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Anzac Cinema:
The Heroic Depiction of Australia’s Film Industry, 1906-1988

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2015
Statement of Authorship

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

PETER MAGEROS
ABSTRACT

In 1915 Australia’s bush-bred soldier-warrior, the ‘Anzac’, wrote himself into history on the battlefields of Europe, earning a reputation as one of the world’s most fearsome and indefatigable fighters. Back home he was conscripted in an equally fierce cultural war as local film interests battled to keep Australian films on Australian screens. This thesis examines the historical prolificacy of Australian cinema to portray itself as heroic as the nation’s Anzac soldier, who is also commonly referred to as the ‘digger’. As such, the thesis aims to contribute to scholarship about the relationship between the Australian film industry and the national identity by examining how the cinema has at pivotal moments sought to incorporate the Anzac legend into its own identity. It is argued that Australian cinema has sought to depict itself in the ‘heroic’ image of the legend. This nationalist tendency was most apparent at moments of crisis for the production sector – the First World War, the arrival of sound cinema in the early 1930s and the period during and immediately after the Second World War. It is also argued that Anzac-themed films were the catalyst for the cultural nationalist-boom of the early 1980s.

The main argument is that the Anzac legend was exploited at these pivotal moments as the film industry sought to re-establish or consolidate its presence in the domestic market when faced with the reality of Hollywood’s dominance. This idea of the ‘heroic film industry’ involved metaphorically aligning the fighting image of the ‘digger’ with the struggle of the film industry itself, culminating in a depiction for both that was interchangeable.

This thesis examines a selection of Bush-Anzac-themed films released between 1906 and 1988, with each chapter focussing on a particular phase of the cinema. This is essentially an interventionist approach to the study of Australian film history. As such, it is involved in a
critical analysis of the films in question and discourse on the film industry, the result of which is a fresh approach to the relationship between cinema and mythology.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Working towards a PhD is not something that is to be entered into without a healthy dose of self-belief, among other important qualities. I would like to also thank my supervisor Dr Keith Broadfoot for his guidance throughout my candidature at the University of Sydney, and his patience in reading through the seemingly countless chapter drafts that I have sent to him. In addition, I would also like to thank my associate supervisor Dr Bruce Isaacs for his efforts, particularly in helping me to develop some of the much earlier versions of the thesis.

I extend this gratitude to others in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences for their encouragement and assistance, and I speak here in terms of both academic and administrative staff. I am just as grateful to the library staff at both the University of Sydney and at the New South Wales State Library where I spent many days and weeks undertaking research. As the fictional cinematic character Indiana Jones once stated: “Seventy per cent of all archaeology is done in the library – research, reading”. I would add that in the Humanities that figure is far closer to 100 per cent. I allowed myself to be guided by my research in formulating my central argument, as opposed to the other way around, and so the hours I put in at the library were well spent. It was within the countless columns of archival newspaper reviews and articles that I looked at, as well as in the film trade papers, that I first observed the tendency of the film industry to portray itself in the heroic image of the Anzac legend.

I would like to thank the University of Sydney for awarding me an APA scholarship when I arrived here in mid-2011, enabling me to continue with postgraduate research studies that were commenced at Macquarie University. I would also like to acknowledge Griffith University where my post-graduate research interest in Australian film was first sparked in
2009 when I completed a Master of Arts degree. Furthermore, I am grateful for the tutoring opportunities that I have been given at the University of Sydney, Macquarie and Griffith universities, along with the University of New South Wales. Finally, I want to thank my parents for their ongoing love and support. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my late grandfather, Michael Mageros, who served with the Australian Army during the Second World War.
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<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>G.U.O.</td>
<td>Greater Union Theatres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.A.A.F.</td>
<td>Royal Australian Air Force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.I.F.</td>
<td>Australian Imperial Force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZAC</td>
<td>In the strictest sense, ‘Anzac’ stands for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corp, although the term in this thesis is used as a reference to the Australian Soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘Digger’</td>
<td>A popular colloquialism for the ‘typical’ Australian Soldier.</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Anzac legend</td>
<td>The nationalist mythology that emerged from the trenches in Gallipoli in 1915 and which was also based on the Legend of the Bushman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bush legend</td>
<td>The nationalist myth that emerged during the 1890s relating to the ‘typical’ Australian, and which was based on facts of the bush worker. Used as a means of distinguishing Australia from its British ancestry by the radical nationalist writers of the 1890s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallipoli</td>
<td>This is a reference to both the military campaign in Turkey in 1915, and the myth of the Anzac that emerged from the same campaign.</td>
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<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australasian</td>
<td>Australasian Films Limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinesound</td>
<td>Cinesound Productions Limited, Australia’s most successful ‘studio’ formed in the early 1930s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘combine’</td>
<td>A reference to the Australian film conglomerate formed in 1912 and which comprised of Australasian Films and Union Theatres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>The Hollywood studio Columbia Pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing</td>
<td>The British film company, Ealing Studios.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eftee</td>
<td>Eftee Film Productions, formed in Australia in the early 1930s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>A reference to the Hollywood film company, Universal Pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century</td>
<td>Refers to the Hollywood studio, Twentieth Century-Fox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Australian Cinema</td>
<td>A term used to refer to the 1970s and 1980s feature film revival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Nationalism</td>
<td>In the 1970s, the term ‘New Nationalism’ was coined to distinguish Australia from its British heritage.</td>
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INTRODUCTION:
THE ‘HEROIC FILM INDUSTRY’
(1906-1988)

This thesis challenges the idea that Australia’s film industry has historically sought only to ‘reflect’ ideas about Australian national identity, finding that Australian cinema went further, seeking at times to incorporate the Anzac legend into its own image. The Australian film industry, it will be argued, routinely depicted itself in the heroic image of the legend, a tendency that was most apparent during moments of crisis for the production sector – the First World War, the arrival of sound cinema in the early 1930s and the period both during and after the Second World War. It is further argued that Anzac-themed films were the catalyst for the cultural nationalist-boom of the early 1980s. The Anzac legend was exploited at all of these pivotal moments as the film industry sought to re-establish or consolidate its

1 The term ‘national identity’ is used in this thesis to describe how a nation ‘sees itself’ and the conjunctive role of Australian film in expounding this national self-image. This is consistent with Richard White’s argument that all national identities are inventions (Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), while Tim Rouse’s contention that “there are in fact no Australians; there are only ways of seeing people as Australians” is also a useful starting point (Australian Liberalism and National Character, Melbourne: Kibble Books, 1978: p.257). Anthony Smith expands on these theories, outlining the key features of national identity as a historic territory, common myths and historic memories, a mass public culture, common legal rights and duties, and a common economy (National Identity, London: Penguin Books, 1991: p.14).

2 The Anzac legend is closely associated with the First World War, and in particular the Gallipoli campaign in 1915. Donoghue and Tranter have further argued that the legend has since come to symbolise “an idealised heroic aspect of national identity for a majority of Australians”, in “The Anzacs: Military Influences on Australian Identity”, Journal of Sociology, 0 (0), 2013, pp.1-15.

presence in the domestic cinema economy when faced with the reality of Hollywood’s dominance\textsuperscript{3}.

This story of the film industry in its battle against Hollywood is one of heroism but not always of heroic conquest, similar to the Anzac legend itself, meaning that the myth\textsuperscript{4} is well suited to a study into how the film industry has historically sought to depict itself as immersed in a heroic contest. As Graham Seal has argued about the legend: “Like all cultural constructs, Anzac is a conflation of history and myth”\textsuperscript{5}. So it was with the film industry which, in films that had Anzac content from the time of the Great War saw its own struggle in the heroic images on the screen, turning to the Anzac legend – in a metaphorical sense – for reassurance. There was an expectation that the heroic exploits of the ‘digger’, if translated into Australian cinema production, could somehow prove transformative for the nation’s embattled film producers.

David Day’s explanation about what the Anzac legend symbolised at the time of its emergence during the First World War can also stand for the relationship between the Anzac legend and Australia’s film industry that I wish to explore. Day argues that the heroic qualities encoded in the myth lent authenticity to the claim that Australians were at last capable of defending their nation – that they could ‘hold their own’:

After Gallipoli, these figures [the different versions of the bushman]
were transformed into the figure of the digger, a composite figure that could accommodate the peculiarly Australian characteristics of its

\textsuperscript{4} The term ‘myth’ is used throughout the thesis to imply various aspects of the national identity which stem from the bush mythology, and which include both the Anzac and bush myths along with the related bushranger and pioneering myths. Other terms including ‘legends’, ‘motifs’ and ‘themes’ are used in a similar context.
\textsuperscript{5} “ANZAC in the secular”, Journal of Australian Studies, 91, 2007: pp.135-144.
predecessors. Many Australians certainly liked to identify with these figures. Indeed, there was a compelling need to do so. In particular, the courageous and resourceful, if ill-disciplined, figure of the digger provided reassurance to Australians as to their ability to hold and defend their partially-conquered continent.6

Day’s suggestion that Australians ‘liked to identify’ with the heroic figure of the Bushman-Anzac is equally applicable to the film industry, in terms of how the legend provided the same reassurance to the cinema that it could ‘hold and defend’ its territory. The film industry saw its own heroic struggle in the image of Australia’s soldiers on the battlefields of Europe: that is, the fierceness of the battle that awaited the soldiers from Gallipoli onwards was metaphorically relatable to the struggle of the film industry. This symbolic connection that exists between national cinema7 and mythology8 (or nation) is more than coincidental if we consider the historical parallels between the birth of the Anzac legend – which coincided with the Gallipoli landings in 19159 – and simultaneous developments in world cinema that resulted in Hollywood becoming the dominant film industry.

This is the early industrial context that explains why the film industry has sought to depict itself in the same heroic image as the Anzac legend. When confronted with the Hollywood film’s insurgency the Great War offered opportunities to embattled film producers due to the

8 The term ‘mythology’ is used throughout the thesis to imply the process in which recurring themes and motifs are conveyed in such a way as to construct a sense of national identity. For example, Zielinski writes of how the bush mythology was used to ‘mythologise’ the battlers of the bush in early Australian films. In “Australian Cinema in the 1930 and 1940s: The Persistence of the Bush Myth”, Screen Education, 45 (2007); pp.135-139.
9 This is consistent with historical accounts of the birth of the Anzac legend.
demand for war-related content\textsuperscript{10}. The dominant theme in the early Australian war film was the newly emergent figure of the Anzac\textsuperscript{11}:

This nationalistic sentiment added to the individualism of the bush ideal. Concepts of mateship and bravery became an emphatic source of national pride. The bushman and pioneer ideal was now transformed into the 'digger', the axe replaced by the rifle.\textsuperscript{12}

In the decades that followed, the film industry became more direct in terms of how it sought to rhetorically align the Anzac image with its own heroic struggle. The following newspaper article, published in \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald} three years before the release of \textit{Forty Thousand Horsemen} (1940) is an example of how the film industry is urged to match the heroics of the ‘digger’:

Mr Charles Chauvel, the Australian film producer, in an address to members of the Royal Empire Society last night, said that for his next effort he hoped to produce, on an ambitious scale the story of the Australian Light Horseman and the campaign in Palestine. He believed that the Anzac was one of the most colourful and popular figures throughout the world and though the film-making industry was backward in Australia he thought that there was no difficulty which could not be overcome here in producing a picture that would

\textsuperscript{10} Pike & Cooper argue that “Australian feature films between 1914 and 1918 reflected stark changes in popular attitudes to the war in Europe: In \textit{Australian Film 1900-1977} (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998): p.48.

