

Australia & the Anzac Tradition – An Immigrant's View

W Bro Geoff Ludowyk WM – Lodge Capitol No 612
Masonic Research Seminar, Bega NSW
30 April – 1 May 2005

About the Author

Geoff Ludowyk is an Australian of Sri Lankan origin. He accompanied his parents and siblings – at the age of sixteen – when they emigrated to Australia in 1962. His father was a member of the Nuwara Eliya Lodge No 2991 of the District Grand Lodge of Sri Lanka, United Grand Lodge of England. His father was initiated in this Lodge in 1937 and remained a member until at least the time of his emigration to Australia.

Educated in Sri Lanka and Australia, Geoff is a Project Manager specialising in the field of Information Technology, is single and has three adult children – two boys and a girl – and three granddaughters. Geoff was initiated in Lodge Capitol No 612 in 1999 and, at the time of this seminar, is completing the first week of his second year as Master.

Growing up in Sri Lanka was idyllic and for most children of my generation, cricket was a passion. In those days, Sri Lanka was not a full member of the International Cricket Council and was not accredited to play Test Cricket.

Test cricket was *Australia -v- England*. The other Test nations were a sideshow. Regardless, we were avid Test Match fans and – almost to a boy – we supported Australia.

This may have been a reaction to a century or more of English rule. More likely it stemmed from a hero worship of Sir Donald Bradman and an addiction to the bible of those times – Bradman's *'The Art of Cricket'*.

And so began an alignment with Australia. Little did I know that I was destined to live here.

Apart from cricket, I had other associations with unique Australians. Vegemite for instance. And Harry Nightingale¹ – a swimming coach who over-wintered in Colombo every year – away from his beloved Bondi Surf Life Saving Club. Harry was the swimming coach at my local club. Under his tutelage I became a competent freestyler and back-stroker and developed a passion for body surfing. He also taught me *'Waltzing Matilda'* and other Aussie songs, some more indecorous than others. I was bitterly disappointed when *'Waltzing Matilda'* did not get up in the referendum for a National Anthem. I imagine Harry would have felt the

same.

Australians at war.

It never really occurred to me that Australia was deeply involved in a number of conflicts until I experienced my first Anzac Day in 1963. My impressions of Australians at War were forged in the days of the Vietnam protest movements and coloured very strongly by those events. I was – like many others of my generation – swept up in the poetry of the movement and the bards of that generation, Bob Dylan being foremost amongst them.

I won first prize in the unfair national service lottery when my birthday marble – May 1 – wasn't drawn and, in a strange way, it seems fitting that I will celebrate my birthday this weekend at Bega.

I have to thank a Scotsman – Eric Bogle – for opening my eyes to a real awareness of war. He afforded me an up close and personal look as his songs focus on real people. He is the real bard of our times, continuing a fine tradition in the vein of Robbie Burns. His poetry made me aware of the sacrifices made by so few to so many. I am certain that many others of my generation were similarly changed and learned to dissociate the politics of war from the sacrifice of individuals; and came closer to understanding the real meaning of the Anzac tradition.

This is my tribute to that tradition and to the bard of my generation who made it happen. I will now sing three epochal songs from the pen of Eric Bogle and follow that with an un-narrated slideshow which I put together last year for the Anzac meeting of Lodge Capitol.

¹ Here are two web sites with a wealth of information on Harry Nightingale, Olympian and one of the great names in Australian Surf Lifesaving: <http://www.thebondiview.com.au/history.html>; http://www.slsa.asn.au/doc_display.asp?document_id=367

Willie McBride²

Well how do you do Private Willie McBride. Do you mind if I sit here down by your graveside?
I must rest for a while in this warm summer sun, I've been walking all day, Lord and I'm nearly done.
And I see by your gravestone you were only nineteen when you joined the glorious fallen in 1916
And I hope you died quick, and I hope you died clean; or Willie McBride, was it slow and obscene?

Chorus

Did they beat the drum slowly? Did they sound the fife lowly?
Did the rifles fire o'er ye as they lowered you down?
Did the bugle sing the 'Last Post' and Chorus?
Did the pipes play the 'Flowers o' the Forest'³?

