



# Anzac all areas

**WAR** Each year publishers produce titles specifically for Anzac Day. How useful are this year's offerings in giving us a meaningful connection with a past that is increasingly distant and mythologised, wonders **Martin Crotty**.

## **A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War**

By Bart Ziino  
UWA Press, \$39.95

## **Gallipoli: The Pilgrimage Guide**

By Garrie Hutchinson  
Black Inc., \$14.95

## **Walking with the Anzacs: A Guide to Australian Battlefields on the Western Front**

By Mat McLachlan  
Hachette, \$35

## **Bean's Gallipoli: The Diaries of Australia's Official War Correspondent**

Edited by Kevin Fewster  
Allen & Unwin, \$35.95

## **To Hell and Back: The Banned Account of Gallipoli by Sydney Loch**

Edited by Susanna and Jake De Vries  
HarperCollins, \$32.99

## **25 April 1915: The Day the Anzac Legend was Born**

By David W. Cameron  
Allen & Unwin, \$29.95

## **The Anzacs: Gallipoli to the Western Front**

By Peter Pedersen  
Viking, \$59.95.

**G**IVEN HOW LARGE and for how long they have loomed in Australians' national psyche and historical memory, the experiences and resting places of Australia's World

War I soldiers are stubbornly remote. As Bart Ziino states in his excellent study of Australians' inter-war relationship with overseas war graves, Gallipoli and the Western Front were for the great majority of contemporaries physically inaccessible.

In the early 21st century we can overcome the physical distances much more easily; but we are now chronologically distanced by the passage of nearly 100 years. Distance's tyranny lingers, albeit in changed form.

The works in this selection of the annual Anzac publications for 2007 offer a range of ways of overcoming the spatial and temporal void; some more satisfactorily than others.

Rather than their varying quality, the distinctive feature of these books is the variety of genres — the multiplicity of ways — that can be used by readers to close the gap with the past, to visit Anzac across the oceans and the years.

That the remoteness of the battlefields has long been a problem for Australians, particularly the bereaved, is astutely and movingly illustrated in Ziino's fine debut book, *A Distant Grief*.

Mourning for the dead traditionally centred around a body and a gravesite, but for the wives, parents, siblings and other loved ones of the fallen Anzacs, both were absent.

Only two Anzac bodies were ever returned to Australia (Thomas Bridges in 1915 and the unknown soldier entombed at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in 1993). About a quarter did not even have known graves and those who did were on the other side of what was then a much-less-easily traversed world.

Ziino's work sets out to explore how, between the wars, bereaved Australians attempted "to come to terms with the distance that separated them from those they mourned".

How did their loved ones die? Where were they buried, what did the cemetery look like and were they

being adequately and respectfully cared for?

Or, as George Carter put it, much more movingly and simply: "Did he whisper our name when dying,/ Or breathe out a parting prayer?/ Oh where did they bury my dear brother;/ Does anyone know or care?"

Ziino illustrates the angst of unknown or inaccessible burial places and the strategies employed both by individuals and authorities to the new and unfamiliar circumstances of bereavement.

Individuals ceaselessly sought details of death scenes and places of burial from the dead soldier's comrades and from organisations such as the Red Cross and, if the body could not be returned, relics at least offered some symbolic return. Personal items were especially treasured, preserving a link with the absent dead.

Similarly, photos of graves, of cemeteries and even etchings of headstones and of names listed on memorials fostered an ongoing imaginative connection by bringing a little of the burial site back to Australia.

Planting of eucalypts at cemetery sites, or having proxies leave sprigs of wattle or photos of relatives at cemetery headstones performed the same function in reverse. A privileged few managed pilgrimages to the gravesites, but they were much rarer than at present.

For the many who take advantage of the comparatively cheap and quick international travel now available to visit the sacred sites of Gallipoli and the Western Front, new guide books by Garrie Hutchinson and Mat McLachlan will be welcome. Both are excellent.

Hutchinson has the smaller task and consequently the slimmer book. Compared with Gallipoli, the fighting on the Western Front was much more complex, continued for a much greater period of time, took place over larger areas and cost many more lives, hence McLachlan's bulkier guide. Both books are, however,



admirably suited to the needs of the battlefields traveller.

General travel advice on matters such as what best to wear in different seasons, details of the historical background, generous illustrations and clear maps of how to get to virtually all cemeteries and memorials will make the pilgrims' journey considerably smoother than was possible even a few years ago.

And yet Ziino's conundrum remains — we can now close the physical distance that separates us from Gallipoli and the Western Front, but what of the distance in time? How do we get to the reality of what happened after nearly a century, especially given the wealth of myth-making that has taken place in the intervening years?

Accounts from those who were there are an obvious method and the diaries of C. E. W. Bean and the memoirs of Sydney Loch are both worthy reads. Bean is well known as a war correspondent, official historian and founder of the Australian War Memorial.

Censorship and a desire to eulogise the Anzacs distorted his public writings, so the reissue of his Gallipoli diaries are a welcome opportunity to read his observations "in the raw".

Much of it accords with his published material, but there are also some rather more frank statements about the less heralded aspects of the Anzacs, including their misbehaviour in Cairo during training,

their sensitivity to criticism and their understandable fear when confronted with the realities of war.

Loch is also frank and unvarnished in his observations — so much so that when his book was first published in 1915 it had to be disguised as a novel and, when the disguise was removed for a reissue in 1916, it was seized by censors.

Little wonder, too, for Loch evocatively relates many of the terrors and horrors faced by the first Anzacs and their understandable reactions, including avoiding the firing line where possible and even the self-inflicting of injuries.

First-hand accounts, though, also have their limitations. They are restricted by the limited perspective of the writer and can take no account of historical research undertaken since. What, then, of the histories of the first day at Gallipoli, by David Cameron, and of the whole Anzac experience by Peter Pedersen?

Cameron's is a fast and furious account of the first 24 hours at Anzac Cove. The detail is admirable, as is the incorporation of the recollections of participants from both sides. But the emphasis on narrative leaves no room for analysis. It is all trees and no wood.

## Only two Anzac bodies were ever returned to Australia.

Pedersen's *The Anzacs*, by contrast, is outstanding and appears fit to become the standard modern work on the AIF in World War I.

Pedersen is an experienced military historian, a graduate of Duntroon and a former battalion commander. It shows. Australian campaigns are related with verve and in considerable detail, but the reader rarely, if ever, gets lost along the way.

The technicalities of military strategy and tactics are related in easily understood terms, Pedersen keeps just the right amount of humanity in his work and the book is superbly illustrated.

He avoids, except for one or two occasions, lapsing into cliched language or tired and simplistic conclusions about Australian heroism and British incompetence. *The Anzacs* stands far above other "epics" of recent years.

War books can be dreadful. But those that are good, which includes the great majority of this selection, allow us to understand, in different but complementary ways, one of our central historical experiences.

Ziino, Pedersen, McLachlan and others do us all a valuable service by making Anzac — the legend, the soldiers, the history, the places — more accessible.

**Martin Crotty teaches history at the University of Queensland.**



**Australian soldiers of the AIF pictured in a Turkish trench at Lone Pine captured on the afternoon of August 6, 1915, by the First Brigade under Brigadier-General Walker, with the loss of 3000 men.**

PICTURE: PHILIP SCHULLER