\textsuperscript{11} Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.

\textsuperscript{12} Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
make even the American film world sit up and take notice of Australia.13

This is truth in the image for the film industry: the image of the advancing Light Horsemen in their historic charge on Beersheba is the image of the Australian film industry’s own heroic battle. The image of the film industry that is projected here is one of a poor imitation of the American film industry – of ‘inexpertly aping Hollywood’14 – which is implied by Chauvel’s reported comments that ‘the film-making industry was backward in Australia’. This statement along with the following passage – that ‘there was no difficulty which could not be overcome here in producing a picture that would make even the American film world sit up and take notice of Australia’ – problematise the cinema by establishing the notion of the ‘impoverished film industry’. It is in the context of this binary opposition between the ‘national’ and the ‘international’ (Hollywood) that the film industry turned to the legend for reassurance.

The conception of the impoverished film industry/filmmaker developed into a recurring theme in discussions about the cinema in the decades that followed, through to and including the 1970s and ‘80s’ cultural nationalism15. John Baxter has argued in relation to the early film industry that when “one thinks of the film industry in Australia before the Second World War it is usually in terms of impoverishment and confusion”16. John Tulloch has examined the same tension in the early cinema and found that it exists “between the individual creative

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14 Lesley Speed uses this term in her study of 1930s Australian cinema and its tendency to imitate the dominant Hollywood paradigm: In “Blazing the Trail: Early Australian Film”, in *Metro Magazine* (158), 2008, pp.76-82.
15 John Hutchinson states that cultural nationalism is the tendency to create national identities based on pre-existing myths and legends, typically in opposition to the existence of a foreign cultural power; in *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Reaction of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987) p.9. In relation to the cultural nationalist film industry of the 1970s/80s, Dermody & Jacka add that that the robust advancement of Australian national identity was aimed at addressing the film industry’s ‘loss of independence’; in *The Screening of Australia; volume 1* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1987), 1987: p.45.
genius [the national] and the monopolistic juggernaut [the international]”’17. Tulloch uses the analogy of the pioneering filmmaker in relation to director Raymond Longford, whose ideology of the film industry was tied into the freewheeling days of the pre-World War One period, before the “American invasion”18. He argues that Longford saw his own struggle in the silent cinema classic, *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), as that of the individual filmmaker who was pitted against the crushing forces of monopolistic control19.

On the evidence of the *Herald* article the metaphor could just as easily apply to Chauvel. Baxter explains that during the 1920s, as Longford’s career was nearing an end, Chauvel was one filmmaker who persisted with Australian subjects told in the ‘Australian way’. As Baxter goes on to explain: “Longford had succeeded for a time. Now another independent producer-director with some of Longford’s messianic fervour was to try his luck: Chauvel”20. Shirley and Adams have also written of Chauvel’s struggle, particularly in securing the backing for *Forty Thousand Horsemen*. They argue that Universal Pictures in America was at first disinterested in investing in the project, but when Chauvel secured funding from the Hoyts exhibition chain, along with a State Government guarantee, the film was eventually made and went on to become an international box office success21.

But Chauvel’s battle to get projects off the ground remained with him for the rest of his career and his struggle mirrors that of the film industry. Chauvel’s wife and production partner, Elsa Chauvel, refers to the implications for the film industry of the short-lived partnership between Chauvel and Universal Pictures. In her biography, she explains that the onset of the Second World War effectively ended Chauvel’s association with Universal, an important development in terms of how we interpret *Forty Thousand Horsemen* as a ‘false

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20 Baxter citation as above, 1970: p.50.
dawn’ for the film industry despite its phenomenal success at home and overseas. She goes on to explain: “…what might have become a lasting partnership in Australian film production became a war casualty”\textsuperscript{22}.

This is the context to \textit{The Herald} article: the conception of Chauvel as the impoverished filmmaker who is immersed in a ‘David and Goliath’ battle against the overseas behemoth, and the conjunctive reassurance that the Anzac legend provided the film industry in this struggle. At the level of metaphor, the Anzac mystique is presented as a potential remedy to the dilemma of American hegemony\textsuperscript{23} in the film industry. In the article, by stating that he ‘believed that the Anzac was one of the most colourful and popular figures throughout the world…’ a connection between the heroism of the bushman-soldier on the battlefield and the challenges faced by the filmmaker/film industry is created.

But also implicit in this stated connection is the notion that the Anzac myth – which is presented in this article as world renowned – holds the key for the film industry in the struggle to redress the historic imbalance with Hollywood. This symbolic connection becomes more evident in terms of how the previous statement is linked with the writer’s concluding comment ‘that there was no difficulty which could not be overcome here in producing a picture that would make even the American film world sit up and take notice of Australia’. It is public discourse on Australian war films such as this article that reminds us that the struggle towards national maturity and that of the film industry are encoded in the Anzac legend, just as they are in the version of bush nationalism to which the legend owes its mythic allegiance.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{My Life with Charles Chauvel} (Singapore: Shakespeare Head Press, 1973): p.86.
\textsuperscript{23} Graeme Turner argues that hegemony is “…the process by which members of a society are persuaded to acquiesce in their own subordination, to abdicate cultural leadership in favour of sets of interests which are represented as identical, but may actually be antithetical, to their own … Hegemony’s aim is to resist social change and maintain the status quo”, in \textit{Film as Social Practice} (London: Routledge, 1993), p.136. Accordingly, in this thesis the term ‘American hegemony’ is used to imply the cultural dominance of the Hollywood film in Australia’s cinema.
In much of the material that I introduce throughout the dissertation, such as the article about Chauvel, it is almost as if the film industry was seeking to turn its subjugated, ‘secondary’ status into something of a virtue, the idea being that it was somehow considered sufficient that Australian film was metaphorically imbued with the mythos of Anzac, and that this might, in itself, prove to be ‘transformative’ for the local film industry in its heroic struggle against Hollywood. In other words, it was possible for the film industry to portray itself as heroic, and as heroic as the Anzacs on the foreign battlefield, while at the same time not realistically threaten or challenge the prevailing power structures that have historically characterised Australian cinema, and which were established in the brief period before the Great War and the rise of the ‘bushman-soldier’, the topic of the next chapter.

The Research Design

In this section I make a few points about the methodology that is used throughout the dissertation. In each chapter I examine the films that are the focus of the historical period in question, although there is some unavoidable overlap. For example, in Chapter Two where I examine the documentary films of cameraman Frank Hurley, reference is also made to *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, a fictional re-creation of the famous Beersheba Light Horse charge which Hurley helped to film. The Charles Chauvel epic is more thoroughly examined in the following chapter (Chapter Three) which spans the period that begins with the First World War and ends with the Second World War.

Throughout the thesis I also examine how the war films and film industry have been discussed and debated in the public arena. This is a methodological approach in which discourse on the film industry forms a key component of Australian screen culture. An emphasis on discourse is useful in the context of the early film industry because as Pike,
Cooper, Shirley, Adams and other historians have noted about the silent film industry, few of the films remain intact. This means that public discourse – reviews and articles from the nation’s major newspapers and the film/screen trade papers, along with other published texts and publicity material – is often all that is left of the silent film industry. I am particularly referring to the silent films released before the First World War, the early cinema’s ‘golden period’, and in particular the halcyon years of 1911 and 1912. It appears that not a lot has changed since John Baxter wrote almost fifty years ago about the failure to protect nation’s early film works:

A ridiculously small amount of film survives from the earliest days of Australian cinema. Even documentation is scarce…No doubt there are other films of which even the names have vanished. There is no way to measure what we have lost through this neglect, except perhaps to compare our present impoverished national cinema with the rich history of countries that have preserved their cinematic heritage.24

Two decades later Shirley and Adams similarly remarked that “over ninety per cent of the silent narrative features were lost”25. In the early chapters that deal with the silent film industry, therefore, I am relying heavily on published reviews and articles from a wide cross section of the nation’s major daily newspapers, which have proved a rich source of research material and are too numerous to individually itemise here. I have also relied on the following Australian film and screen trade publications: The Theatre Magazine, Everyone's, The Film Weekly, The Australasian Exhibitor, Australian Variety, Australian Variety and Show World and The Exhibitor. At the same time I have drawn from American film journals such as

Modern Screen, The Film Bulletin and Motion Picture Daily. To supplement this list of film and screen trade publications I have also accessed material from The Bulletin newspaper and Smith’s Weekly.

The intention of such an approach has been to fill in the gaps caused by the absence of the films that I have been unable to view in full. Most notable among these is the first Gallipoli-themed war film, *The Hero of the Dardanelles* (1915), of which only a few minutes remains.

It should be noted that throughout the dissertation I have sought to undertake a conjunctive analysis of the films and discourse on the film industry in support of my argument. The reliance on discourse is an approach that has been used by other film historians and scholars. James Latham has argued in his analysis of American movie promotions from the First World War: “Advertising and publicity are forms of commercial speech that function powerfully to motivate movie-going and shape our understanding of films”\(^\text{26}\). The reliance in this thesis on public discourse, however, is also motivated by practicality. As Shirley and Adams have pointed out in the introduction to their text:

> …the high rate of loss for other films of the silent era has meant that much of our commentary on films from that period has had to be drawn from contemporary published articles and reviews.\(^\text{27}\)

But there is another, equally persuasive reason for taking this approach. Reviews and articles about films and the film industry tend to embellish the process of mythologising, which is the focus of this study – that is, the mythologising of the film industry in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. Many of these articles are written in such a way that they seem as deeply immersed in the myth-making as the films themselves, and in some cases take on a life of

\(^{26}\) “Technology and ‘Reel Patriotism’ in American Film Advertising of the World War 1 Era”, *Film & History*, 36 (1) 2006: pp.36-43.

\(^{27}\) Shirley & Adams citation as above, 1989: p. viii.
their own. This literary method of presenting the films to the audience in reviews and articles is, as a result, pivotal to how the film industry has sought to depict itself in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. In archival newspaper copy there is no moving image, only words, allowing for the symbolic relationship between myth and cinema to be often much more clearly stated.

Once again, there is a precedent in Australian film history for the approach adopted in this study. In his examination of Australian films made during the 1940s and ‘50s by Britain’s Ealing Studios, Peter Limbrick argues that

…the discourse about these films also constitutes a cultural practice in its own right, one that further narrativizes and mythologizes the settler relations as constructed in the narratives. 28

The Thesis Outline

The layout of the thesis is as follows. In Chapter One, I examine the shift in the early film industry around the time of the Great War which led to the rise of the Hollywood cinema in the domestic film market. The conjunctive emergence of the Bush-Anzac legend at the same time as a counter measure to this hegemony is also examined. The reasons for the emphasis on the early film industry are two-fold. The first is that the monumental shift from the ‘national’ to the ‘international’ put the framework in place for the decades that followed in the film industry, in terms of how the cinema’s relation to the American film industry is typically written about. Secondly, the emphasis on the period before and during the First World War is aimed at avoiding, as much as possible, duplication with the content contained

in the ensuing chapters and which focus on specific periods in the film industry’s development.

For example, Chapter Two re-imagines the documentary films of acclaimed actuality cameraman, Frank Hurley. The argument here is that discourse on Hurley’s work is among the earliest evidence of how the film industry has sought to depict itself in the heroic image of the national identity. I examine the film of the expedition that Hurley made to the nation’s ‘Far North’ in 1914 with explorer Francis Birtles, a film that is deeply imbricated in the Bush legend. I then examine the films that he made during the First World War in his stint as the A.I.F.’s first official cameraman, along with his work as a cinematographer on Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, both of which were pivotal to the development of the Anzac legend.