Did you leave a wife or a sweetheart behind, in some faithful heart is your mem'ry enshrined?
And though you died back in 1916, to that loyal heart are you always nineteen?
Or are you a stranger without e'en a name, forever enshrined behind some glass pane
In an old photograph, torn and tattered and stained and fading to yellow 'neath a brown leather frame?
(*Chorus*)

And can you tell me now Willie McBride, do all those who lie here know why they died?
Did you really believe them when they told you the cause? Did you really believe that this war would
end wars?
Well, the suffering, the sorrow, the glory, the shame, the killing the dying, it was all done in vain
And for Willie McBride it's all happened again. And again, and again, and again and again. (*Chorus*)

The sun's shining now on those green fields of France. The warm wind blows gently and the red poppies
dance.
The trenches have vanished long under the plough - no gas and no barbed wire, no guns firing now.
But here in this graveyard it's still no man's land. The countless white crosses in mute witness stand
To man's blind indifference to his fellow man; and a whole generation who were butchered and damned.
(*Chorus*)

Now I'm Easy²

This evokes the life of a soldier settler who I understand lived in the Bungendore-Braidwood region of NSW.

For nearly sixty years I've been a cocky. Of droughts and fires and floods I've lived through plenty.
This country's dust and mud have seen my tears and blood. But it's nearly over now and now I'm easy.

I married a fine girl when I was twenty. But she died in giving birth when she was thirty.
No flying doctor then, just a gentle, old black gin. But it's nearly over now and now I'm easy.

She left me with two sons and a daughter. And a bone dry farm whose soil cried out for water.
And though my care was rough and ready, they grew up fine and steady. But it's nearly over now and
now I'm easy.

My daughter married young and went her own way. My sons lie buried by the Burma Railway.
So on this land I've called me own I've carried on alone. But it's nearly over now and now I'm easy.

City folks these days despise the cocky. Saying with subsidies and all we've had it easy.
But there's no drought nor starving stock on a sewered, suburban block. But it's nearly over now and
now I'm easy. (Reprise 1st verse).

² © Eric Bogle

³ Refer to the last page of this document for references on the origins of this lament

And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda⁴

This to me is THE song of our time. I believe it was instrumental in bringing about a sea-change in attitudes to the men and women of the armed services that were characteristic of the baby boomer generation. I remember singing it at a party many years ago when Vietnam Vets were treated as pariahs and the effect it had on one man in particular. He talked about his experiences as a 'nasho' and – according to his wife, this was the first time he had ever talked about it. He went on to become very active in the Vietnam Veterans' Association.

When I was a young man I carried me pack and I lived the free life of a rover
From the Murray's green corner to the dusty outback, well – I waltzed my Matilda all over.
Then in 1915 my country said, "Son. It's time to stop wandering, there's work to be done."
So they gave me a tin hat and they gave me a gun; and they marched me away to the war.
And the Band played Waltzing Matilda as our ship pulled away from the quay
And midst all the cheers, the flag-waving and tears, we sailed off for Gallipoli.

And how well I remember that terrible day, how our blood stained the sand and the water.
And of how in that hell they called Suvla Bay we were butchered like lambs at the slaughter.
Johnny Turk he was ready, he primed himself well. He showered us with bullets and he rained us with shell

And in five minutes flat he'd blown us all to hell. Nearly blew us right back to Australia.
And the Band played Waltzing Matilda as we stopped to bury our slain
We buried ours and the Turks buried theirs, then we started all over again.

And those that were left, well, we tried to survive in that mad world of blood, death and fire
And for ten weary weeks I kept myself alive though around me the corpses piled higher.
Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head and when I woke up in me hospital bed
And saw what it had done, well, I wished I was dead – never knew there was worse things than dying.
For I'll go no more Waltzing Matilda, all around the green bush, far and free
For to hump tent and pegs a man needs both legs, no more waltzing Matilda for me.

So they gathered the crippled, the wounded and maimed and they shipped us back home to Australia.
The armless, the legless, the blind and insane – those proud, wounded heroes of Suvla.
And when our ship pulled into Circular Quay, I looked at the place where me legs used to be
And thanked Christ there was nobody waiting for me – to grieve, to mourn and to pity.
And the Band played Waltzing Matilda as they carried us down the gangway
But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared. Then they turned all their faces away.

And so now every April I sit on me porch and I watch the parade pass before me.
And I see my old comrades how proudly they march, reviving old dreams and past glory.
And the old men march slowly, old bones stiff and sore. They're tired old heroes from a forgotten war.
And the young people ask, "What are they marching for?" And I ask meself the same question.
And the Band plays Waltzing Matilda and the old men still answer the call
But as year follows year, more old men disappear. Some day no one will march there at all.
Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda. Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?
And their ghosts may be heard as they march by that billabong, "Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?"

