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| **Ideas and Society Program:** **Separating the Myths from History: What Really Happened at Gallipoli.** |
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| **Professor Chris Mackie** |
| Well good evening ladies and gentlemen, my name is Chris Mackie and I'm the new Professor of Public Scholarship at La Trobe University and it's my pleasure to open proceedings tonight. Before we begin I'd like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we're gathered this evening and pay my respects to their elders past and present. On behalf of La Trobe University I'd like to welcome you to the second Ideas and Society Event for 2015, Separating the Myths from History, What Really Happened at Gallipoli. My role at the university is to encourage and support La Trobe's mission in the community, be it through the written word or the spoken. Through traditional forms of media and presentation or through new and emerging avenues of engagement. The Ideas and Societies chaired by Professor Robert Manne is a keynote of our engagement in the city and beyond. The program brings together some of Australia's leading thinkers and public figures to the university and I would like to recognise and thank Professor Manne for his great work, both in leading the series and in participating in it.Our theme tonight is obviously connected to the Centenary of the Landing at Gallipoli which is now only a matter of hours away, but it is also a topic of great worth in its own right at any time. We will consider the campaign itself and the spectacular military failure as well as the response to it through time, from party politics and nationalistic agendas to commodity culture in 2015. And to do so Professor Manne is joined by two distinguished historians of Gallipoli and Anzac. Robin Prior is visiting Professorial Fellow at the University of Adelaide and was for many years a historian and Head of School at the Australian Defence Force Academy. Professor Prior is one of the leading authorities, nationally and internationally on the History of Warfare, he is widely esteemed on the world stage for his contribution in clarifying the essential problems and failed endeavours of major battles of the First World War. His recent work on Gallipoli contributes to a deeper understanding of war and society. Professor J Winter of Yale University described his 2009 book *Gallipoli the End of the Myth as "The best account by far"* of the Gallipoli Campaign. Two of his other many books, book publications include *The Somme – 2005 with Trevor Wilson* and *The First World War – 1999.* Professor Prior is also an editor of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* and a Fellow in History in The Australian Academy of the Humanities. Carolyn Holbrook is a Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences at Monash University and prior to that was a Doctoral Student at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters and also of *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography,* published by New South Books in 2014. The book focuses on the changing ways in which Anzac has been interpreted in the political culture over the past century.  *"The journey from the early image of our 'martial baptism' to Australia's civic religion." Ken Inglis said of Carolyn's book that "The book deserves a place alongside the writings of Charles Bean and Bill Gammage," and Bill Gammage himself said of it, "In this splendid book Carolyn Holbrook shows us artfully how history is made and how much it makes us who we are."*Please welcome our speakers here tonight. |
| **Professor Robert Manne** |
| Thank you Chris and I'd like to thank you all here in the audience for coming. For all my adult life I've belonged to a university and I believe universities have an important role and that role is scholarship and the search for truth, the truthfulness. I don't in any way, say that it's wrong that Anzac and Gallipoli and our part of popular culture, but there is a role to trying to penetrate popular culture and get to a separation of myth from history and to find history.There are two big questions that have always interested me. The first big question is roughly, what happened politically and militarily at Gallipoli? And when I read Robin's book, it was, at least for me, by far the most illuminating and analytically clear, account of what really did happen in 1915. And the other question that has always interested me as a citizen as well as historian is: why Gallipoli was chosen as the battle that Australians would commemorate First World War through? And also something that I don't know the early part of the history and the second part which is how it's changed over the last 100 years, how Anzac and Gallipoli has been seen.Late in the piece, I discovered Carolyn's book and it was exactly what I had been looking for and as soon as I found out about it I invited Carolyn to come along as well, to answer the second question. Why Gallipoli was chosen, why it's stayed around for 100 years as the sacred soil of Australia and as the way in which we remember mainly the First World War and indeed all wars?One thing I have to explain, Robin's book ends in December 1915, it's in some ways a very tight monograph in the best sense. And Carolyn's work really begins when it's the end of the First World War but certainly after December 1915, for that reason, what I'm hoping to do is to get a sense, give you a sense, of both books. I'm going to spend the first half asking Robin questions and the second half asking Carolyn questions, this requires Robin to be concise because there's a lot to be said to cover a book of that complexity, but please don't think I'm being rude if I address the first questions to Robin, because I couldn't think of any other way to get the best out of this conversation. There will be time for questions and I'll be fielding the questions and there are roving mikes that will go around for you to ask questions. I thank you very much for coming and I think it is a very appropriate time to have a serious discussion about the history and meaning of Gallipoli and Anzac.So, Robin, begin at, there's a map there which we can't see but the audience can, just describe briefly the situation, the war, the Great War as it used to be called had reached at the beginning of 1915? |
| **Professor Robin Prior** |
| Thank you Robert. The dilemma as the British saw it was that trench lines had now been solidified from the English Channel to neutral Switzerland and several attempts had now been made to break those trench lines by both the French and the British and they'd failed. They'd failed with some slaughter and one of the people who witnessed that slaughter was Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the civilian head of the Navy in Britain. And he thought there must be a way of bringing the enormous preponderance of sea power that Britain possessed to affect the result of the war.He put forward a serious of more or less, hair-brained schemes to attack islands off the German coast, to ender the Baltic. They were all knocked down by the admirals because they risked the Grant Fleet. We don't hear much about the Grand Fleet, but it was the context in which Britain fought the war. Eventually he came up with the idea of using ships surplus to the Grand Fleet, old battleships to break through the Dardanelles, proceed up to Constantinople and knock Turkey which had joined the war in November 1915 out. And … |
| **Robert Manne** |
| November 1914. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yes. And there were great consequences which I might go into a bit later that were to follow that event, the occupation of Constantinople. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Well if we can just push on with that a bit. I partly want to ask, what were the divisions within the political and military leadership when Churchill made his proposal for the attack on the Dardanelle straights and the ultimate aim of taking Constantinople? How easily did Churchill convince others that this was the way to go? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Like any political group, the body that was running the war in Britain was a Committee of the Cabinet called the War Council and like any, body of politicians they were agreeable to any scheme providing it worked. And Churchill had a very persuasive way of selling military schemes to civilian colleagues, all of whom of course, had been brought up under the Pact Britannica in the 19th Century. They were all convinced with Churchill that ships, that sea power, must be able to affect land operations and there must be a way of avoiding the impending slaughter on the Western Front. So when he brings the scheme to them, they all agree, on the grounds it's going to be cheap, you're only going to use old battleships, the Turks will surrender because they are unspeakable and militarily incompetent, and it's all going to be very easy. On that basis they agree to the plan. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| It's sort of obvious, but I think it's worth saying, why were only second rate ships to be used? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| The Admirals would not risk the main ships of the Grand Fleet, they were to fight the Germans in the North Sea when the Germans came out and obligingly were defeated. The fact was that the Germans hardly ever came out in the First World War, only briefly anyway. But the Admirals would not risk the first rate ships of the Grand Fleet. Britain had about 30 or 40 more battleships, surplus to requirements, never to be used against modern German ships, and these were some of the ones that were sent to the Dardanelles. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Not everyone will know that originally, the plan was entirely naval. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Entirely navel. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And also that the French were approached and they agreed to join in the naval campaign. You're book is scathing about both the plan, the naval plan and also scathing about the execution of the plan. Say a little bit about, what is not as well-known I think, in the story of Gallipoli as the first phase. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| One of the way Churchill sold this to his colleagues was, no troops would be needed. The Fleet would do the business, it would knock out the forts guarding the Dardanelles,… |