Chapter Three examines the Australian war films, beginning with the first wave of propaganda movies released at the start of the Great War through to, and including, the Second World War. In examining the theme of the impoverished filmmaker I rely heavily on John Tulloch’s argument, in terms of how he conceives of director Raymond Longford as the Australian film pioneer who does battle with the colossal forces of the film industry. This is an important distinction in terms of how the film industry ‘sees its own struggle’ in Longford’s silent film classic, *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919).

Chapter Four examines the ‘false dawn’ presented by the arrival of the overseas-funded location filmmaking in Australia in the 1940s and ‘50s. I examine *The Overlanders* and *Smithy*, both of which were released in 1946, immediately after the war had ravaged local cinema production. I apply the notion of the impoverished filmmaker to directors Ken G. Hall (*Smithy*) and Harry Watt (*The Overlanders*) and arrive at a similar conclusion as in the

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29 Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.351.
previous chapter. Chapter Five continues the examination of location filmmaking with a study of the Anzac-themed *The Desert Rats* (1953) and *On the Beach* (1959). I argue that the appearance of the two Hollywood-funded films, both of which have Anzac-Australian content, is typically written about as emblematic of the demise of independent film production during the 1950s. At the same time, the emphasis in both narratives on nationalist themes helped to keep alive an Australian screen culture during a decade that is routinely characterised as a dark period for the film industry.

Chapter Six examines the cultural nationalist revival of the 1970s and ‘80s and how the cinema sought to redress the ‘imbalance’ after decades of American cultural imperialism. I argue that *Gallipoli* (1981) and *Breaker Morant* (1980) provide further evidence of the heroic struggle of the film industry, although the ambiguous nationalism of both films undermines the independence of nation and film industry. What unites the films of the New Australian Cinema – epitomised by Colin Rogers in *Emerald City* (1988) – is that the film industry is implored to emulate the Anzacs in its heroic struggle against the dominant Hollywood cinema.

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30 The argument in this thesis is underpinned by the term ‘cultural imperialism’, or the notion that Australia’s film industry has been subordinate to the Hollywood cinema. As Stuart Cunningham explains: “Australia and its cultural production are the losers in an unequal exchange with dominant economic and cultural powers, principally the United States”, in “The Decades of Survival: Australian Film 1930-1970”, *The Australian Screen*, Moran & O’Regan eds. (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1989); p. 55.
CHAPTER 1:
THE RISE OF THE
‘BUSHMAN-SOLDIER’

This chapter examines the dramatic changes in Australia’s film industry shortly before and during the First World War which led to the rise of the Hollywood film in the domestic cinema market, along with the conjunctive emergence of the ‘bushman-soldier’ as a countermeasure to American hegemony. The reasons for the emphasis on the early film industry are two-fold. The first is that the monumental shift from the ‘national’ to the ‘international’ in the brief period before the war effectively put into place the framework for the film industry in the decades that followed, in terms of how the film industry’s relation to the dominant international cinema has since been publically discussed, debated and conceptualised. Secondly, the emphasis on the period just prior and during the war is aimed at avoiding, as much as possible, duplication with the chapters that follow and which focus on specific periods in the film industry’s development, although some analysis of later periods is necessary in order to establish a line of thematic development in commentary about the film industry.

The significance of the Bush-Anzac legend to this study is that it has formed the basis of the film industry’s response to the dilemma of American dominance in Australian cinema, beginning with the early cinema and continuing through to the revival of the 1970s and ‘80s.
Accordingly, the historical emergence of the Bush-Anzac legend is traced, the idea being to highlight how the values and ideals associated with the radical nationalist tradition have provided the recurring myths and symbols used to assert ‘Australianness’ as a means of countering the implied presence of a dominant cultural power in the film industry. The representation of the film industry as ‘heroic’, and in the image of the ‘digger’, was such that it was directly equated to the heroic exploits of Australia’s soldiers on the foreign battlefield. This nationalist image is a metaphor for the heroic struggle of the film industry, in terms of how both cinema and Anzac are depicted as defending Australian values and ideals against equally formidable opponents.

As this suggests, the conception of the film industry as ‘heroic’ is imbricated in ideas about cultural imperialism and its influence on the film industry. But the notion of the impoverished film industry, introduced in the previous chapter, extends beyond the cultural imperialism argument and is more generally a reference to “the treadmill of brief booms and longer busts”\(^1\) that has characterised Australian cinema. While the cultural imperialism of Britain and America explains many of the film industry’s historical peaks and troughs, Pike and Cooper have argued that this is not the case with the pre-World War One collapse in Australian film production:

> The cultural imperialism of the U.S.A. and Britain has often been blamed for causing the failure of the feature film industry by acquiring a stranglehold over Australian theatres and denying local film-makers access to the screen. While such arguments may help to explain the problems of the industry in later decades, they do not explain the problems of the sudden and sharp fall in production in

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\(^1\) Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.24.
1912, several years before Hollywood gained primacy in world production.²

The sharp fall in production in 1912 is a reference to the establishment of the ‘combine’, a consolidation of the film industry’s commercial interests shortly before the First World War. Distribution was brought under the umbrella of ‘Australasian Films’, while exhibition operated under the banner of ‘Union Theatres’. These developments had an immediate impact on the film industry, killing off the pre-war boom³. Graham Shirley has observed that the ‘combine’ favoured the distribution and exhibition of imported (mostly American) films, shutting out Australian-made pictures⁴. However, the onset of the Great War also provided the ‘combine’ with the opportunity to throw its weight behind the production and screening of propaganda pictures, firming the idea that the Anzac legend was used to boost the production of local films: “Australasian’s [the combine’s] next step to deflect mounting industry criticism of its virtual monopoly was its offer of full support for the war effort”⁵.

Other developments that took place during the war also conspired to crush local film production, most notably the arrival of the Hollywood studios in Australia. This development quickly eroded Australasian Films’ monopoly:

In 1913, Biblical Biographs (later Paramount Pictures) set up an office in Australia and, by the 1920s, almost all of the major Hollywood studios had branches in Australia to distribute directly their moving pictures. This virtually ended both Australasian’s

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³ These developments in the industry are outlined in numerous histories of the early cinema, including Baxter (1970), Shirley & Adams (1989) and Pike & Cooper (1998).
previously key position in the release of American films, and the freedom of the distribution industry from overseas control. Once established in Australia, the US firms lost no opportunity to make their powerful presence felt.\(^6\)

Before the ‘combine’ there was a brief, golden period for Australia’s film producers. Between 1910 and 1912, about 90 narrative (feature) films were released into the nation’s picture houses, with more than fifty of them screened in 1911 alone\(^7\). In the absence of film distributors, producers sold their films directly to exhibitors. Josephine May has described this phase in the following terms: “Australian cinema of the silent era was national and democratic in its orientation, seeking as it did to reach the widest possible audience”\(^8\). The film industry was also self-referential in that it was influenced neither by Hollywood nor by any other national cinema, and as a result reflected mostly Australian conditions\(^9\): “The boast at the time was that Australian films were produced for Australia, in Australia and by Australians”\(^10\). In other words, the brief period before the Great War was intensely nationalistic\(^11\):

It was perhaps the most acutely ‘national’ period in Australian cinema, and many of the recurring themes and motifs of the local cinema were first explored and defined at this time.\(^12\)

As local film producers responded to their audience’s demands for a recurring subject matter a distinctive representation of ‘Australianness’ began to emerge in the films\(^13\). The major

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\(^7\) Shirley citation as above, 1994: p.10.
\(^9\) May citation as above, 2010; pp. 623-637.
\(^10\) May citation as above, 2010; pp. 623-637.
\(^11\) Pike and Cooper citation as above, 1998: p.3.
\(^12\) Pike and Cooper citation as above, 1998: p.3.
themes of the film industry, both early and recent, were first explored during this phase of the cinema, with images of the bush and its inhabitants developing into recurring themes and motifs. Australia’s early films are said to have created, sustained and developed a national spirit:

This national cinema of recognizable events, characters and settings, outside any overseas context, was established in the first major film production period prior to the First World War.

The first narrative film released in 1906, The Story of the Kelly Gang, inaugurated this genre of ‘long-form’ stories about Australia in which the emphasis on the film’s duration was a means of indicating the importance of the national subject matter. There is a suggestion here that the film’s duration and thematic content – the latter of which is the bushranger myth which is derivative of the ‘Bushman’ – are symbolically related. Eleanor Hodges has argued about the bushranger myth that it exemplifies the bushman in his most extreme form, “being more completely independent, anti-authoritarian, tough, resourceful, and loyal to his mates, than the most thoroughly acclimatised bush worker.” Andrew Zielinski adds that the Kelly Gang film’s anti-authoritarian sentiment is significant also because it is from this film that the ‘city-bush’ binary opposition emerged, which is “one of the dominant and persistent themes of the cinema of Australia.” The film’s duration is also pivotal to its distinctiveness. Shirley

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14 Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
15 Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
16 Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
17 William Routt, in “The Kelly Gangograph: dreaming it all again”, from the series The Picture that will Live Forever, 2007, pp.53-100.
19 Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
20 Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
and Adams have found that in 1906 other film industries, including that of America, would have considered five-reels as unthinkable\textsuperscript{21}.

In the following newspaper review of *The Kelly Gang* all of these qualities of the film – thematic and durational – culminate in a heroic depiction of the film industry. The article is significant because it is pre-emptive of public debate about the ‘heroic’ Australian film industry:

\begin{quote}
This picture should be of exceptional interest to the Australian public, as almost every man, woman, and child in Australia knows of Ned Kelly and his fellow-bushrangers, and it is probably one of the most stirring incidents in Australian history. The effect on the house on Wednesday night justified the efforts of the management. The pictures were strikingly clear and true to life. The mulga and tea tree-scrub translated the spectators from the Town Hall to the aboriginal bush. The story of the Kellys almost every Australian knows.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

The Bush legend in this review assumes rhetorical precedence over the bushranger myth, even though the two are symbolically related just as the Bush and Anzac legends are interconnected. This is because bushrangers, like convicts and larrikins (in the 1970s it was the ‘Ocker’) “represent the unacceptable face of the bushman, the pioneer, and the Anzac”\textsuperscript{23}. This is how *The Kelly Gang* is mythologised in this article, with the outlaw aspect of the story, described as ‘one of the most stirring incidents in Australian history’, suppressed in favour of the unconquerable Australian bush. The taming of the natural landscape is presented as what sets Australia apart from elsewhere. The bush is what defines the nation


\textsuperscript{22} *The Adelaide Register*, 27th of December, 1906

and in this review the film industry is depicted in the same heroic image. This one extract in particular – ‘The pictures were strikingly clear and true to life. The mulga and tea tree-scrub translated the spectators from the Town Hall to the aboriginal bush’ – is a metaphor for the film industry. The transformative powers of the outback are symbolically related to the journey of the film industry – that is, the idea that the film ‘translated’ spectators from the picture house to the bush – the outcome of which is that *The Kelly Gang* is presented as a heroic new epoch in Australian film production.