While the sentiment of the last verse is no longer a reflection of today, it is a reminder to us how easy it is to forget the individuals who have forged the spirit of this nation and the birth of that spirit of nationhood in the years from Federation to the conclusion of the First World War.

⁴ © Eric Bogle

From Federation to the 'War to End all Wars'

This is a brief history⁵ of Australia's passage from Federation to the end of World War 1.

It is April 2005 – Elizabeth the Second is still our head of state – the final link in Australia's constitutional ties with Britain... She is a living reminder that Australia was created not as an independent nation but as a dependency of Britain...

Australia was young, brash and democratic. The people had a vision of their nation and in the 1890's wrote their constitution. The colonies voted to create the Commonwealth of Australia and the six states. Never before had such small communities divided by such distances dared to form a nation...

"We were creating a better Britain, a classless Britain, a healthy Britain back here in Australia..." Kim Beazley

"The fact that we saw ourselves in the extension, a dominion of the British empire, greatly influenced everything we did..." Paul Keating

"Australia was born as a child of the empire. Its people had the courage to vote for a new nation but the common sense to see they needed Britain. In 1901, Australia was not an independent country. Queen Victoria was our head of state. The Privy Council was our highest court. We had no flag, currency or navy. Foreign policy, the power over war and peace, was run from London." Paul Kelly, ABC Journalist on 'A Child of Empire' – March 2001

Queen Victoria's representative, the first Governor-General, arrived at Farm Cove, Sydney in December 1900. John Adrian Louis Hope, 7th Earl of Hopetoun came to inaugurate the nation. His new role of Governor-General was to protect and uphold Britain's interests in Australia... Hopetoun was quickly the target of local jealousies. The wife of the South Australian governor – Lady Tennyson – wanted somebody far grander...

"I think everyone feels that the position requires a much older man, in fact, a great statesman, to set the wheels going in the right line and to keep peace between all the petty jealousies of the different colonies, especially Melbourne and Sydney - who have always hated each other..." Audrey, Lady Tennyson.

At 10 o'clock on the 1st January 1901, Sydney began its celebrations for the inauguration of the new Commonwealth. Stretching from the Domain to Centennial Park, it was a mixture of Australian informality and imperial pageantry. Australia was an open air democracy. It came into existence not in a hall or a parliament but in a great park of the people beneath the summer sky. One hundred thousand people waited at Centennial Park...

"I, John Adrian Louis, Earl of Hopetoun do swear that I will well and truly serve Her Majesty Queen Victoria in the office of Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, so help me God."

"The bands played the national anthem ... the soldiers gave the royal salute... Everyone in that living amphitheatre stood and cheered again. It was a sight of a century; it was a sight worthy of an epoch." Newspaper – Hopetoun Archives

Hopetoun's accent was distinctly non-Australian. It would be 65 years before an Australian as Governor-General became the norm.

The leaders of the movement for Federation now became ministers in the first government. Edmund Barton, a Sydney barrister and a politician of charm and guile was the first Prime Minister. His Attorney-General was Alfred Deakin, a Melbourne lawyer who would become the great Prime Minister of Australia's foundation age. The ministry was a mixture of Liberals and conservatives. None was a Labour man. All States were represented. Five months later, the new nation would dedicate itself to the crown – the start of a long love affair. The Duke and Duchess of York arrived in the temporary federal capital, Melbourne. They came to open the new Commonwealth parliament...

"The Duke read the proclamation, extremely well worded and everybody was surprised at the strong voice coming from such a little man. There was profound silence... all averted at this tremendously important moment for Australasia..." Lady Tennyson

⁵ Gleaned from the ABC TV Documentary – "A Child of Empire" – from the *Australians at War* Series

But the *Bulletin* was contemptuous of Queen Victoria's grandson: *"The opening of the first Parliament of all Australia was an event large enough to stand alone. It wanted no tawdry trappings, no small accidental prince... a thin undersized man who has never done anything save be born, and grow up and get married and exist by breathing regularly..."* The *Bulletin*, 1 June 1901

Rule Britannia was sung. Lord Hopetoun called for three cheers and the Royal party left. The politicians made their way to Spring Street where the Commonwealth Parliament would sit for 26 years.