| **Robert Manne** |
| People can now see the… |
| **Robin Prior** |
| It would sweep the minefields in those narrow waters, there were 350 mines there, and yet the naval operation was so badly planned; they key to the defences of the Dardanelles was the minefields, but the Admiralty sent out Grimsby Trawlers, trawlers from the North East Coast of England, manned by civilian crews, in order to sweep them. They never stood a chance, they could make 4 knots with their sweeps out - the current flowing down the Dardanelles is 4 knots.  |
| **Robert Manne** |
| So they stayed put. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| There's often a Northerly wind as well, of guess what strength? 4 knots. Often the mine sweepers would start off on their journey and finish up blown back outside the straights. They swept 4 mines, 3 by dint of 3 the ships being blown up, it's one way to sweep a mine - but if you have 350 mines you need 350 ships. If you're going to do it that way. The other problem was with the old battleships the guns were, very worn. These were built in the 1890's more or less, and the barrels of the guns were worn. That matters because when a shell comes out of worn barrel it wobbles all over the place, some of them just plopped over the end of the ship. They hardly ever hit a fort, only the two modern ships sent at the last minute by the Admiralty, the Queen Elizabeth and the Irresistible, hit a fort and hit a gun. So the thing is very badly planned, the naval attack, from the beginning. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| I took it from your account that it had no chance whatever of success. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| None at all, None at all. None of the forts had been damaged except by landing parties, this is quite interesting, the Turkish troops were not guarding these guns very closely and the ships managed to land landing parties of marines, who did manage to blow up about twelve guns at the entrance to the Dardanelles. They were the only guns of the forts that were hit. That was it.  |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And so what happens, and again I'm entirely reliant on your work, what happens is, seeing that the naval campaign is getting nowhere, rather than deciding to give up, the decision is made, and it seems a consensual decision, to add to the naval campaign a troop landing. And this happens, the naval campaign goes on but in March 1915 a decision is made in London, and obviously the French agree, to land troops. Could you say what the logic was of the troop landing given the failure of the Winston Churchill idea of a naval campaign and also what Churchill's attitude was now to the question of troops arriving? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Well Churchill is very impatient with the naval campaign, it starts on February 19th 1915 and by mid-March it's got nowhere. It's a desultory affair, a couple of ships enter the straits, fire a few shells and then go home. He goads the Admiral, Admiral Carden into a full scale naval attack on March 18th. 18 battleships are going to take part, British and French in this concerted effort. At the end of the day a third of those ships are sunk, another third are damaged and no forts have been hit and no mines have been swept. The Admiral, not Carden who's collapsed with a stomach ulcer, but his second in command, de Robeck, calls off the naval attack essentially. He thinks, rightly, you can only do this twice more. If you use a third of your force each time. He's a cunning mathematician [laughter] and he's worked out with the third one, he won't have any ships left at all. So at this point the British Government have actually sent a General down to have a look at what's going on. In other words, there's unease in London that the naval… |
| **Robert Manne** |
| That's Hamilton? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| That's Hamilton, yes that it's not going to work, and Hamilton witnesses that debacle on March 18th and then, no troops – that was the way it was sold, there were no troops. Suddenly there are troops, because it's said by Lord Kitchener the Secretary of State for War that, *"Britain's prestige cannot suffer that sort of reverse."* |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And this is when the phrase *'No turning back.'* |
| **Robin Prior** |
| No turning back. The British find a Division, the last of their Regular Divisions, the 29th Division. They discover that there are some Australian and New Zealand troops training in Egypt on their way to England to take part in fighting on the Western Front. They're training in Egypt because it's too wet in England. The French contribute a Division (one feels to watch the British), the same reason the French contributed some ships, I mean, should the Ottoman Empire collapse the French want their slice of it as well. So that you've got a French Division, a British Division, the Anzac Forces in Egypt and a few rag bags from something called The Royal Naval Division. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Is it possible to say at that point, what the war council would have imagined, optimally might happen with the landing of the troops? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| They started writing papers along the lines of, *'after Constantinople the next steps.'* This is before they've landed anybody. The idea was (you can see on that map), that the troops from the South, which were British, the 29th Division, were to push North to that narrow piece of water there, called The Narrows. Meanwhile the Anzacs would land further North, dash across the peninsula, cut off any Turkish reinforcements that might interfere with the British and then you would be at The Narrows. You could then demolish the forts, the troops could demolish the forts, and they would have unimpeded access to the minefields. The minefields would be swept, the fleet would go through and Constantinople… |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Constantinople would fall. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| And Constantinople would fall. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| It didn't happen like that. If we could talk first, a little bit about the landing of the British and people can see on the map Hellas, it's not on the map but the name of it. If you could briefly describe both the British landing and also what happened say, over the period between late April and late June, early July in that strip of the peninsula? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| This is the main landing, the main landing is at Hellas. The Anzac is in support, the British land on five beaches: on three they get ashore with no opposition at all. In two there is much slaughter, these are the end of the peninsula, V Beach and W Beach, there's much slaughter there. Two, three and eventually four thousand men are lost on the 25th April 1915 on those beaches. The commander offshore, General Hunter Western, remember this is the 2nd Eleven of the British General Staff there, the 1st Eleven, if you can believe that are on the Western Front. But the 2nd Eleven are at Hellas. He reinforces the two beaches where you have a failure, where the casualties are being caused and he funnels troops into those for the rest of the day, thus ensuring by the end of the day, the British are ashore, that they've lost so many casualties that there is no possibility of them making a rapid advance inland. They have to be reinforced first. By the time they're reinforced, the cunning Turks have reinforced their own troops, the British inch forward, trenches are dug - a stalemate that looks very much like the Western Front is existing now at Hellas. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| By June? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| By early June 1915. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| If we can now turn to the bit that is Australian collective memory and mythology, the Australian New Zealand also, but mainly Australian troop landing at Anzac Cove. Just briefly, one thing interested me and I think it's also now penetrating popular culture is, the landing wasn't as disastrous as sometimes portrayed. Is that a fair description of what you discovered? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yeah it is. Maybe there were 200 troops opposing the landing, Turkish troops, they had no machine guns. Mind you with a bolt action rifle you can do a bit of damage, you can fire twelve rounds a minute with one of those. Australians and New Zealanders suffered 2,000 casualties by the end of the day but there's no slaughter on the beaches, that's a complete myth. They get inland rather quickly. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And then what? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Then, they're up against two things, the country which for anybody who's been there is very steep, tortuous, difficult, even, without a rifle and a pack. And of course, the Turks have rushed reinforcements there, two groups one under Mustafa Kemal and another group arrive about midday on the first Anzac Day and together they stop any further inland advance. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| One of the things, again I learned from your book and perhaps I should have known beforehand, was the incredible discrepancy in the deaths between Turkish and Anzac forces in the May offensive of the Turks. It seems from their point of view an incredibly bloody battle. Could you say a little bit about that? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| The Anzac's gradually fight their way inland to what's called the 2nd Ridge, they needed the 3rd Ridge, that's where the heights are but they didn't get that far. The Turks then decide to try and counter attack them into the sea. Not all the generals, all the stupidity, was on the side of Allied Generals. By this time the Anzacs had dug in, they have machine guns, the Turks charge them across the open, and they suffer 10,000 dead, possibly in one day. The Anzac's fire over 1,000,000 rounds of ammunition at them on that day. The stench of rotting bodies is so bad that a truce is called so that they can be buried and by the way, so the Anzac Officers can get a good look at the Turkish trenches which they take the opportunity of doing, while the burial parties are in no-mans-land. So it's not all altruism, there's some pragmatism mixed in there as well. But this is the worst days fighting in the entire Gallipoli campaign. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| For the Turks. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| For the Turks. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Whereas the death toll was relatively small compared to say, the loss of Australian Troops at Hellas when they helped the British? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yes, yes it is. At one point in June, an Australian Brigade is sent South to help the British and they lose about 50% casualties in that operation, much higher than they'd lost on Anzac Day. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| If we can just say we now get to July 1915, have anything substantial been achieved by the English, Australian, New Zealand, French Forces, Indian Forces? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| No. What we've got now is two areas of stalemate. One at Hellas, the other at Anzac Cove along the Anzac perimeter and its trench warfare in both areas. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Which is what it's designed to avoid. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| This is what it's designed to avoid, trenches are dug, machine-guns are put in position. What little artillery each side has are brought to bear. The naval guns which the British have thought would make a big effect are almost useless because they're very flat trajectory and when you're firing in an area with a lot of gullies and hills they're not much use, so it's a stalemate. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Again, I use the term collective memory for this. In Australian collective memory, I think the most memorable parts of what happened, happened in the following month, in August when the names like Nek, Lone Pine are associated with the August offensive for Sari Bair. Could you say; that was probably the most significant, it seems to me the most reprehensible part of the campaign in so far as Australians were concerned. I'm just wondering, if you could say a little bit about the August offensive? Your book suggests that it had no chance whatever of succeeding. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| None at all. It's about as useful as the naval attack in general terms. By July, back in London people are starting to get restless, this looks awfully like the Western Front. They've got two options, get out, evacuate or try for another offensive and they send out three divisions of extra troops to try and break the stalemate. The idea is that this will be broken now from the Anzac perimeter, troops will spread out to the North to avoid the trench lines that are confronting them and at the same time there'll be a British landing at Suvla Bay, you can see that marked on the map.The British landing is designed merely to establish a base, they need some flat ground for all the stores and ammunition, the food that this Northern force is going to consume through the winter. The idea of a quick dash to Constantinople is now gone, but what they're thinking is, if they can gain some ground, hang on to the Spring of 1916, then that might be the time to get through to Constantinople. So you have two operations, close to one another but unrelated. The Anzac one, the big left hook and the landing in Suvla Bay. |
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| **Robert Manne** |
| One thing that amazed me in reading your book was that Charles Bean, normally the most sober and realistic of historians still writes in the Official History that, *"if Sari Bair had been taken, not only would Constantinople fall but the war might have been turned in the favour of the allies."* |
| **Robin Prior** |
| He said that, yes he did. I was amazed to read that because he normally is rather sober, but he's got carried away here. What's carried him away is, during those operations out of the Anzac perimeter, a couple of small groups of men got on top of some very small points on that 3rd Ridge, Sari Bair, there are some New Zealanders Chunuk Bair one of the hills, and there are some Gurkhas because there are Indian troops there as well, a brigade of Indian troops is introduced in June and they're there and they're on another hill called Hill Q.Now they only hold these small hills for a very short time, they're counter attacked off because the Turks have the numbers, and yet people can; if you stand on Chunuk Bair you can see the Straits. And Bean, after the war stood on Chunuk Bair and he saw the Straits and he thought it was wonderful and he declared that this was the opportunity. It wasn't the opportunity. Between Chunuk Bair, between that ridge and the straits are many more ridges. *"Ah,"* but Bean said, *"the Turks couldn't have held those because we would have held the higher ridges."*When you think about it, the Turks held the higher ridges and we clung to the lower slopes for eight months and they couldn't dislodge us. Why in reverse this would have suddenly been different I don't know. But it's a complete furphy. The country between Sari Bair and The Narrows is very difficult indeed and it includes a formidable plateau, the Kilitbahir Plateau, with sides 500 feet high, up which you would also have to advance. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| My reading of your book would be that after the failure of the August offensive, the politics and the logic is towards admitting what the situation is and eventually we'll get to it evacuating. What was the condition of the troops, both British and French but also Australian, New Zealanders by say the Autumn of 1915? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| One of the reasons the troops don't stand a chance is they've been much weakened by this stage by various diseases and malaria and dysentery are the main ones. The jobs impossible any way, but this makes it ludicrous to these emaciated men. Struggling up gullies which they have no maps, in the dark, that was the August offensive. The critical part of it is carried out at night, they have no maps they lose their way. John Monash for two days, is advancing in absolutely the wrong direction, he's advancing away from the Turks instead of towards them. He doesn't know that, he's doing his best, but he doesn't have a map and one gully, especially at night looks very much like another. So the troops at Anzac are much reduced in capacity as are the British and French at Hellas. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| We'll move now towards the end. Most Australians who are interested in Gallipoli know that the farther of Rupert Murdoch, Keith Murdoch, played a role and sometimes I think that role is exaggerated, in convincing London that Gallipoli was hopeless and that Sir Ian Hamilton had to be returned and that the troops had to try to evacuate. Just very briefly, what was Keith Murdoch's role? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Murdoch was there to investigate the postal service. While he's there he encounters another war correspondent called Ashmead-Bartlett who writes this most inflammatory letter speaking of the troops sitting around the campfires discussing mutiny, which was hardly the case. I mean perhaps they should have been, but troops didn't do that in 1915. Bartlett gives Murdoch the letter to take to London, Murdoch lands at Marseilles, the military authorities have got wind of the letter, they arrest Murdoch they confiscate the letter, Murdoch proceeds to London, writes out a reasonable facsimile of the letter and gives it to the government. Astonishingly as it seems, the Prime Minister Asquith publishes that letter as a State Paper, as a Cabinet Pater, but what Asquith is doing is using Murdoch, this is one of the times where the British establishment are using a Murdoch for their own purposes. [Laughter] |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Maybe that's why the revenge is happening now. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Maybe it is. Asquith and the government want to sack Ian Hamilton, Murdoch's letter gives them an excuse to do it, though the strange thing is when the Cabinet to which this document is presented, when the document comes up the document's never discussed. There's no mention of the Murdoch letter in the Cabinet Minutes. They decide to sack Hamilton and Murdoch ever after thought he was instrumental in doing that, but he was just aiding the Government in doing what they wanted to do anyway. So that's the Murdoch letter. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| I take it again that when Hamilton's replacement Monroe arrived and sort of understood after a while that it was hopeless, and your book suggests that when he decided not to ask for any reinforcements, everyone acknowledged that the game was up and evacuation was the only option? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Well, they didn't in a way. Monroe doesn't tell them what they want to hear, the politicians back in London want to hear that this thing is still got a chance. So Monroe comes and in Churchill's famous phrase, *'He came, he saw, he capitulated.'*  |