**The Australian ‘Bush’ Legend**

This review is also significant because of how it alerts us to the idea that the Bush legend is the basis of subsequent versions of the national identity, including the Anzac legend, suggesting that the Legend of the Bushman is the most enduring in Australian mythology\(^\text{24}\). This is the paradigm from which Australian films have overwhelmingly relied on for their nationalist motifs and symbols. Graeme Turner argues that fictions that represent themselves as national do so by drawing on “the available myths and discourses of national character and identity”. National myths are not unmediated reflections of history, but rather are transformations of history\(^\text{25}\), an example of which is the *Kelly Gang* review and what it implies about the film industry’s heroic development. Turner goes on to explain that the Bush legend has informed a swathe of Australian cultural production throughout the nation’s cinema and literature\(^\text{26}\). The images of the nation drawn from the radical nationalist tradition

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\(^{24}\) Studies which provide critical analysis into the bush mythology include McFarlane (1987); Tulloch (1981, 1982); Turner (1986); Dermody & Jacka (1987, 1988, 1988a); Rattigan (1991); Bruce Molloy (1990); Moran/O'Regan eds. (1989).


\(^{26}\) Turner citation as above, 1986: pp.107/127.
of the 1890s – the ‘Bushman’ and later the ‘digger’ – have gained considerable cultural currency in the process.27

The bush myth has also stood the test of time, emerging as one of the dominant themes of the 1970s and ‘80s’ film industry.28 As Turner goes on to explain: “In film and fiction, it is this legend that provides the paradigms for the representation of nationalism”29. Thus, the New Australian Cinema30 of the 1970s and ‘80s borrowed heavily from the radical-nationalist tradition, in that the meanings of Australianness constructed in films are based on the notion of ‘difference’. Elizabeth Jacka makes this connection between the film narratives of the 1970s and ‘80s and radical nationalism when she argues that “…it [the cinema] is concerned to establish the difference between the culture of Australia and that of other nations”31. Based on this framework it is possible, Jacka argues, to take up an anti-American or previously, an anti-British, position in Australian cinema32. It is in opposition to the implied presence of a dominant cultural ‘Other’ that the film industry has sought to heroically assert itself.

Furthermore, and as Jacka and Turner both argue, the idea that Australianness is asserted against British values or American cultural dominance is mythically derivative of radical nationalism. This is a key point in terms of how the film industry is conceptualised in this thesis as ‘heroic’, because the idea that the cinema sees its struggle in the heroic images of the Anzac legend is embedded in the version of bush nationalism that has long supplied the cinema’s dominant themes and motifs.

28 Turner notes that the nationalism of the ‘70s and ‘80s, while more sophisticated than that of the films synonymous with Chips Rafferty or the 1950s, is reminiscent of the early cinema. He states: “...the construction of Australian-ness through reference to these earlier representations is no less common”; In National Fictions: Literature, film and the construction of the Australian narrative (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p.114.
30 The term ‘New Australian Cinema’ is taken as implying the post-1970s film revival, a formulation that is consistent with scholarly accounts of this period.
While the same can also be said of the films of the 1970s and ‘80s given their underlying mythic heritage, the New Australian Cinema was also a concerted attempt at cultural nationalism. John Hutchinson argues that cultural nationalist movements seek to create (national) identities based on a set of pre-existing myths and legends. The cultural nationalist film revival of the 1970s and ‘80s was underpinned by the creation of an Australian identity “for our own self-esteem and national maturity.” The creation of an Australian perspective in films was underwritten by government (financial) support of the film industry from the late 1960s, a legislative attempt to reverse the tide of Hollywood’s dominance. Dermody and Jacka explain it in the following terms:

At most, cultural nationalism may inure Australians to cultural hegemony from without, helping to establish a view of the world that serves in our own national interests rather than those of another state.

The national identity that underscored the cultural-nationalist film revival was based on a set of myths and legends that were derivative of 1890s radical nationalism. Turner explains that this brand of Australian nationalism, although customarily discussed in relation to hegemony, is a positive and resistant ideology, and at the same time provides the terms for an authentic assertion of identity in order to establish political independence; or else it can be enclosed within an evolutionary model of cultural development which sees nationalism

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34 Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.45.
as the index of the end of colonialism and the beginning of the transition to cultural maturity, to the utterances of an unselfconscious ‘adult’ national voice.\(^{38}\)

The implication here is that the bush myth has been pivotal to imagining the Australian nation in its struggle towards ‘national maturity’, while also acting as a mechanism by which producers have sought to connect with local audiences. With regards to the latter, Shirley and Adams observe that bush stories were used to entice audiences back to cinemas towards the end of the Great War as movie-goers tired of propaganda\(^{39}\). During the war the Anzac legend strengthened a sense of national identity, and “as anti-war and some anti-British feelings emerged in the latter years of the war, this nationalism only increased in strength”\(^{40}\). The result of this strengthening of national identity was a return to bush themes by the end of the conflict. But it is the earlier point about the bush myth representing the nation’s struggle towards national maturity – or finding its ‘adult national voice’ – that is symbiotic with the argument that the film industry sees its heroic struggle (towards maturity and/or destiny) in Anzac-themed films.

As Neil Rattigan has found, the ‘Legend of the Bushman’ is the one overriding myth that defines and underlies all attempts to define and explain what ‘Australia’ is. The landscape and the experience of landscape are therefore pivotal to the Australian imagination and the creative artist\(^{41}\):

So the bush, for all its geographical and ecological actuality, becomes the mythic forming factor that separates Australia, the experience of

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\(^{38}\) Turner citation as above, 1986: pp.107-108.
\(^{40}\) Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
\(^{41}\) Rattigan citation as above, 1991: p.25.
Australia, and the fact of being Australian from the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{42}

Rattigan cites the popular revival film, \textit{The Man from Snowy River} (1982), as one in which the narrative is centred almost entirely on the concept of ‘landscape-as-character’. The film’s narrative is centred on the “wholehearted embracing of the most persistent Australian myth of self-identity, especially in its assertion that the untameable bush is central to understanding what Australia means”\textsuperscript{43}. It is this same sense of landscape that characterises the earlier article about \textit{The Kelly Gang} film, in terms of how the taming of the nation’s vast and unconquered interior – the bush – is culturally constructed as the key point of difference between Australia and other nations, particularly with Britain. In the 1890s, the historical and mythic setting for \textit{The Man from Snowy River}, Australian values and ideals such as the taming of the landscape were measured in opposition to this sense of ‘Britishness’. As Neville Meaney has argued, attempts to establish a dominant and recurring nationalist myth have typically invoked the nation’s relationship with the British Empire. Meaney adds: “…Australia is not defined by a myth celebrating its own unique values but rather as against Britain”\textsuperscript{44}.

This way of thinking about the Australian identity, as a counterpoint to Britishness, has also characterised discussions about the recent Australian war film. Celebrated films of the 1970s and ‘80s’ renaissance, in particular \textit{Gallipoli} (1981) and \textit{Breaker Morant} (1980), are indicative of how “the rash of films dealing with the Boer War and the First World War were

\textsuperscript{43} Rattigan citation as above, 1991: p.200.
\textsuperscript{44} “British and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography”; \textit{Australian Historical Studies} 32 (116), 2008: pp.76-90.
infused with the themes of The Australian Legend”\textsuperscript{45}. Graeme Turner argues about the two films that they are indebted to representations of the dominant nationalist myth which has resulted in ‘Australian-ism’ substituting for character, at the same time resulting in “outstanding examples of the conflation of nationalism, of mateship and of the myth of individualism”\textsuperscript{46}. The cultural identity that is apparent in both narratives is consistent with the 1890s (Furphy-Lawson) brand of radical nationalism, which has at its core ‘anti-authoritarianism’ and ‘anti-Britishness’\textsuperscript{47}. Furthermore, Australian values are asserted either as a gesture of independence or at the point of disconnect from the nation’s imperial ties\textsuperscript{48}. These are resistant qualities that originated in the 1890s but which survived well into the cultural-nationalist film industry of the 1970s and ‘80s, the result of which is that representations of ‘Australianness’ are typically measured against ‘Britishness’, thereby “…valorising those aspects of our national character which depart from English values and loyalties”\textsuperscript{49}.

In the much earlier Anzac-themed films that are examined in this thesis, including The Overlanders and Smithy (both 1946), along with On the Beach (1959), the bush is presented as the symbolic heart of the national mythology – of the nation – and it is from the bush that the main protagonists draw their strength and courage. The bush is where they return to, sometimes in a purely symbolic sense, in order to rediscover their will to continue on in their heroic endeavour. Moreover, this mythic lineage is crucial to an understanding of how the Bush legend informs newer versions of the national character, which include the Anzac legend:

\textsuperscript{45} Meaney citation as above, 2008: pp.76-90. Also worth noting here is that the term, ‘The Australian Legend’, is Russel Ward’s name for the bush mythology made famous in his thesis, and which is regarded as a landmark study about the Bush legend. See The Australian Legend (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958).
\textsuperscript{46} Turner citation as above, 1986: p.103.
\textsuperscript{47} Turner citation as above, 1986: pp.114-115.
\textsuperscript{48} Turner citation as above, 1986: pp.107-108.
\textsuperscript{49} Turner citation as above, 1986: p.114.
...these experiences and responses and their results are organised into three subsidiary mythic legends, each of which builds upon the basic structure of the effect of the bush upon those who venture into it, each in turn...building upon the preceding one without ever totally subsuming it but altering it in the process. These are the legend of the bushman, the legend of the pioneer, and the Anzac legend.50

The Anzac Legend

The symbiotic relationship established in this quotation between the Bush legend and the three subsidiary mythic legends implies that ‘The Australian Legend’ informs explanations about subsequent versions of the national identity. At the same time, “both [the bushranger myth of Ned] Kelly and Anzac amplify the bushman tradition”51. One of the unifying principles of the Bush legend that enables us to understand how the bushman evolved into the Anzac is the ideal of ‘mateship’. Peter Horton has found that mateship achieved near-mythic status in Australian culture52, becoming closely associated with the literary nationalism of the 1890s mostly because of the contribution of The Bulletin writers53. The bush ideal of mateship was “central to the imagining of the community of Australia”54, and this was especially so at the turn of the twentieth century. In cultural representations of the nation it was mateship, along with the heroic taming of the landscape, which defined the nation. Mateship is therefore pivotal to our understanding of other versions of the national ‘type’:

52 “Tumultuous Text: The Imagining of Australia through Literature, Sport Nationalism from Colonies to the Federation”, in The International Journal of the History of Sport, 29 (12), 2012: pp.1669-1686
54 Horton citation as above, 2012: pp.1669-1686.
It was the construct of the Australian bushman coupled to that of Australian soldiers firstly in the Boer War and less nostalgically in the First World War, when the ANZAC legend was born, that turned this lava-flow of emergent nationalism into the bedrock of a nation”55.