"I think in 1901 the majority of adult Australians believed that they belonged to Australia first and foremost but at the same time they were proud that they belonged to a large organisation, the British Empire, which they regarded at that time as enormously successful and important for safety and security..." Geoffrey Blainey – Professor Emeritus, University of Melbourne

In the new nation, living standards were better than those of Britain - the average Australian had fresher food, a superior home and lived longer. The population was close to 4 million with 75 % native born. More than half the population still lived outside the capital cities and most Australians worked by hand...

"Motor cars were then practically unknown, electric light had only just crept into use... the world famous beaches of Bondi and Coogee were ugly shores covered by bracken where boys went shooting... The banks of the Yarra were public tips; the word 'damn' was not permitted on stage; everybody went to church on Sunday; a good worker was passing rich on 2 pounds a week... and Victor Trumper was giving class bowlers headache..." Herbert Campbell-Jones, journalist on *The Argus* and *The Sun*, from typescript of memoirs 'The Cabinet of Captains'.

But Australia remained a British dependency and untested. It was created at the ballot box, not by war or revolution. Its spiritual birth would come 14 years later in the Great War. This was our greatest catastrophe: it killed 59,000 Australians and wounded another 167,000 – about one third of all able bodied men. Australians now proved themselves to their mates and to the world.

Britain did not consult Australia before her declaration of war in August 1914 but Australia was bound by Britain's decision. Liberal Prime Minister, Joseph Cook declared: *"Whatever happens, Australia is a part of the Empire right to the full. Remember that when the Empire is at war... Australia is at war"*. The *Argus* 1 August 1914

The Australian people responded magnificently. Thousands rushed to volunteer. But families agonised over how many sons should go to war. The Menzies family was one of them...

"My father didn't go to the first world war which was a continuing agony to him because he was criticised for it and he felt he could never answer the criticism. But there was a family conference about it. And it was decided that Bob was the one with the brains and the ability and he must stay at home and work and make certain the family was looked after... I'm sure every time somebody in a public meeting called out from the audience, "You didn't go to the war", I'm sure he felt it every time that happened..." Heather Henderson, Sir Robert Menzies' daughter

It would be nearly 8 months before Australians faced their first battle on the Gallipoli peninsula...

"Inside of a few hours (we) shall be in the thick of the greatest combined military operation in history, with Australia in the pride of place... it is astonishing how light hearted everybody is, whistling, singing and cracking jokes..." Colonel John Monash

The landing was a military disaster. More than 7,500 Australians died in the Gallipoli campaign...

"Nothing will induce any of our staff to tell of the horrors they have seen and dealt with and no-one who has not seen it in its awful reality could imagine a portion of this saddest part of the war". Sister Lydia King - 'Women in the Great War'

Out of the horror emerged a bond between the soldiers and a new pride in nation. For war correspondent, Charles Bean, ANZAC and mateship became synonymous with national identity... *"What was it that carried each man on? It was not love of a fight... it was not hatred of the Turk... nor was it purely patriotism... Life was not worth living unless they could be true to their idea of Australian manhood. Standing upon that alone... when the end loomed clear in front of them, when the whole world seemed to crumble and the heaven to fall in, they faced its ruin undismayed"*.

And so Australia's journey to nationhood began.

The Great War also saw political conflict at home as Australians grappled with the difference between Nation and Empire – one that still haunts us today. Conscription raised its head and referenda in 1916 and 1917 – both championed by Billy Hughes – were lost. Hughes took on his own Labor Party in 1916, which was bitterly opposed to conscription. The loss split the party and Hughes broke away with 24 others to form a new party. He persuaded the Liberals to join him and he won the May 1917 General Election as leader of a new, non-Labor party – the Nationalists.

Emboldened by his win, Hughes took the country to another referendum on conscription. Even though he had enlisted the support of many prominent Australians (including Dame Nellie Melba), he was opposed by many others, including Daniel Mannix, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne – the NO case won – by even a greater margin this time.

Australia's pre-war unity was being destroyed ...

"... that led to the divisions between Irish Catholic and other Australians and indeed ultimately to all Catholics and other Australians. It never really died away until the mid or late 1950's and left a scar on Australian society for decades". Malcolm Fraser Prime Minister 1975-1983

But the people were not voting against the war – they were voting against conscription. And the disunity that was Australia at home contrasted starkly with the unity, gallantry and bravery of Australians in the battles of World War 1.

