

Is it Anzac Day or ANZAC day?

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What was once commonly 'Anzac Day' is nowadays often referred to as 'ANZAC Day' (in homage to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). Which is the more correct?

The official historian, Charles Bean, who knew more about Australians in the Great War than anybody, wrote of a day in early 1915 when a staff officer arrived at HQ seeking a code name for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. Having noticed 'A&NZAC' stencilled on cases and also rubber stamps bearing this mark, a clerk suggested:

'How about ANZAC?' Major Wagstaff proposed the word to the general, who approved of it, and "Anzac" thereupon became the code name for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.¹

As a proper noun, as well as acronym, 'Anzac' entered the vernacular of the Diggers and Kiwis. At Gallipoli, they called their position, simply, Anzac; and the famous cove, Anzac Cove. They started referring to each other as Anzacs too. Eventually, any Australian or New Zealander who served in the war could be called an Anzac—although to them a true Anzac was a man who served at Gallipoli (later issued a brass 'A' to stick onto their unit colour patches).

On 25 April 1916, when people paused to observe the first anniversary of the landing and pay solemn tribute to those who had died at Gallipoli, by common accord it was Anzac Day, in honour of the men (*not* ANZAC Day, in reference to the corps.) The NZ Returned Soldiers' Association, for example, had an 'Anzac day sub-committee'; the King sent a message to be published 'on Anzac Day'; and songs and poems honoured 'Our Anzac Boys'. As many more died on the Western Front, the day evolved to honour *all* Australians and New Zealanders in the war (that is, not just those of the ANZAC, which actually ceased to exist after Gallipoli). Later still, Anzac Day encompassed every other conflict.

The modern penchant for 'ANZAC Day' may reflect the influences of the Australian War Memorial and the RSL whose websites and publications now consistently refer to 'ANZAC Day' and to 'the ANZACs'. Many people do not realise that the acronym is one which has only an initial capital and that this usage is enshrined in The Protection of the Word 'Anzac' Regulations. This is the word gifted to us by the men who forged the Anzac legend.

The ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915 gave us a legend and a date of commemoration, but the day has long been about so much more of our history and so many more of our people. This day is for all Australians to honour *all* who have served and died for our nation in the Anzac tradition.

'Anzac Day' reflects the history of this special word and the true meaning of the day. What is important is that the remembrance continues to be observed.

¹ C. E. W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Vol. 1., *The Story of Anzac: The first phase*, (Sydney, 1941 edn), pp.124–25