The Anzac legend emerged as a defining nationalist myth in its own right because it is symbolically associated with the birth of Australian nationhood56. Graham Seal has argued that the legend is a confluence of historical fact and mythology: “The history is that of Australia at war from 1914 and through all subsequent conflicts”, while the myth involves a “more complex and older process”57, a cogent reference to the underlying influence of the bush mythology. The history relates to the nation’s involvement in military battles, beginning with Gallipoli, and it is these ‘combat’ scenes of the heroic diggers in action that form the basis of the myth-making that is apparent in the Australian war film. John Williams alludes to this process of mythologising, arguing that the Great War was regarded as confirmation that Australia had become the “motherland of a race of incomparable fighters and sportsmen”, and that the “Australian soldier had now made our people a famous people”58. Richard White adds that the myth, which was underpinned by a unique brand of Australian (bush) nationalism, translated directly into whether the nation was capable of playing its part in defending the Empire, the one great test that was said to still await the archetypal Australian59:

The digger emerged as the national hero. He held a special place in the national identity because he could be seen as the fulfilment of all

57 Seal citation as above, 2007: pp135-144.
58 Williams’ citation as above, 1993: pp.25-40.
the hopes that had been invested in ‘The Coming Man’, the ideal expression of the Australian ‘type’.60

The national type that emerged from the war trenches (in Gallipoli) was therefore closely associated with those values and ideals traditionally associated with the Bush legend, with one important difference: the fighting prowess of the bushman was transplanted from the pioneering frontiers to a new frontier – the field of war.61 The seminal moment that resulted in the unveiling of the bushman’s latent fighting qualities arrived when the Australian soldiers landed at Gallipoli in April 1915: “…the ready-made myth was given a name, a time and a place”.62 Bill Gammage agrees that the significance of these historical events lies in the potency of the myth, with the battles at Gallipoli greeted as the answer to the true test of nationhood that still awaited an anxious population63:

The praise and the success were what mattered, for they made Australia a nation, and a partner to the Empire…This floodburst of emotion was the high water mark of ideas and attitudes which had built up steadily in Australia during the 30 years or so before 1914.64

Gammage goes on to explain that while there had been few doubts about the bushman’s ability to ‘hold his own’ in the bush environment – with the radical nationalist tradition sufficient in explaining how he was considered competent under the harsh Australian conditions – the nation’s role in the defence of the Empire was considered an entirely different matter. This was an arena in which the ‘typical Australian’ was viewed, certainly before the Great War, as ‘untested’. The war trenches provided an important new context for

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60 White citation as above, 1981: p.125.
61 White citation as above, 1981: p.125.
64 Gammage citation as above, 1982: p.57.
the bushman tradition\textsuperscript{65}, the result of which was the emergence of the new and heroic figure of the ‘Anzac’:

The bush and the war demanded similar qualities in individuals – for example, resource, initiative, endurance, reliability, courage, and mateship. Like the bushmen, the Anzacs wanted to show how they were different. They made a distinctive tradition – brave and tough in battle, excelling at any task to which they set their hands, careless of authority, hostile to most convention, proud of their distinctiveness and their country. For them the real Australian was the Anzac, the bushman on the stage of the world.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{The Early War Film}

The first wave of propaganda films was conveyed to audiences as the point at which the nationalist discourses of ‘Bushman’ and ‘Anzac’ symbolically intersect. Andrew Zielinski says of the early war films that “…the losses, struggles and heroism of Australian troops in the Great War had a major impact on Australian culture and cinema”\textsuperscript{67}. It is somewhere within the nuances of this quotation that my argument about the heroic depiction of the film industry is located, in that the losses, struggles and heroism of the diggers were metaphorically relatable to the heroic struggle of the film industry. Closely related to this myth-making is the way that the early war narratives portrayed the main protagonists based

\textsuperscript{65} Gammage citation as above, 1982: pp.61-62.
\textsuperscript{66} Gammage citation as above, 1982: pp.61-62.
\textsuperscript{67} Zielinski citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
on the ‘hero’s journey theme’. The hero’s journey, which derives from 1890s’ radical nationalism, emphasises the transformation of the archetypal bushman into the so-called ‘finished soldier’. Discourse on the first wave of Gallipoli films from 1915 was such that it imitated the narratives, as reviews followed the journey of the raw recruit from the time that he enlisted – typically from ‘up bush’ – until the moment that he ‘arrived’ on the battlefields of Europe. Equally we can identify the hero’s journey theme in the two key protagonists in the Peter Weir film, Gallipoli (1981), more than six decades later.

Catherine Simpson has found that the first of the Gallipoli films, The Hero of the Dardanelles (1915), set the benchmark for the cinematic depiction of the mythical Australian soldier, an overtly heroic depiction that was sustained almost unaltered through to Weir’s Gallipoli in the early 1980s, and beyond. Simpson explains about The Hero of the Dardanelles that “highly successful, it was Australian cinema’s first Gallipoli film and underpinned the image of the Anzac as heroic”. She refers to a direction note contained in the original screenplay that describes a fight scene showing an Australian soldier tackling a Turkish soldier, and which reads in part: “There follows a life and death struggle”. This is a defining image of the original Anzacs that was established with the first tranche of war films; an image that, at the level of metaphor, is symbiotic with the film industry’s heroic struggle against an equally fierce opponent.

The metaphor of ‘heroic struggle’ is the basis of this newspaper review of The Hero of the Dardanelles.

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The motive of the story is the same as that which has actuated Australians in recruiting since the first casualty lists were published – “Bill got it in the neck; and we’re Bill’s pals.” Thousands of Australians have done just what the principal character in the picture does – replaced the cricket ball with the hand-grenade and the forwards’ rush with the bayonet charge, gone through the months of hard training at Liverpool, marched the weary miles across the Egyptian desert in preparation for the day, and when that day came have fallen fighting for civilisation’s cause. It is a true picture of what the men go through from the raw recruit stage to battlefield.73

The underlying sentiment of this story, certainly in hindsight, is laced with tragedy while allowing for very little in the way of triumph. There is scant evidence of military triumph anywhere in this article, just of heroism, if we consider the use of such phrases as ‘casualty lists’ and the ‘fallen’. If there is triumph anywhere in these words then it lies in the depiction of the Australian soldiers and the heroism that they display in the field of battle. The story of the Gallipoli campaign as it is presented in this article – that is, as the symbolic birthplace of the nation – is one of courage and endeavour in the face of insurmountable, sometimes tragic odds. The film is placed into a similar cultural sphere: that is, as immersed in a heroic portrayal of the Australian soldier’s ‘life and death’ struggle. The phrase, ‘It is a true picture of what the men go through from the raw recruit stage to battlefield’, is the symbolic point where the struggle of the (mythical) Australian soldier is transposed on to that of the film industry. This is the film industry at its most thoroughly ideological, imploring itself to show similar valour in its own heroic contest.

73 The [Sunday] Sun, 18th of July 1915, p.22
If we project forward to the Second World War we will find that public debate about Chauvel’s tribute to the Great-War Anzacs is of a similar calibre. In his study of representations of the Great War-Anzac in Australian war films, Daniel Reynaud has described *Forty Thousand Horsemen* as the most complete articulation of the Anzac legend ever put onto the screen:

It further refined cinematic representations of the Anzac-bushman legend and upheld the almost exclusively maleness of the Australian image with its emphasis on larrikinism, mateship, patriotism, and humour of the ordinary soldier.\(^7^4\)

In the following review that was published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* soon after the film’s release, there is evidence of how the eponymous figure of the Bushman is recast into the equally heroic figure of the ‘Anzac’:

Never before has an Australian producer-director attempted mass spectacle on the scale revealed in "Forty Thousand Horsemen". The sequence representing the famous charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba is as dynamic in its dramatic realism and sustained battle action as any imaginative Hollywood or English producer could have made it. The battle for Gaza is splendidly recreated, but that spectacle of charging horsemen finally reaching their objective with fierce hand-to-hand combat is something that has to be seen before it can be fully appreciated.\(^7^5\)

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\(^7^4\) Reynaud citation as above, 2007: p.144.

\(^7^5\) *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30th of December, 1940: p.2.
The first sentence of this passage, ‘Never before has an Australian producer-director attempted mass spectacle on the scale revealed in Forty Thousand Horsemen’, is more than a statement about how the Gallipoli campaign was considered the symbolic ‘birth’ of Australian nationhood. This is also a commentary about the film industry achieving its own destiny, the underlying implication of which is that, like the original Anzacs, the film industry has created history in the production of this one film – the film represents a heroic new epoch for the film industry. The reader is thus urged to symbolically equate the Light Horse’s historic charge depicted in the film to a correspondingly heroic advance by the film industry – to consider the one as interchangeable with the other. The reviewer even suggests that ‘The sequence representing the famous charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba is as dynamic in its dramatic realism and sustained battle action as any imaginative Hollywood or English producer could have made it’. This is an example of the film industry ‘reimagining’ its own historic struggle as heroic, and as of the same calibre as the Light Horsemen who staged the famous charge on Beersheba.

The cogent comparison with the film industries of America and Britain problematises the cinema by conceding the presence of dominant cultural powers in the film industry, evidence of the dilemma posed by cultural imperialism at the time of the film’s dramatic box-office success. The reviewer’s concluding comment, that ‘the spectacle of charging horsemen finally reaching their objective…is something that has to be seen before it can be fully appreciated’, is aimed at metaphorically equating the vividness and truthfulness of the image in this film – which is of the advancing Light Horsemen – with the film industry’s own heroic charge. This is the underlying message for the film industry in this film and in the review of the film; to counter cultural hegemony with a similarly heroic advance on overseas cinema.
markets. The international success of this film provided hope – in ‘real’ box office terms – that the film industry might somehow reverse the flow of hegemony\textsuperscript{76}.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter has explained the historical context for the film industry’s tendency to depict itself in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. The emphasis, therefore, on the dramatic changes in the brief period before the Great War is aimed at establishing the framework for the subsequent dominance by American films in the many decades that followed. It was during this brief period, sandwiched between the boom of 1911/12 and the war, in which the opposition between the ‘national’ and the ‘international’ was consolidated in the film industry, largely as a result of the combine’s decision to favour the screening of imported, mostly American films. The establishment of this binary opposition coincided with the simultaneous emergence of the ‘Bushman-Anzac’, a radical nationalist discourse that itself is immersed in notions of heroism in terms of how Australian cultural values and ideals are asserted against the presence of a dominant cultural power in the film industry.

\textsuperscript{76} Shirley and Adams argue that the Chauvel film’s international success offered hope at the onset of the Second World War when there were grave concerns about the continued existence of independent film production in Australia. Citation as above, 1989: p.163.
The heroic depiction of the film industry was apparent from the first tranche of Australian films released before the Great War. Among these were the films of Frank Hurley, the leading documentary filmmaker of the early Australian cinema. Hurley’s expeditionary films, in which he travelled to previously unexplored areas of the globe to bring back images of never before witnessed scenes, were naturally predisposed to discussions about the ‘heroic’ film industry. His subsequent stint during the war as the military’s first photographer-filmmaker helped to build and spread the Anzac legend. Hurley was the nation’s first ‘frontline cameraman’, and public debate about his war films in which he himself was an active participant emphasised the heroic image of the combat cameraman standing on the frontline alongside the troops, an image that the film industry conjunctively sought to incorporate into its own identity.

Shirley and Adams, positing Hurley as the best-known Australian documentary filmmaker of the silent film period, describe him as an ‘explorer-cameraman’:
For thirty years Frank Hurley was Australia’s foremost actuality filmmaker, combining skill as a movie and stills cameraman with an explorer’s enthusiasm.¹

This conception of Hurley as the ‘explorer-cameraman’ is central to how the film industry could depict itself as equally heroic. As Hurley could venture into new territory, so could the film industry. Hurley covered a number of polar expeditions with both Mawson and Shackleton before being appointed the Australian Imperial Force’s (A.I.F.) official photographer-cameraman in June 1917, filming the troops first in France and then the Middle East². Graham Shirley observes that Hurley was “by far the most celebrated Australian documentary film-maker of the silent and early sound periods”³ who made his name by filming journeys to regions that were hitherto unexplored. It was these trips with noted explorers, explains Shirley, which won Hurley his fame and reputation as a cameraman-explorer⁴. This formulation is consistent with other accounts of Hurley’s early career, such as that by Dixon and Lee who describe Hurley as an “adventurer-photographer and cinematographer”⁵.