Casualties	WW 1	WW 2
Battle related deaths	53,993	19,235
Non-Battle deaths	7,727	20,194
Wounded in action	137,013	23,477
Gassed	16,496	0
Prisoners of War	3,647	28,756
Prisoner of War deaths	109	Unavailable

Conflict	Enlisted	Served overseas
Sudan	770	770
Boer War	16,463	16,463
Boxer Rebellion	560	560
First World War	421,809	331,781
Second World War	993,000	575,799
Korean War	17,164	17,164
Malaya	7,000	7,000
Borneo	3,500	3,500
Vietnam	50,001	50,001

Gallipoli – Casualties by Country	
Turkey	86,692
Britain	21,255
France	9,798
Australia	8,709
New Zealand	2,701
India	1,358
Canada	49

Conflict	Defence Expenditure
First World War	£188,480,000
Second World War	£2,132,743,000

Bibliography

- Verses to *Willie McBride, Now I'm Easy and The Band Played Waltzing Matilda* were transcribed from 'Now I'm Easy' (1974) – the first album recorded by Eric Bogle
- ABC TV Documentary – “A Child of Empire” – from the *Australians at War Series*
- The Australian War Memorial Archives
- Department of Veterans' Affairs web site

The Flowers of the Forest

According to The Scots Musical Museum there is a fragment of an old ballad in the Skene Manuscript titled *The Flowres of the Forrest*, about the non-return of the large number of Scottish soldiers after the Battle of Flodden Field in 1513, when 10,000 are said to have perished along with the Scottish King James IV and large numbers of the nobility. The 'flowers' refer to the men of Ettrick Forest in Selkirkshire who fell at the battle of Flodden. An air so titled appeared in Oswald's collection and several others. However, the old ballad did not survive and three later versions were written.

The earliest version was by Mrs Alison Rutherford Cockburn (1712-1794). According to the Museum, a man known to Mrs Cockburn heard a shepherd playing a flute. Fascinated by the air, he committed it to memory and communicated it to Mrs Cockburn. She recognized the tune as *The Flowers of the Forest* and knew some lines of the old ballad. He prevailed upon her to write new words.

Another version was written by a Mrs John Hunter.

The one which has proved to be most popular is the version by Jean Elliot (1727-1805) who reworked her recall of the old ballad as a poem, *The Flowers of the Forest – A Lament for Flodden*.

Jean Elliott's version was published anonymously around 1755. It was, at the time, thought to be an ancient surviving ballad. However, Robbie Burns doubted its anonymity and he, along with Ramsay and Sir Walter Scott, eventually discovered who wrote the song.

The Lament is now traditionally played to commemorate lost relatives and by the Lone Piper at Scottish Military Ceremonies.

The origins of the lone piper are obscure, although a lone piper has been a feature of Scottish military ceremonies for several hundred years. The bagpipes are the traditional instrument of the people of the Scottish highlands and have been carried into battle with Scottish soldiers from the days of William Wallace to the Falklands War of 1982. Traditionally, in Scottish units a lone piper has taken the place of a bugler to signal the day's end to troops and as such has also bid the farewell to the dead at funerals and memorial services. *Flowers of the Forest* is the tune usually played on these occasions.

I've heard the lilting, at the yowe-milking,
Lasses a-lilting before dawn o' day;
But now they are moaning on ilka green loaning;
"The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away".

As buchts, in the morning, nae blythe lads are
scorning;
The lasses are lonely and dowie and wae.
Nae daffin', nae gabbin', but sighing and
sobbing,
Ilk ane lifts her leglen, and hies her away.

In hairst, at the shearing, nae youths now are
jeering,
The Bandsters are lyart, and runkled and grey.
At fair or at preaching, nae wooing, nae
fleeching,
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

At e'en, in the gloaming, nae swankies are
roaming,
'Bout stacks wi' the lasses at bogle to play.
But ilk ane sits drearie, lamenting her dearie,
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

Dule and wae for the order sent our lads to the
Border;
The English, for ance, by guile wan the day:
The Flowers of the Forest, that foucht aye the
foremost,
The prime o' our land are cauld in the clay.

We'll hae nae mair lilting, at the yowe-milking,
Women and bairns are dowie and wae.
Sighing and moaning, on ilka green loaning,
The Flowers of the forest are a' wede away.