men and women returned from these wars marched through Adelaide yesterday morning, while an assembly of more than 170,000 people paid homage. Over 8,000 soldiers, airmen and members of the women’s services, representing between 50 and 60 units with overseas service, took part.”

Combined, for years after the war, these views served to dampen the enthusiasm to remember in any form, even in solemn commemoration. It took 10 years following the war for the Anzac Day tradition to fully take root. The first beach service at Gallipoli was in 1925, and in 1932, for the first time all of Australia commemorated the fallen with a public holiday in each state.

In 1929 the first semi-formal group of officials returned to Gallipoli to hold a service. Mid-way through the next decade, Anzac Day resembled closely the services, marches, and memorials which can now be seen in most Australian towns on 25 April each year. Anzac Day had taken root as part of the national psyche, and the numbers of those who participated were staggering. On 26 April 1946 the Advertiser reported crowds even greater than had gathered for the end of WWII in the pacific.

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Student Nikki so proud to win a place to attend Dawn Service

SOUTH Australia will be present at Gallipoli this year with 22 schoolchildren flying over for the Dawn Service. Year 10 student Nikki Brennan of Merced College has won a place on the trip and is delighted to be heading over.

“I’m so excited,” Nikki said. “We’re going for 10 days during the school holidays and I cannot wait.”

Students in Year 9 and 10 from across the state were selected based on a essay they wrote, with Nikki focusing on her grandmother.

“I hope one day I can march down the streets with my grand- father, it would be amazing,” said Nikki, who has long been a big contributor for Anzac Day throughout services and school presentations. “I attend all the marches I can and go to the Dawn Service every year,” she said.

“I also do a lot with school such as speeches and memorial works.”

The 22 students will be chaperoned by five teachers and were due to start their journey to the Turkish peninsula yesterday.

Nikki’s passion for Anzac Day didn’t just come from her grand- father – a previous teacher from Mitcham Primary School also sparked her interest.

“In primary school in Year 7 I had a teacher who is a world renowned author and we did speeches in front of veterans and I even laid a wreath,” she said.

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Nikki is always a regular at the Dawn Service in the city and believes it’s one of the proudest days of the year for Australians.

“Just seeing all the soldiers marching down the streets and them wearing all their medals, it’s what inspires me,” she said.

“Rudd, Gillard and Abbott have all contributed to the Anzac Centenary program. “All this has been abetted by strong official promotion of the ‘Anzac’ brand by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Australian War Memorial, and by media networks, newspapers, filmmakers and publishers.

More recently, Professor Stanley argues, the formerly temporarily removed Australia becomes from the carnival of two world wars, the more the collective memory fades. ‘Anzac is strongly associated with Australian nationalism. This has always been a strong strand in Australia’s understanding of war, but as we become more distant from actual deaths in war, so Anzac becomes less an occasion for mourning and more a matter of nationalist celebration,” he said.

“I think that this is directly related to the lack of connection with those who have actually experi-