That Hurley’s overseas-made films, including those that he made away from the battlefield, should be just as relevant to ideas about Australia’s national identity has been noted elsewhere. This is because his films, like other actuality films of the same period, brought images of overseas events back to Australian shores at a time when overseas travel was out of reach for many people. Diane Collins has argued in relation to Hurley’s involvement in the Mawson and Shackleton Antarctic journeys that his actuality films were important to the

¹Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years (Hong Kong: Currency Press, 1989); p.87.
²Shirley & Adams citation as above, 1989: p.87.
⁴Shirley citation as above, 1994: p.18.
⁵Dixon uses this expression in The Diaries of Frank Hurley: 1912-41, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee eds. (London: Anthem Press, 2011); p.x111.
nation because they represented the only opportunity for many Australians to witness life in other countries:

At a time when, foreign wars excepted, the vast majority of Australians had no chance to experience overseas travel, these often carefully coloured scenic films were like a thousand postcards in motion.⁶

Dixon and Lee have made a similar argument about Hurley in their introduction to his republished diaries⁷. They explain their motivation for repackaging the memoirs as an opportunity to explore his role in covering events of significance for local and overseas audiences – to “review the part he played in imagining them for an international as well as an Australian public”⁸. The internationalist conjecture about his work, evident in the hypothesis of both Collins and Dixon and Lee, is important to the argument in this chapter because it forms one aspect of why his films and the film industry were portrayed as heroic. Hurley was routinely discussed as a figure of international stature, as a filmmaker who was ‘punching above his weight’. This also implies something about the film industry, in that discourse on his films reflected these priorities but was also underpinned by the Bush-Anzac legend. The culmination of this tendency for both film industry and national identity was an image that was equally heroic and mutually dependent.

An article included below from The Sunday Times newspaper about the journey that he made to the far north in 1914, resulting in the Unknown Australia film, is a useful example of how discourse on Hurley’s films emphasised the myth of the ‘cameraman-adventurer’:

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⁸ Dixon & Lee citation as above, 2011: p. xii.
Mr. Hurley's Antarctic pictures won him a world-wide reputation. The effect of his 'Unknown Australia' series should be even greater. The writer has witnessed many travel films taken in the jungles of India, Africa, and South America, but none of them hold the interest or beauty of photography Mr. Hurley's pictures possess.\(^9\)

Both filmmaker and film industry are portrayed as matching the film’s emotive visual imagery that is centred on the vast, unexplored landscape of the nation’s interior. The conclusion that ‘The effect of his *Unknown Australia* series should be even greater’ than his Antarctic films alludes not only to the film’s internationalist credentials, but to the influence of the bush myth as the source of this national distinctiveness. It is the filmmaker’s matching of the national distinctiveness – the bush mythology – that culminates in a heroic depiction for nation and cinema, with the film presented in this review as a new milestone for both. The transformative potential of the national distinctiveness, which is in the form of the landscape and the taming of the landscape by the filmmaker-explorer, is referenced by the reviewer’s conspicuous comparison of this film to the travel films of the jungles of India, Africa and South America. The writer’s claim that ‘none of them [the overseas travel films] hold the interest or beauty of photography Mr. Hurley's pictures possess’ is where the image of Hurley as the heroic adventurer-cameraman, and that of mythology (or nation) converge, forming into a heroic identity for each.

Hurley’s war films are equally immersed in an extravagant style of writing about the film industry. Furthermore, his documentary or ‘non-fiction’ war films are as imbricated in the Anzac legend as the fictional war films, such as *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940), for which Hurley contributed the cinematography. Daniel Reynaud has stated of Hurley’s *With the Light Horse in Palestine* (1918) that the film “showed the Australians through the filter of the

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\(^9\) *The Sunday Times*, 17\(^{th}\) of January 1915: p.16.
Anzac legend”\(^{10}\). Dixon and Lee have also discussed the film in these terms, arguing that “Hurley’s view of the Australian soldiers is consistent with the emerging Anzac legend, which his photography helped to build”\(^{11}\). The implicit point in these arguments is that Hurley’s war films were complicit in the popular dissemination of the Anzac legend, with Hurley more than the willing cameraman who just happened to be on the spot to record the exploits of the gallant lads as the events unfolded on the battlefield.

Hurley’s role in actively helping to create and disseminate the Anzac legend is consistent with historical accounts of Hurley’s official role with the A.I.F. during the Great War. Dixon and Lee, for example, have found that the real Beersheba advance had already taken place before Hurley even arrived in Palestine in 1917\(^{12}\). While Hurley had experienced much of the fighting in France first hand, by the time he landed in Palestine “many of the key engagements, including the charge of the Light Horse in Beersheba, were already history”\(^{13}\). Hurley then staged re-enactments of old battles specifically for the cameras:

> The Middle East allowed Hurley the freedom to create highly romanticised images of Australian airmen and the Light Horse in the richly associated geography of the Holy Land\(^{14}\).

The claim that Dixon and Lee are making about Hurley’s re-enactment of important battles, such as the eponymous charge by the Light Horse in Beersheba, is central to the notion that his films culminate in a depiction of the film industry that is in the ‘digger’s’ heroic image. The fact that Hurley not only filmed actual military battles as they took place but went further


\(^{12}\) Dixon and Lee citation as above, 2011: p. xx.

\(^{13}\) Dixon and Lee citation as above, 2011: p. xx.

\(^{14}\) Dixon and Lee citation as above, 2011: pp. xxi-xxii.
by re-staging key events – that he crossed the line between reportage and re-enactment – implies that his films are similar to the early war dramas in that they presented highly mythologised portraits of the troops. Implicit in Dixon and Lee’s formulation that the ‘Middle East allowed Hurley the freedom to create highly romanticised images’ is the idea that Hurley’s films and photographs were not merely factual accounts of military battles. Rather, his images were romanticised projections of Australia’s servicemen in combat. In these films, Hurley not only sought to depict the troops as heroic but the ‘combat-cameraman’ as well – in other words, himself.

To further explain the point, an article about Hurley’s film work that was published in The Argus newspaper has been included below. All of Hurley’s key accomplishments shortlisted in this article are anchored by the myth of the hero ‘combat/adventurer-cameraman’, culminating in a depiction of the filmmaker (film industry) that is in the indomitable image of the Anzac legend:

It is significant that in all the pictures referred to, except those of the Mawson expedition, Captain Hurley's work was represented. Many of the Palestine films were taken by him during his services as official cinematographer to the Australian Imperial Force, while he accompanied Sir Ross Smith and Sir Keith Smith in the latter stages of their flight. The Shackleton films were, of course, entirely his work. A record such as this is remarkable. No other cinematographer has contributed so greatly to the triumph of cinematography, and it is pleasing that an Australian should have achieved such world-famous results. Had it not been for indomitable courage, his Shackleton films would have been lost. When the Endeavour was crushed to destruction in the ice-floes, the room in which the films were stored
The article bookends Hurley’s most prominent career milestones with references to his war service in Palestine, the result of which is that the reader interprets his achievements through the ‘filter of the Anzac legend’. In this regard it is also worth considering the writer’s decision to refer to Hurley throughout the article by his military title – ‘Captain Hurley’ – even in the discussion about his Antarctic expeditions. But there is no indication anywhere that Hurley had staged much of what he filmed in Palestine – that these were re-enactments. The writer says only that in ‘order to obtain the Palestine pictures, he risked death many times’. As a result, the film industry is as thoroughly immersed in the article’s intensely mythologised portrayal of the ‘combat cameraman’ as Hurley is himself. The reader is placed into the action of the films and implored to equate the heroic efforts of the ‘adventurer-cameraman’ with the heroic journey of the film industry itself. This one passage in particular – ‘No other cinematographer has contributed so greatly to the triumph of cinematography, and it is pleasing that an Australian should have achieved such world-famous results’— simply implies a heroic new epoch in the story of the film industry. Against all adversity and overcoming all odds, the film industry could be like the adventurous Hurley, travelling to the far flung corners of the globe and returning triumphantly with ‘world class results’.

This symbolic connection between the film industry achieving its heroic destiny and the Anzacs in battle on overseas battlefields is most completely realised in *Forty Thousand*.

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Horsemens, a film for which Hurley provided the all important camera work. In the following newspaper review the film is immersed in a familiar portrayal of Hurley as the ‘combat-cameraman’:

Producer-Director Charles Chauvel took the wild rides of the Australian Light Horse at Gaza and Beersheba for his theme, engaged a group of young Australians for his central characters, had Capt. Frank Hurley (now with the Department of Information unit in the Near East) for photographer, and had the services of contemporary light horsemen to play the rearin’, tearing diggers of 24 years ago.

Even in this article which is about a fictional war drama there are still traces of a style of writing that depicts Hurley as the heroic war-cameraman who went into the trenches and risked his life to capture realistic images of the troops in battle. There seems little other point as to why Hurley should even be referred to in this review, except for the fact that the film industry was seeking to capitalise on his reputation. The implied comparison that is made between cinematographer and the ‘contemporary light horsemen to play the rearin’, tearing diggers of 24 years ago’ is therefore conspicuous. This emotive visual imagery culminates in a depiction of the film industry that is as epic as the military battle that is depicted on the screen. In other words the film industry sees traces of its own journey in this film, just as it did in the earlier review which described Hurley’s documentary films as a ‘triumph of cinematography’.

Hurley’s ‘Unknown Australia’

Hurley’s film of the Far North Australia expedition that he undertook with Francis Birtles was important in establishing his credentials as the heroic cameraman. Pike and Cooper explain that Birtles was the first to make films of his journeys across the outback from 1911, establishing this style of documentary film as a popular form of commercial cinema. He was soon joined by others, most notably Hurley.17 Shirley and Adams add that Birtles asked Hurley to join him on the motor tour through the wilds of the nation’s most northern reaches in 1914 that resulted in the film, Unknown Australia18. The film was pioneering because:

It was an objective account of Aboriginal customs on Carpentaria (many of which were filmed for the first time) as well as local Aboriginal and station life, and the flora and fauna of the Northern Territory.19

The film’s emphasis on Aboriginal customs and history, along with the nation’s vast interior – its flora and fauna – is pivotal to how Unknown Australia was promoted. The Bush legend underpins the Hurley film and inadvertently reveals how the film industry viewed its relationship with the dominant international cinema. As Jill Julius Matthews has argued in her examination of the early film industry as emblematic of the arrival of international modernity in Australia, the eulogising of the bush – or the constant appeal to the nation’s pictorial setting – was typical of the cultural nationalist response by smaller film industries to the problem of ‘Americanisation’ in the early twentieth century20. The Hurley film’s emphasis on the bush landscape needs to be considered within such a conceptual framework, in terms of how the film industry’s self-reflexive tendencies are encoded in the bush myth that underpins the narrative. The method in which Hurley’s narrative centralises the radical-

20 Dance Hall & Picture Palaces: Sydney’s Romance with Modernity (Sydney: Currency Press, 2005); pp.11-12.
nationalist theme of ‘landscape-as-character’ is, therefore, asserting Australian values and ideals against the implied presence in the film industry of a dominant cultural power.