| **Robert Manne** |
| It's a good phrase mate. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| It's a great phrase, scurrilous but great, so when Monroe says *"We must evacuate."* There's a Cabinet revolt, the Cabinet says *"No"* |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Lead by Curzon. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yeah, *"We can't do it, Curzon, we just can't do it."* So they sent out Kitchener this time, hoping I think that he won't come back. There's a great deal of disillusionment with Kitchener as Secretary of State for War at this time and I think they hope the Turks will snipe him or he'll catch malaria or something awful will happen to him and then they won't have to put up with him in Cabinet anymore. That doesn't happen, but Kitchener too authorises evacuation. That's it. Once he has spoken, they then make the decision to evacuate. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And to finish this half of the conversation, you describe the evacuation, 'As a masterpiece of precision and cunning.' |
| **Robin Prior** |
| It is, it was planned by Brudenell White to a large extent, the Australian Chief of Staff to General Birdwood. I have two feelings about it, it's extraordinarily well planned down to the last minute. On the other hand, if you were the Turks, remembering May 19th, remembering the 10,000 dead, would you get up out of your trenches and assaulted an enemy that was leaving your shores. I think they knew we were going and let us go. It was brilliantly executed, but perhaps with some complicity on the other side. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| So we've got to December 1915. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| We have. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Now I'll turn to Carolyn, your work really begins after all this is history. I think we all agree now, particularly in the last week now, particularly in the last week, that Gallipoli is selected out as the battle that Australians choose to remember. Not only The Great War as it used to be, but all wars, so the question of questions is why so? Why is a military defeat, of the sort Robin has been analysing chosen do you think, as the most important moment in the Nation's history? |
| **Doctor Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Well I think the simple answer is because it was the first significant battle of the First World War, it actually wasn't the first enemy contact that Australians had in the First World War, that actually happened in a place called Rabaul in modern day Papua New Guinea and the first casualties happened in Papua New Guinea but people don't know about that, that was in 1914. So it was because it was the first moment that Australians faced a major battle with other nations, with significant other nations, fighting alongside Britain was an important part of it. So it didn't matter what the outcome of the battle was, the myth of Gallipoli started really as soon as the news of the landing reached Australia, which took ten days to two weeks. So really as soon as news of the landing reached Australia and the first report that was printed in Australia which was by Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett who Robin was talking about then in relation to the letter that Keith Murdoch took to Britain. He was an English correspondent and his report was the first report that reached Australia, in Australian newspapers about ten days after the landing, I think sometime in early May. And the way that he wrote the letter, the report of how the Australians fought, it was what Australians wanted to hear, it was highly flattering, it was written in a kind of heroic language, he talked about us being a race of athletes and we were comparable to the Heros of Mons and so comparing us favourably with the British, we were comparable with the British, we were as good as the British, this was the kind of thing that Australians in 1915 for various reasons, wanted to hear. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And can I, thinking of a really nice phrase concerning this question you've just been talking about when you call it *'the contradiction of the heart of Australian Nationalism,*' and I quote from you "the very nation that it sought to distinguish itself from, was the nation whose approval it craved."Can you say a little bit about that, because, I think that is immensely illuminating. |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Well, this kind of two way thing goes on the whole time in Australian history. On the one hand we want to prove ourselves separate from Great Britain, but on the other hand it was Great Britain's approval that Australians desperately craved. Around the time of the First World War there was this ideology of Social Darwinism, so if you take Darwinism, well humans applied a human layer to it, so there was an idea of a hierarchy of the races and of course the British sat at the top of the hierarchy of races, and so people wondered whether races were evolving or degenerating. So the question was, is the Australian race going well or degenerating in the Southern environment? And the big shadow that hangs over all that is our convict background, something that wasn't spoken about terribly much but it was a source of great shame I think, and so Australians just always had this chip on their shoulder and this question-mark in the back of their minds. Are we good enough, are we worthy of this great British heritage? And so, it's significant that it was an English correspondent that wrote that first report, we were fighting among the British, so there was this huge 'sigh of relief' that Australians had proved themselves worthy. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And that really, I think explains why you have the idea that the Nation is Born, which is a peculiar idea for a battle 15 years after Federation. |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yes, there is this other concept called Martial Nationalism or Military Nationalism, it's this idea that nations were born in war and this idea became really popular around the late 19th Century, early 20th Century with that new Imperialism, all the empires and the dominant countries in Europe, rushing around trying to acquire colonies, trade, the arms race. So militarism became glorified, even if you look at popular culture, there's what one historian called *"a pleasure culture of war,"* so there's kind of a glorification of war going on in Europe at that time and therefore in the colonies of the European nations. War was often equated to battle, so there's that famous poem, *"Play Up and Play the Game,"* the Boy's Own Magazine that was very popular at that time, there's a lot of stuff in there comparing the experience of war to the experience of the cricket pitch or the rugby field. And so, these ideas of war would have been based on 19th Century wars. I mean people hadn't experienced a war like the First World War before, so it was an idealised notion of war. So the idea came about that nations were born in war, that's what Australians of that period tended to believe. The fact that we'd federated peacefully in 1901 didn't count for terribly much, it would have been much more romantic for Australians if they'd been born in a revolution or a war like America or France. And that wasn't just the view of conservative people, Henry Lawson wrote a famous poem about that as well, it was quite a widely held view.  |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And how quickly was April 25th made into a public holiday? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| That didn't happen around the country until I think about 1927, it was happening in various places, but it wasn't uniform until the 1920's. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| I remember as child November 11th and April 25th were both significant dates to do with the First World War and war in general. How did it come that April 25th, I think only in Australia is November 11th amongst English speaking people displaced rather quickly, at least challenged rather quickly. Challenging by November 11th gives way eventually to April 25th. Any explanation as to why? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Well I guess Remembrance Day wouldn't have started until 1919, and so Anzac Day was first commemorated in 1916. Troops, Australian Troops marched through London, there were various ceremonies held around Australia, so even though it wasn't legislated as a public holiday it was certainly being recognised and commemorated. So Anzac Day had already been going for a few years before Remembrance Day started. Of course New Zealand also recognises Anzac Day, but I gather that it's nowhere near as big in New Zealand although it is apparently becoming bigger there. As for the reason why Anzac Day outplaced Remembrance Day well it's because of the idea we were just talking about, the birth of the nation, Anzac Day has always been, or for most of Australian History since the war, been associated with nationalism. The two things are completely entangled, so that's why it gets that tone of pride and even celebration which you still here these days and Remembrance Day just doesn't have that does it, it's much more solemn. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Gallipoli and Anzac Day are not only to do with martial baptism and war or even only with the birth of the nation, they also I think, have come to define what Australians think of as National Character. Egalitarianism, mateship, a sort of larrikin behaviour or larrikin humour at least, pragmatism maybe stoicism. I'm just wondering the attachment of those qualities to Anzac Day and Gallipoli which happens reasonably early, how significant is Charles Bean in making that happen do you think, or is it a spontaneous question? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| I guess he is significant in making it happen if you look at the kind of stuff that he wrote in the Official History he was certainly saying those things, but he developed that idea about Australian Manhood before the First World War. He'd been into outback New South Wales and he was developing this thesis of, A Distinctive Australian Type. The bushman and this bushman had a lot of the same characteristics that the digger ended up having. But in terms of 1915 saying that that was the birth of the Australian Nation, or the Anzac Spirit that was born in the trenches of Gallipoli and that embodies uniquely Australian characteristics and they were born there, well those characteristics actually had a whole history that you can trace back through the 19th Century, possibly earlier than that with European Australians. There's this whole history with the convicts, the rural workers, these kinds of things were being written about and noticed well before 1915. So the element of Gallipoli that annoys people like Paul Keating so much, is there is an element of cringe in talking about the Anzac Spirit and that’s quintessential Australian values that emerge from Gallipoli. Well they didn't emerge there, they were evident before there, the thing is that was when there were other people to observe them in 1915, other people to validate them, but it doesn't mean that they actually started there. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| But the values already in the 19th Century tradition were attached to Gallipoli and the culture? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yes, absolutely, I've got no doubt that they were on display there as well. I believe that there were distinctive things about the Australian soldiers but they were distinctive things that had already emerged in the Australian culture for various reasons, so to talk about the fact that they were born at Gallipoli is untrue. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Now I'm old enough to remember the 1960's and 70's and it was clear then to someone as wise as Ken Inglis, in some ways the most interesting cultural historian of Anzac. He thought that Anzac was dying in the 60's and early 70's or maybe even the late 70's. Why do you think it died off after the Second World War? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| I think there were various reasons, but the reason that you hear most commonly is because of the Vietnam War Protest Movement, but that’s not entirely true because if you look at when people started to really oppose Vietnam after the introduction of conscription in late 1964, well the turn against Anzac had actually started before that. Some of you might remember there was an article published in the Sydney University Newspaper - Honi Soit, it might have been about 1959, 1960 and that article dared to criticize Anzac Day and talk about the diggers as boozing people who just vomited on the streets. So young baby boomers were willing already to challenge the idea of Gallipoli of being this sacred place and to criticise the old diggers and there were changing values there. The Anzac Legend, the original Anzac Legend was born in an Australia that believe in things like White Australia, a very close connection with Britain, there was more of an emphasis on military prowess and the fighting skill of the soldiers, there were traditional gender roles. The baby boomers who were coming up and going to university by the early 1960's, they were much more socially liberated, so there was a huge generation gap between them and the old diggers and then Alan Seymour's play, *The One Day Of The Year* which was first performed in 1961, that play embodied that generation gap and it showed the difference between the old diggers, the old Australia and this new Australia that was emerging. And then the Vietnam War certainly gave that a push along but it's not true to say that it started with the Vietnam War. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And one of the parts of your book I found really extremely interesting and illuminating was the revival of Anzac Gallipoli and the 1980's, if I can take two of the things you discuss and ask you to say something about them. The first is, I think it's 1981, the film that I think many people here will have seen, Peter Weir the Director and David Williamson the writer and I think you give a fascinating interpretation in the way in which it changed Anzac Gallipoli and thus may have saved it. One was to move the story from Empire loyalty to something like the betrayal of the British of the young Australians. The other even deeper theme is your interpretation from Martial Baptism, the early part of the story to the suffering of young men, which is a quite different cultural reading. And I think for that generation, the generation coming through in the 80's if I'm not wrong in interpreting what you said is that that may have played a role in the revival? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yeah, so in terms of the film Gallipoli which came out in 1981 and the way that it deals with the British relationship, so if you remember in the 1960's Britain decides to join the European community, so Britain in many ways turns away from Australia and starts to find its economic future within Europe and political future. So that Australian – British identity is really breaking down. That causes Australians a lot of consternation, politicians and ordinary Australians as well, and artists as well. There's this great movement among artists, among politicians in terms of political patronage called The New Nationalism to find a new Australian identity some of you will remember all that kind of thing.So there's a degree of hostility towards Britain so what that Peter Weir film does so interestingly, is that it plays on that anti-British sentiment and so one historian has gone so far as to say 'it's *the British, not the Turks who were the real enemy in the film.'* You can picture the gorgeous young soldiers taking the mickey out of the British Officers, they are sort of pompous and doddery and they're incompetent and they're sitting around drinking cups of tea at Suvla Bay while the Australian are getting slaughtered on the landing… |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Yes |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| I'm sure Robin's got something to say about the accuracy of that. So it had an anti-British theme to it that really resonated I think with Australian audiences. And then the other thing is there's hardly any fighting in it, most of its back story, the only fighting happens right at the end and Mark Lee's character that gorgeous blonde character, he doesn't even bear a weapon when he runs towards the Turkish trenches at the end, and if you can picture, I saw a frame of it last night, I watched that *Sam Neill show - Why Anzac?* And he's like Jesus, he's got his arms outstretched… |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And the bandaged feet… |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yes that’s right, so it's this sort of Christian Illusions going on there, he's a victim. So that military element of the Anzac legend that had become so unattractive to Australians after the Vietnam War has been removed. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| And if I can just add, as a teacher when I would discuss this with students, they were often astonished and in awe of the fact that people as old as them or younger, had been willing to lay down their lives, so the sacrificial element seemed to me to resonate with the different generations, which is quite different, I think from militarism or whatever. Is that…? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yes, the idea of these people as victims, because remember around, some of you will remember Bruce Ruxton, I mean he was Second World War, he was an army cook I think in the Second World War. But some of the veterans of the First World War who were prominent in the RSL, well they just used to espouse values publicly that were very out of keeping with what young people thought. So young people are going to have a fairly negative view of the soldiers, but if you start to see them portrayed in the way that Mark Lee and Mel Gibson portrayed the soldiers. I mean there's a scene in the film where Mark Lee's character tells someone off for being racist towards an Aboriginal stockman. That plays really well to audiences in the 1980's but it's probably an unlikely view for an Australian of the early 20th Century, so it plays very cleverly to contemporary views about these kinds of things. So the idea of the soldiers as victims, and people who we can feel sympathetic towards and a greater emphasis on their suffering and this is also happening in the history writing as well. Bill Gammage wrote a book called *The Broken Years*, was published in 1974 and it was based on his PhD and when he told his professors at the ANU that he wanted to do Doctoral work on the First World War, they were all scratching their head because it was so unfashionable. And then he wanted to use the letters and diaries of the young soldiers, which he happened to find had been kept in the War Memorial since the 1920's, because Charles Bean had collected them and not really ended up using them. He wrote around the world looking for examples of other historians who had used soldier's letters and diaries but there were none. You're getting the idea, reading the war through the soldier's letters and diaries: that is so poignant and tragic isn't it, so it's opening a totally new view on the war. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| The other thing about history which I thought was really interesting and I'd never seen discussed before in this way was, that you're saying in the 80's a lot of grandchildren, particularly female grandchildren became more and more interested in the experience in their grandfathers at war and in awe of what they'd gone through and also perhaps had been silent when they returned. And there were a lot of either self-published or published accounts of the experience by the grandchildren writing about the experience of grandfathers. Is that? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Absolutely, the whole influence of family history is huge, huge and probably unacknowledged. If you look at library catalogues, this boom in family history starts in the 1970's and it grows and it's actually continued to grow. But because the soldiers would have been born in the 1880's and the 1890's and they're dying out in the 60's and 70's and the 80's the older ones mostly. So the daughters, mostly women actually, daughters, occasionally sons and granddaughters they often report in these family histories finding bundles of letters or diaries, often that they didn't know existed, things that had been shoved in a cupboard and not looked at for decades, and some of them mention in the family histories that they're a direct reaction to that film Gallipoli. That was incredibly important that movie. So people all of a sudden, things that were unimportant all of a sudden become of immense historical and sentimental value and so people put enormous effort into compiling these into books and often self-publishing them. But if you think about the version of the war that they embody, again it's deeply personal and sympathetic, it's based on the letters and diaries of the men so not this broader geopolitical, not questions of what the politics were like or whether they were bigoted, anything like that it's a kinder more sympathetic focus. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Now, one of the facts I glean from your book which I'd never known in 1965 there were I think 300 veterans return to Gallipoli. The amazing fact about that is there was, and Ken Inglis gives evidence of this, not a politician amongst them. Actually I think that's probably the biggest change of all that we're talking about today. So I want to have as perhaps the final themes before we get questions, to talk about the last part of your book which is about Prime Ministers who you think are the *'High Priests and Beneficiaries of Anzac,'* which I think is a very nice phrase. It really was Bob Hawke who was the first Prime Minister who saw the political, well I don't want to be cynical about it, who was moved by the story but also saw the political advantage. Could you say something about Hawkie and Gallipoli? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| And also just in terms of 1965, so yeah there was this pilgrimage and I was reading a bit about what Ken Inglis wrote a couple of days ago and he said that *"four back packers, two women and two men in jeans and parkas turned up for Anzac Day, the 50th Anniversary at Gallipoli in 1965 and the old diggers were thrilled that there was evidence that at least some young people, four of them, cared about Gallipoli."* And then I checked on the internet and 42,000 Australians applied to go to Gallipoli in 2015, so 4 compared to 42,000 and it was obviously capped at 10,000 this year. Good evidence of the change that's gone on.So with Bob Hawke, what happened, it was relatively cynical and it was probably other things as well but there was a cynical element to it. Generally within the office, I think the government regarded the belief that the Bi-Centenary had been a bit of a flop, that it hadn't quite worked and it hadn't come off and the government had failed to garner any political momentum from it. So apparently Graham Freudenberg who was one of Hawke's speechwriters; well a bloke called Bill Hall - a World War 11 veteran approached Kim Beasley with the idea, Beasley took it to Hawke and Freudenberg was there in the background saying *"Yeah I think we've got to do this, the conservatives have got a hold on all this Anzac mythology, I think we need to grasp it and milk it,"* So there certainly was a cynical component to it. And it just went off like a treat, that 1990 pilgrimage, I saw some footage of it I think last night, it's very moving, they're really old in their 90's, one of them might even been over 100. These old blokes stumbling along, being helped by young military officers and Hawkie mixed with them beautifully, he's really great at that. And Hawke talked in fairly conventional language about the birth of the nation and that kind of thing.And then you get Keating who is the black sheep, who was the aberration… |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Before you get onto Keating can I just say an element that's in your book that you haven't mentioned but it does interest me is that, with Hawke there's definitely a multi-cultural dimension added to Anzac. In a way the Turks have never been despised as the enemy, from what I've read, going right back. Nevertheless, they were now really introduced into the story as part of the Anzac story, no longer the enemy, is that a fair reading of it? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yeah, he probably had lots of Turks in his electorate didn't he? [laughter] I notice that even now, if you look at Julia Gillard's rhetoric on Anzac Day, she went in 2012 I think, compared to a conservative, there's lots of similarities. But yes Bob Hawke and Julia Gillard, the two I can recall there's definitely more rhetoric about multiculturalism and Australians coming from more diverse backgrounds and there's an effort among labour politicians to try and make the Anzac legend more inclusive. I mean it's a motherhood thing to try and make it fit everyone. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Can I add a sour note here, [laughter] one of the, this is something that interest's me a lot, one of the peoples of multicultural Australia are the Armenians and it's something I've written about is the coincidence, let's say of the Armenian genocide where a million or more than a million were killed within the Ottoman Empire. It's tomorrow that the Armenians celebrate or commemorate sorry, the centenary of the Armenian genocide, the day after Australia commemorates the Gallipoli landings. The Australian Government, like most governments refuses to use the word genocide in regard to what the Armenians suffered and if you ask the question the general answer is that they want good relations with Turkey because Turkey refuses to allow the work genocide to be used and is furious when it is. But also, in my view, if Australia, the Australian Parliament or the Government said the word genocide in regard to the Armenian massacre, all of the relations over Gallipoli would come awry. The Turks have an incredible power to prevent Australian ceremony on Gallipoli so I do think, that's my sour note. I would love the day when the coincidence of the Armenian genocide in Gallipoli was more noticed by Australia and the Australian Government would use the word genocide in regard to the genocide that occurred. But that's interpolation. I stopped you talking about Keating but I want you now to talk about Keating because, amongst contemporary Prime Ministers, he's quite unusual I think in his relation to Gallipoli, can you say something about that? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| So for his first Anzac Day as Prime Minister in 1992, Keating went to Papua New Guinea not to Gallipoli or didn't stay home, but it was the 50th Anniversary of a lot of battles that were fought in the Second World War so there was good reason to go to Kokoda. But Keating was very interesting of changing the focus of Anzac Commemoration in Australia, from Gallipoli to Kokoda and to the Second World War, and it's only after he lost power in 2008 that he came out directly and said *"Gallipoli was shocking for us, we were cut to ribbons and dispatched. I've never been to Gallipoli and I never will, the idea that we were born there or redeemed there is ridiculous,"* and he really cut loose after he lost the Prime Ministership. But I think that goes back to what we were saying before, in terms of the cringe factor. He thinks we were fighting for Britain, it was an Imperial War, the campaign was ridiculous as Robin said, it was shambolic and that Australians would be better off commemorating something where more was at stake for Australia. Australians believed in World War 11 that we were actually under threat from invasion. Keating tried to reorient things to Kokoda, he certainly did succeed in increasing Australian interest in and knowledge of, Kokoda but he certainly didn't loosen the grip of Anzac on the Australian psyche, of Gallipoli rather, of Gallipoli, it just continues to grow. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Which shows the limitation of what Prime Ministers can do I think. |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yes exactly. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Although perhaps it shows that Keating was in some ways, in many ways, was a little out of touch with thinking in Australia, which I think he was. He was, in some ways, an unusual Prime Minister. I slightly disagree with you with your underestimation of the role of Howard. You think the Left has exaggerated the roles of Prime Ministers in Gallipoli and I can see why you say that. I think John Howard did play a big role in all sorts of ways into turning Gallipoli into such a big event, perhaps you could say a little bit about it. |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| I mean there was a book, a very influential book published in 2010 called *What's Wrong With Anzac: The Militarisation of Australian History by Marilyn Lay* who was at La Trobe for a long time, Henry Reynolds, Joy Damousi, Mark McKenna and Carina Donaldson. So that book argues, I mean it's a fabulous book in so many ways, it really started this whole debate about the role of politicians in pushing Anzac history and they showed that governments are contributing ever more money to educational materials through the Department of Veterans Affairs and through the War Memorial and they're pushing a military Anzac obsessed view of Australian history. I guess in the book one thing was that I wanted to try and do Robert, was to show that Hawke actually started it and Keating might not have been focused on the First World War but that whole Australian Remembers Campaign to do with the Second World War, that was a huge government patronage of military commemoration. And also the fact that the seeds of the whole Anzac revival lie further back in the 70's and 80's, politicians didn't start it, they certainly jumped on the band-wagon, they didn't start it so I guess that was part of my motivation. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Yeah, I mean it was a Howard, the Anzac thing moved left I think, with David Weir and Peter Williams in the 80's and I think it was drawn back into something more conservative and linked in some way with the military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan that somehow it gave a kind of blessing to the contemporary military activities, particularly because they weren't that far away from where Gallipoli took place. |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| I asked him about that, he denied it of course. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Of course. And one final question and then I want to have a reasonable time for the audience to ask questions, I'm just interested in what you think of this. Do you think Australians still think that the nation was born at Gallipoli or has the origin faded and become something else? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| It's so interesting watching what's going on at the moment, there's two debates going on, one is the commercialisation and one is fatigue, Anzac fatigue. So there's a lot of talk on digital, on social media and on the internet, are people just over it. And I think there are some people, people who tend to listen to the ABC, read The Age, who just think its overkill, these are the kind of people who are more likely to have a critical view and to actually ask hang on *"What's this idea of the birth of the nation mean?"* And be a bit cynical about it.And then there's another group of people who've been equally offended by the commercialisation of Anzac, who probably are more likely to hold onto that rhetoric about the birth of the nation and so they are highly offended about the commercialisation about it, because to those people it is something that is highly sacred. So there's kind of two groups. But that group of cynics I think, if you look at the internet, they're growing, they're just not the usual suspects, not sort of academics and intelligentsia on the left who are saying "Hang on, I think the media have over judged this and has overshot itself." |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Robin, you've been impeccably silent, longer than is your norm. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Thanks Robert. I think the problem is with the groups, some of them fall into both categories. They're appalled by the commercialisation but they're also appalled by the way Anzac has taken us over. So on the one hand they're saying *"You can't commercialise something that's sacred."* On the other hand they're saying, *"Well it doesn't matter very much anyway."* And they're the same people, they have a real problem here, they're trying to play both sides of the street I think. Some of them, Monash History Group are in that, it's to me, we commercialise it, I think we commercialise Christmas don't we just a tad, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Anzac was only waiting it's turn. All these are going to get there sooner or later.  |
| **Robert Manne** |
| It's interesting that laws against commercialisation go back to the twenties. That there's an old tradition of… |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yes, I mean Anzac is copyright. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Even when we weren't a commercial nation, there were laws against commercialising Anzac. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yes, |
| **Robert Manne** |
| If you'd like to ask anything if you'd raise your hand. |
| **Audience** |
| I heard recently a Turkish man who's book is being reprinted about the Turkish view of Anzac, he was speaking at a Rotary Club, Rotary Conference, and I was interested, he linked the whole war effort there to oil, which we know all about, because that comes from the Middle East and the British were shifting from coal to bunker oil. So behind all of it was oil. Is that true, where does that fit in the scheme of things? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yes, that was around for a while. There are elements there, the British were getting a lot of oil from Basra and they occupied Basra very early in the war in 1914, towards the end of 1914. And the idea is to push inland to keep the oil supplies safe. But Gallipoli doesn't have much to do with oil I don't think, it's a geo-strategic plan to shorten the war, it's a misguided one, but I don't think oil has much to do with it. Mind you, once the British are on land at Basra, they take an awfully long time to leave, 1954 I think, so the war is not unrelated to oil, but I think Gallipoli is. The fact is that Britain was getting most of its oil from across the Atlantic anyway during the First World War you could do that in five or six days, it was much faster than getting it from the Middle East. I think they were guarding the Middle East supplies because they could, not much to do with Gallipoli though. |
| **Audience** |
| Just a little minor comment, I think 1960 it is fairly unlikely a baby boomer is writing to Honi Soit, the oldest person born after 1945 is only 14 or 15 and surely even Sydney University wouldn't have many contributors of that age? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Yes, that's true. Alan Seymour for example, who wrote the *One Day of the Year* was not a baby boomer, he was born in, well he's just died recently, so he was 10 years older than that, so yes that's true some of those people didn't fit into the definition of baby boomers which is from 1945 to 1960's. |
| **Audience** |
| Thank you for your talk Robin and Carolyn I really appreciate that. My question and I'm just trying to work out how to phrase this exactly. My curiosity with the study and the pre-eminence of the Gallipoli Campaign in Australian Society, I feel is a bit at odds, with the lack of military historians in universities to comment on it and perhaps to help deconstruct it. I've seen how well social and cultural historians do deconstructing the Anzac Myth and I feel a military historian would have a lot to add to that if they had a prominence within a place at the academy. So I'm just wondering if, a) is that the case, why is that the case and do you think it would actually help? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| If the government…. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| You set this question up… [laughter] |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yeah, [laughter] Yeah, thank you. The payment will be made later.If the government would fund any historian in any university it would be a miracle at the moment, certainly there used to be more military historians in the academy than there is now. At Adelaide there were a group of about five of us at one point. Two died, three retired, they've not been replaced. This is not just happening to military history by the way, it's happening across the board, but I mean, when I think back on my PhD on the First World War topic I was told I was mad. There'd be no jobs, I'd stave, I'd be singing in Rundle Mall or something. But that didn't happen, in fact there were, in the mid 80's there was an expansion of jobs in Military History, I was lucky enough to be at the Defence Academy which was not funded by Education but by Defence. If you want really good education funding, go to defence, not education. We were well funded there and there were a group of us there and the groups, look they're still around, there's a group at Newcastle of military historians, we haven't died out completely, but we're going, the problem is history departments are going with us. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Can I ask a slightly adjacent question? What's your view of the popular histories of Gallipoli and the First World War? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| [Laughter} They're a lot bigger than mine, there are at least two histories of Gallipoli where you could put this in a slip case in the back and not notice it was there. Look, they're stories rather than history some of them and I think their authors would agree with that statement, they are parasitic on academic research, there's no doubt about that. If you want to find your views widely disseminated, just pick one up, you'll be there somewhere, maybe the footnote won't be there, but you'll be there and I think some of them, there's one recent one which the author will remain nameless, but he has put all his quotes into the present tense. He's changed all the quotations into the present tense, the book is written in the present tense…. |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| Does he wear a red bandana? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| They were your words Carolyn not mine [laughter], he is 6ft 6". Yes it's Peter Fitzsimons we're talking about. What the problem for me with that is, he's done it to give it immediacy, the immediacy of say a novel, but he finishes up, in my view, glamorising the whole event. It's a page turner in exactly the wrong way, I mean you come away with the thinking it was a jolly adventure from Boy's Own of derring-do. Well that's the affect it had on me.Look, you can publish what you can publish so it's no good going on about it. If these books sell, they'll always find an audience. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| There's one question at the back and then one in the front. |