The film’s generic qualities also reveal the film industry’s underlying anxieties about Hollywood ascendancy in the domestic cinema market. John Tulloch has remarked in relation to Hurley’s documentary films that they were derivative of the popular melodrama 21, which

…consisted of two defining but apparently contradictory qualities: a highly romantic adventure story packed with rapidly changing incidents and a pictorial ‘realism’ of setting” 22.

*Unknown Australia*’s emphasis on a ‘pictorial realism of setting’ implies the underlying influence of the bush mythology as the point of difference for both nation and film industry. The bush nationalism that infuses the film alerts us to its ‘Australianness’, while the eulogising of the bush that nourishes the narrative is indicative of the film industry’s reaction to the problem of ‘Americanisation’ 23. In discourse on the film, Hurley’s documentary was presented to readers in the same form as the narrative itself – in the style of a sweeping, geographical melodrama, which itself emblematises the national distinctiveness. A newspaper article that was published in *The Argus* is a useful example:

Mr Frank Hurley, the well known cinematographer, filled in the interval between his return with the Mawson Antarctic party and his departure to join Sir Ernest Shackleton’s new expedition to the South polar regions by accompanying the intrepid overlander Francis Birtles on a motor tour through the wilds of the Northern Territory. This he did at the instigation of the Australasian Films Limited, and as a result

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23 Matthews’ citation as above, 2005: p.11-12.
of the journey, which occupied over three months, a very fine
collection of pictures of life and scenes in the Territory was obtained.
Mr Hurley’s pictures include, it is said, some splendid examples of
the scenery of the unexplored north, but are chiefly valuable for the
views which have been secured of the manners and customs and
strange ceremonies of the aboriginal tribes.\textsuperscript{24}

The inclusion of word imagery such as ‘intrepid overlander’, ‘the wilds of the Northern
Territory’, and ‘motor tour’, is aimed at imploring the reader to measure the achievement of
the nation’s destiny against that of the film industry’s destiny. Hurley’s journey through the
wilds of the unexplored north metaphorically stands for the film industry achieving its own
heroic destiny – that is, the realisation of a new epoch in the development of cinema
production in Australia as a sustainable enterprise. This is the underlying implication in the
statement that ‘Mr Hurley’s pictures include, it is said, some splendid examples of the
scenery of the unexplored north’. Here, we get a sense of how the twin ideals of nation and
cinema are easily conflated, in as much as the film industry is conceived of as having
matched the conquering of the nation’s vast and unexplored landscape – epitomised by the
heroic figure of the cameraman-explorer – in its equally epic journey.

Furthermore, the comparison with the Mawson and Shackleton expeditions is a cogent
reminder of Hurley’s well established internationalist credentials. This method of
characterising Hurley as ‘punching above his weight’ is the heroic image that in this review
the film industry is seeking to capitalise on. This is also a potential remedy for the film
industry in the uneven contest between the national and international film industries, which is
alluded to by the conspicuous reference to Australasian Films (the ‘combine’). In this
reference, the reader is prompted to consider that while the film industry is portrayed as

\textsuperscript{24} The Argus, 11\textsuperscript{th} of January, 1915; p13
heroic it is also on the margins of the domestic cinema economy, which is implicit in the statement that Hurley’s involvement in the expedition was ‘at the instigation of the Australasian Films Limited’. When we consider the ‘combine’s’ sidelining of local film producers during this phase of the cinema, the reference to Australasian Films invokes a sense that locally-produced films, including those made by Hurley, occupied a mostly marginal place in the domestic film market.

The metaphorical references to the film industry’s heroic struggle with the dominant international cinema are scattered throughout discourse on the film, including in the following review that was published in The Maitland Daily Mercury newspaper:

> The story of the expedition is one of courage and fearlessness in the face of danger, endurance, and perseverance in overcoming the difficulties and hardships entailed in this 9000 miles dash into the wilds of Central Queensland and the Northern Territory.\(^{25}\)

The central theme of this review, the filmmakers ‘overcoming the difficulties and hardships entailed in this 9000 miles dash into the wilds of Central Queensland and the Northern Territory’, can be understood as a metaphor for the film industry. The heroic foray into the nation’s interior – that is, the taming of the bush landscape – is what sets the nation and equally the film industry apart. In this article the pioneering cameraman (Hurley) thus substitutes for the journey of the film industry. Although there are no direct references to the presence of a foreign cultural power in the film industry, phrases such as ‘courage’, ‘fearlessness’, ‘danger’, ‘endurance’ and ‘perseverance’ imply as much when we consider that these traits are recurring motifs for the brand of radical nationalism that infuses the narrative. What is invoked in this passage is the film industry’s struggle towards national

maturity which is the same as the nation’s own struggle to maturity. The description of the perilous journey undertaken by the filmmakers into the nation’s inhospitable interior in this review alludes to the scale of the challenge that awaited the film industry at this historical juncture. In this review, Hurley and the film industry are pitted against the dangerous unknown of the landscape, and in such a way that the ‘difficulties and hardships’ of the journey metaphorically relate to the film industry.

In the following newspaper review, the myth of the heroic ‘explorer-cameraman’ is even more closely associated with the destiny of both cinema and nation:

The pictures are a graphic record of a venturesome and fearless trip through the unmapped portions of Central Queensland and the Northern Territory, undertaken and successfully carried out by Australia's explorer, Francis Birtles, who has made 16 journeys across Australia, and on two other occasions girdled one Australian continent; and Frank Hurley, official photographer to the Mawson and Shackleton Antarctic expedition. The route was through Queensland to the Gulf of Carpentaria. They engaged three natives to guide them through the Northern Territory, returning by way of Cloncurry and Longreach to Sydney, after covering 9000 miles. Scenes through the "Never-never" consist of corroborees, crocodile hunting, camel teams, nests of alligators, the cattle stations, great ant hills (hundreds of years old), wild boars of the Barcoo, flying birds in thousands, brumbies, the sandy deserts, sombre forests, and scenes of

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26 See for example Daniel Reynaud who has noted how the local industry was already in decline by 1914, due to the merger of local cinema interests and the rising technical competence of international producers. In “Convention and Contradiction: Representations of Women in Australian War Films, 1914-1918”, *Australian Historical Studies* (113), 1999: p.216.
natural interest innumerable. The educational value of this film cannot
be over-estimated. Every Australian should see this production.27

This review’s celebration of heroic endeavour is characterised by the comment that the
‘pictures are a graphic record of a venturesome and fearless trip’. The account of the intrepid
filmmakers who venture deep into the nation’s unexplored interior and emerge triumphant
can again be understood to stand for the film industry’s own intrepid adventure. The
comparison to Hurley’s overseas escapades also further implies the durability of this brand of
bush nationalism; another reminder that the film industry is able to ‘hold its own’, not only
on its own territory but also on foreign soil. Underscoring this review is an unbridled sense of
heroism that, at the mythic level, is reminiscent of the Anzac legend in its purest sense. If we
are to re-imagine this article along the lines of the public debate that would later characterise
the early Australian war film, what is being provided in this article is an insight into the
Anzac legend’s bush origins.

Thus, with this tracing of the Anzac legend back to its bush origins, it is as if the film
industry is allegorising itself, seeing itself in the images of the bush landscape on the screen.
The most effusive example of this tendency is in the passage that begins with ‘Scenes
through the "Never-never" consist of corroborees, crocodile hunting, camel teams, nests of
alligators’, and ends with ‘[the] wild boars of the Barcoo, flying birds in thousands, brumbies,
the sandy deserts, sombre forests, and scenes of natural interest innumerable’. While still
presented in the generic structure of a newspaper article, this reads like a rapid montage
sequence from a documentary film. In these words, the reader is implored to (re-)imagine the
conquering of the nation’s rugged and untamed interior and match this ‘heroism’ with the
equally heroic journey of the film industry.

27 *The Examiner*, 25th of March, 1915; p.7
In other words, the reader is left with the impression of a common purpose and shared identity that symbolically unites film industry and mythology. This symbiotic connection is even more stridently asserted in the following review published in *The Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate* newspaper:

> They left Sydney eight months ago in search of cinema, subjects, and, travelling up through Queensland, worked their way into Northern Territory, going as far as the shores of the Gulf. They returned via West Queensland; and, striking Cobar at the beginning of the week, arrived in Dubbo on Wednesday evening. Hurley will proceed to Buenos Aires, where he is due to meet the Shackleton South Polar expedition, of which he is a member, in November. He is no novice at Polar exploration, having been a member of the band who accompanied Mawson on his visit to the Antarctic.  

The reviewer has left little to the imagination of the reader in terms of how closely interrelated the twin ideals of nation and cinema are in this film. The opening sentence – ‘They left Sydney eight months ago in search of cinema [and] subjects’ – gives the clearest indication of how the fate of the one is deeply imbricated in the other. The descriptiveness of the journey and the territory covered by the intrepid explorers – ‘travelling up through Queensland, [they] worked their way into Northern Territory, going as far as the shores of the Gulf’ – is equally as much about the epic nature of the journey of the film industry as it is about the exploring of the nation’s unconquered interior. The film industry sees itself in this emotive visual imagery just as surely it does in the references to Hurley’s world-renowned reputation as a ‘cameraman-explorer’. When the reviewer explains, ‘Hurley will proceed to Buenos Aires, where he is due to meet the Shackleton South Polar expedition. He is no

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novice at Polar exploration…’, the Hurley film of the Far North is placed into the same oeuvre of expeditionary filmmaking – simultaneously national and international – the effect of which is to embellish the heroics of filmmaker and film industry, with each portrayed in the heroic image of the Bush legend.

**From Filmmaker to Footslogger**

The remainder of the chapter examines Hurley’s films from the battlefield, at the same time allowing for an analysis of the heroic values of the Bushman and how these were transposed on to the emerging figure of the ‘Anzac’. The culmination of this close association between cinema and legend was a depiction of the film industry that was in the heroic image of the mythical Australian soldier. As in the previous section on Hurley’s *Unknown Australia*, the symbolic connection between cinema and myth does not always imply a story of heroic conquest for the film industry, just of heroism. This formulation is consistent with the ideals that are inscribed into the Anzac ethos:

> It is a legend not of sweeping military victories so much as triumph against the odds, of courage and ingenuity in adversity. It is a legend of free and independent spirits whose discipline derived less from military formalities and customs than from the bonds of mateship and the demands of necessity.²⁹

Dixon and Lee have left open the possibility of Hurley being depicted in the heroic image of the Great War-Anzac, in terms of how the cameraman has written about himself, when they argue about his films and photographs from the battlefield: “Despite his admiration for the

Australian diggers, the real hero of Hurley’s diaries is Hurley himself.” The image that Hurley presents of himself carried over into public discussions about his work, some of which were written by the filmmaker himself or quoted heavily from him. This is a depiction of the combat cameraman whose own image was indistinguishable from that of the diggers that he filmed and photographed in the battlefield: who cheated death by going into the trenches alongside the troops to capture realistic images from the war zone, an important aspect of how the film industry also presented itself in the same heroic image. Dixon has expanded on the values encoded in the provocative images that Hurley captured from the battlefield, specifically at Ypres in France in 1917, and while his account more than likely relates to Hurley’s photographic collection, the values and ideals that he refers to are concomitant with the Bush legend. Dixon writes:

> Among his most famous, most moving images are intimate group portraits of soldiers, expressing the ideals of mateship, imperial service, personal courage and loyalty. These values are associated with the visual codes of pictorialism.  