| **Audience** |
| I recently read Max Hastings book on the First World War called *Catastrophe*, and in it he speaks about how the British reported the defeat at Mons in a positive way, or it was reported in a positive way in the British media. And I was just wondering if there was a similarity in the Australian context with the reporting of Gallipoli and how that played out in the way that Gallipoli is being perceived consequently? |
| **Carolyn Holbrook** |
| You might be able to say more about this than me. The journalists were censored in terms of what they could write, there were rumours before the first actual reports appeared, false rumours about how the Australians were advancing well and that kind of thing. But Robin, did they actually publish, I would imagine they would have had to publish the realistic casualty lists? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| That's the problem with censorship in the First World War, on the one hand yes all the despatches, particularly at Gallipoli because they are so isolated are easy to censor they all have to go through a central office before they reach here or Britain. The same applies to the battles on the Western Front, the problem is they do publish the casualty lists, the Glasgow Herald helpfully added them up for you each day at the top of the front page of the paper.  |
| **Robert Manne** |
| It's like the Iraq body count? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yes and they also, of course, published maps and you don't have to be all that bright to add up the casualty figures, look at the maps and think, 'My God Constantinople doesn't seem to be on this map. Where are we going? Where is Berlin?' First day of The Somme, "Great Allied Victory," but there's the map showing that they'd advanced a quarter of an inch on this map, so the censors do have this problem right through the war. On the one hand they're trying to put across an official story, on the other they're giving the casualty statistics and they're publishing maps of very, very small advances. Not many people, I'm speaking mainly of Britain here, not many people were fooled by the optimistic stories they had a fairly realistic grip on what was going on. It's not a matter of people at home saying, *"If only we'd known, we would have brought the war to an end,"* they did know. So, far from bringing the war to an end in Britain, they kick out the Asquith Government and bring in a government that they think will really prosecute the war under Lloyd George, a more determined government. So people have a good grip on it, by then there's so many casualties, you've got to see it through. So censorship is a pretty poor instrument here. |
| **Audience** |
| I'm Will Marshall from the Socialist Quality Party, I firstly want to thank you for your presentation. I think what you were raising Carolyn the sort of militarism is seeing history as the present, you're seeing it emerge again sort of from the promotion of militarism. The question I have, I want to ask the indulgence of this meeting, I want to call on the panel and the people here, I've passed around a resolution which I'm hoping will be supported, it's for democratic rights as in World War 1 opponents of war face censorship, and what we've found, my party in the Burwood Council in Sydney cancelled a meeting recently on the grounds that Reclaim Australia, an ultra-Right party claimed that they were against the nature of the meeting. The University of Sydney then refused to hire us a theatre on the grounds that there was significant risk of disruption to other unnamed events, such as their Anzac themed events they were having at the same time. Now this was only reported in the Sydney Morning Herald, no other media would report it. It's not just censorship by these institutions, you know you're seeing a deluge really of militarism in the media. I want to ask that you support this motion, 'That this forum at the National Gallery of Victoria, on 23rd April condemns Burwood Council and the University of Sydney for banning the Socialist Equality Party's Public Meeting – The Meetings entitled 'Anzac: The Glorification of Militarism and the Drive to World War 111.' These acts of political censorship set a dangerous precedent. Finally under conditions of rising international geo-political tensions, it is imperative that anti-war and anti-militarist voices have the democratic right to be heard." And I hope that everyone can see the intimate connection, they say truth is the first casualty of war and accompanying that is democratic rights.  |
| **Audience** |
| What's the question? |
| **Audience** |
| I'm asking will the panel and will this meeting support that motion? |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Well I can't see any reason that if people wish to raise their hands in support they do it, I can't see that anything's lost. So if people would like to. |
| **Audience** |
| Do you support it? |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Yes I do, I mean I don't know enough to be honest, so I really wouldn't vote. But on the facts as you've given them I can see no reason why… I mean I actually believe universities are places, more than anywhere else in a democratic society where there should be full freedom of speech and particularly for that which one doesn't feel comfortable with. If the facts are as you say, I would, but it's probably not appropriate to have formal motion, partly because people don't know enough about the situation, but I certainly express sympathy with the idea of free speech and if you want to hold forums of that sort I think you should be able to. I hope that does something. |
| **Robert Manne** |
| I don't think we'll have a formal motion, we just don't have the structure for that but I'm sympathetic with what you've just said. One final question and then we… There's a question up the back there, we actually have reached time so we have to be pretty brief. |
| **Audience** |
| It seems that Churchill was always obsessed with the Second Front and the Soft Underbelly as he called it. This is the first time he tried it, he tried it again in World War 11 through Greece, had they been successful and knocked the Turks out, how was the army then going to move up through Romania, Bulgaria and threaten the…? |
| **Robin Prior** |
| I'm glad you asked that… |
| **Audience** |
| I'm pleased I asked you. |
| **Robin Prior** |
| Yes, I can get to the oxen. I love the oxen. The idea was that once Constantinople had surrendered, which it was planned to do; it probably wouldn't have surrendered but let's supposing it had. The French and the British would then have led a Balkan Alliance made up of the armies of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia and attacked Austria, Hungary and Germany from the rear. That was the idea, and if you add up those armies they come to something just over 1,000,000 men. There's a problem here, and there's more than one problem. The first problem is, these armies were basically peasant levies; they didn't have the modern equipment that the British, the French and the Germans had. The Romanians for example turned out 2 shells per day, that's not per gun, that's 2 shells per day. Artillery was the big killer in this war, the Romanians were not going to kill many people with those shells. The other thing about the Romanian Artillery I love, that they were ox-drawn guns. There's something farcical about ox-drawn guns. How would they have advanced up the Danube Valley? With vast difficulty, there's only one major railway line, you would have needed far more infrastructure than that to support 1,000,000 men. The other problem was that the armies of all these countries would have had to agree to other armies traversing their territory. Now for those who remember the First and Second Balkan Wars; especially the Second one where the states fought each other, the problem is they hate each other much more than they hate the Austrians, Hungarians and Germans, that's the problem. The coalition would have been one the very unwilling indeed and may have collapsed before it started. But let's supposing that the coalition exists and somehow the oxen plod up the Danube valley. Here they come - plod, plod, plod, - then, they come to the Alps…. Am I getting through here? Then they come to the Alps?... [laughter] Now Hannibal did get some elephants across but these elephants were not pulling 60lb of guns, not pulling 9.2inch Howitzers, you couldn't have got them over the Alps. The other thing about the Alps, the top of them is occupied by the Austrian and German forces, it would have collapsed right there. In my view it wouldn't have even started, because of the internecine hatred of these states for each other and the poor equipment that they had. But had you formed such a coalition it would have come to grief somewhere in the foothills of the Alps, it wouldn't have shortened the war by a single day. The whole thing was futile.  |
| **Robert Manne** |
| You could thank the speakers for what I think has been an incredibly illuminating evening, thank you very much. |
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