The ideals that Dixon refers to in this passage – mateship, courage and loyalty – are pivotal to understanding how the bushman was transformed into the eponymous figure of the ‘digger’. These values reappear with regular frequency in public discussions about Hurley’s war films. The culminating point of this re-imagining is a depiction of filmmaker and film industry that is in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. In other words, the film industry sees itself in the heroic pictures of Australia’s soldiers in combat on foreign war fields, although in the context of its own heroic struggle against the international cinema. Dixon alludes to just such a symbolic connection between cinema and nation (legend) in the above quotation when he

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30 Dixon and Lee citation as above, 2011: p.xxi.
discusses how the bush ideals (of courage, loyalty, service and mateship) are encoded in the
provocative images that Hurley captured from the battlefield – what he terms the ‘visual
codes of pictorialism’ – the result of which is an image for the filmmaker that is as heroic as
the ‘footslogger’s’.

Frank Hurley’s first-hand account of how he was embedded with the A.I.F. in France,
published in this article in *The Maitland Weekly Mercury* newspaper, is imbricated in a
portrayal of the filmmaker-as-footslogger. He writes:

> “On my arrival in London I was offered the post of official war
photographer to the A.I.F., which I accepted. A few weeks later I was
snapping shell bursts, and doing my best to make camera records of
the great deeds which have shown to the world the “stuff” of which
our nation is made. Experiences and escapes I found more numerous
than exploration. One has, for instance, a surplus of excitement and
sensations sitting in the midst of a barrage chasing shell bursts.
Parachute jumping from a burning balloon is one long thrill. Once I
actually held up a Turkish patrol of 20 horsemen with a camera!
Doubtless they imagined my instrument some new form of machine-
gun.”

Hurley’s highly personalised account is mythically reminiscent of the heroic ‘combat-
cameraman’ who time and again chanced his arm as he fought alongside the Australian
soldier. His heroic account of himself in terms of how he would go ‘parachute jumping from
a burning balloon’, while holding up a ‘Turkish patrol of 20 horsemen with a camera’, is
aimed at imploring the reader to metaphorically equate the work of the war correspondent –

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himself – as inhabiting the same, rarefied space as that of the army footslogger. Hurley is symbolically relating his own experience as the equivalent to that of the rank and file, the underlying intention of which is for the reader to supplant the deeply nationalistic image of the heroic soldier with that of the heroic cameraman. This is the essence of the symbolic connection that is established in his testimony, such as when he observes that ‘One has, for instance, a surplus of excitement and sensations sitting in the midst of a barrage chasing shell bursts’.

This is also how the film industry sought to depict itself. In its own heroic journey the film industry is urged to emulate the national vitality, which in this article is embodied in the image of Hurley as the heroic ‘filmmaker-footslogger’. In one highly emotive passage Hurley talks of ‘snapping shell bursts, and doing my best to make camera records of the great deeds which have shown to the world the stuff of which our nation is made’, the result of which is that the film industry is viewed as matching the heroic deeds of the Australian infantryman. The image of the war cameraman, in terms of how Hurley characterises ‘himself’ in his own eyewitness account, is inseparable from that of the archetypal Australian soldier. As a result, the film industry and nation are entwined in a common purpose and shared destiny.

Hurley expands on the metaphor of the heroic combat-cameraman in a review that was published in *The Clarence River Advocate* newspaper:

> Official photographers, states Captain Frank Hurley, late official photographer with the A.I.F., are classed as non-combatants, and carry no arms other than their cameras. It is especially galling to
participate in a stunt, hop over in a wave, be lustily shelled, and only grind away complacently at the cine-handle or snapshot and 'duck'.

This is Hurley at his most stridently heroic. He is remonstrating in this passage how he wished he could have downed his camera and taken up arms alongside the gallant lads – to have metaphorically, if not literally gone beyond the merely implied symbolic connection between filmmaker and ‘footslogger’ and taken up arms himself. This is the implication when he explains: ‘It is especially galling to participate in a stunt, hop over in a wave, be lustily shelled, and only grind away complacently at the cine-handle or snapshot and 'duck’’. The intention here is to plant in the reader’s mind the heroic image of filmmaker and soldier standing shoulder-to-shoulder in the field of battle. But these words also reveal how the film industry’s struggle is reflected in the heroic images on the screen. Hurley’s feeling of helplessness at being shelled ‘and only grind away complacently at the cine-handle or snapshot and 'duck”’ might just as easily stand for the sustained bombardment of the complacent film industry which was being concurrently shelled (in a rhetorical sense).34

In another extract from the same newspaper article, Hurley’s conviction about the national identity that proved itself in both the war zone and the Polar Regions, and how this metaphorically translates to the film industry is more strongly asserted:

To express in pictures the daily lot of our diggers, in trial, suffering, and happier vein, has been my ardent purpose. All this is true, though from the standpoint of morale, I observed little difference in them whatever the conditions might be. The Australian is the most adaptable character of the races of the world. I have fought with him

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33 The Clarence River Advocate, 28th of March, 1919: p.4.
34 Histories of the film industry generally argue that Hollywood emerged as the world’s leading cinema during the First World War. See, for example, Pike and Cooper (1998) and Shirley and Adams (1989).
in the great White Area of the Polar Regions, and the grim red warfare of the battlefield. In hardship, pain, or pleasure, he is unchangeable. It is the unconquerable self-reliance of a young and virile nation.³⁵

Hurley sets up the binary opposition between the ‘national’ and ‘international’, which is encoded in the references to ‘The Australian’, whom he describes as ‘the most adaptable character in the world’. Hurley’s admission that his lot was to ‘express in pictures the daily lot of our diggers’ casts the filmmaker as pivotal to this conception of the film industry as both ‘heroic’ and ‘secondary’. While there are no direct references to the American film industry in this extract, Hurley’s impassioned defence of the national ethos implies the presence of a dominant cultural ‘Other’. Furthermore, the existence of the binary opposition (national versus international) is encoded in the version of bush nationalism that inspires Hurley’s films, including those from the war zone. The answer for the film industry in this implied contest with the international cinema lies in the vitality of the national character. Thus, Hurley observes: ‘The Australian is the most adaptable character of the races of the world. I have fought with him in the great White Area of the Polar Regions, and the grim red warfare of the battlefield.’

This is important testimony from one of the early cinema’s most celebrated documentary filmmakers whose own reputation was intricately tied in with notions of heroism. In this regard it is worth noting his use of the phrase ‘fought alongside’ the typical Australian, of whom Hurley goes on to conclude: ‘In hardship, pain, or pleasure, he is unchangeable. It is the unconquerable self-reliance of a young and virile nation’. Like the set of opposites that he establishes at the outset between the national and international, the emphasis he places on ‘self-reliance’ for both nation and filmmaker belongs to the radical nationalist tradition.

³⁵ The Clarence River Advocate, 28th of March, 1919: p.4.
These frequent references to bush nationalism are also cogent reminders of the film industry’s self-reflexive tendencies – that it sees its struggle in the heroic images on the screen.

From Palestine to ‘Forty Thousand Horsemen’

The culminating point in discourse of this nature is an image for the film industry and national identity that is simultaneously heroic and thoroughly symbiotic. This section examines how the myth of the ‘combat-cameraman’ typified discourse on Hurley’s films from Palestine before carrying over into discussions about his role as a cinematographer on Chauvel’s fictional epic, *Forty Thousand Horsemen*. There is an implication in the comparison that is made here between the fiction and non-fiction war films that both cinematic genres presented a highly romanticised portrait of the Australian ‘digger’. It is argued that Hurley’s role as an actuality filmmaker in which he re-enacted important military battles, such as the famous Light Horse charge on Beersheba, provided added ‘mythic’ credence to his reconstruction of the same episode for Chauvel’s feature film.

Central to the representation of Hurley’s role in both the fictional and non-fictional versions of the Beersheba advance is how he was pictured as ‘going over with the front line’ during the battles. This is the basis for the following newspaper article of his actuality war films, including those from Palestine:

He was appointed official war-photographer with the A.I.F. in France, acted in a similar capacity in Palestine, and risked his life a hundred times in securing a series of war pictures of the Australian forces in
action, frequently 'going over' with the front line. His adventures on
land, at sea, and in the air make a wonderful story…

The heroic image of Hurley ‘going over with the front line’ alongside the troops also symbolises how the film industry ‘sees itself’ – that is, in the guise of the combat-cameraman. Further still, the heroic image of the war correspondent who repeatedly risked his life to film the troops in France and then in Palestine substitutes for the film industry mounting its own heroic assault on foreign markets in an effort to reverse the flow of cultural hegemony. This is purely at the level of metaphor because although the reader in these vivid and graphic accounts is urged to consider the filmmaker’s heroism as matching that of the troops, there was no real expectation of such a reversal taking place. This review does reveal, however, the extent to which public debate about the early war film (fiction and non-fiction) was imbued with notions of Anzac heroism, at the same time implying the transformative potential of the legend in helping to turn around the film industry’s fortunes. The writer’s conclusion – that Hurley’s ‘adventures on land, at sea, and in the air make a wonderful story’ – suggests that the depiction of Anzac heroism in this film is as much about Hurley (and the film industry) as it is about the diggers.

The emotive image of Hurley ‘going over with the front line’ also characterises debate about *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, in particular in those examples of discourse that refer to Hurley’s role in the production of the film. In first-hand accounts of the re-creation of the seminal battle sequence in Chauvel’s film, and in public discourse on the film, we find the same traces of the cultural construction of Hurley and the film industry in the heroic image of the legend. Reynaud makes a similar argument about the connection between Hurley’s actuality films from Palestine and his fictional re-creation of the same cavalry sequence for the

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36 *The Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advertiser*, 7th of November 1919: p.4
Chauvel film\textsuperscript{37}, finding that the director “filmed some cavalry sequences, using a four camera crew which included Frank Hurley, who had actually filmed the Light Horse in Palestine during the war”\textsuperscript{38}.

There is an implied symbiotic link here between the provocative images Hurley captured as a combat-cameraman in Palestine and the cinematography he would later contribute to Chauvel’s war epic. When Hurley was in Palestine in 1917 he staged a series of ‘re-enactments’, a necessity given that he only arrived in Palestine after the actual Light Horse charge had already taken place\textsuperscript{39}. In the articles referred to in this chapter there is little, if any acknowledgement at all of the fact that he had actually staged the battle scenes for the benefit of the cameras. Rather, these reports are configured in such a way that they invite comparison between the ‘heroic’ troops and the equally ‘heroic’ cameraman who was on the spot to film the action.

An example of this equation is in a letter to the editor published in \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald} soon after Hurley’s Palestine films were screened in early 1919. The writer discusses Hurley’s combat footage for the evocative way that it conjures the ‘grim reality’ and ‘tragedy of war’:

\begin{quote}
They are the real thing, and are of historic value. They reflect incident after incident of the various phases of the war in which our Australian soldiers took part. They are grim reality graphically revealed. They grip one with the intensity of the tragedy of war and its horrors and its pathos. Every Australian who had a relative in the war zone must feel a heartfelt interest in them. These pictures should be taken over by
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} Reynaud citation as above, 2007: p.142.
\textsuperscript{39} Dixon and Lee citation as above, 2011: pp. xx, xxi-xxii.
A senior in authority and screened not only for the Australian man
and woman but for the Australian schoolboy and girl. Captain Hurley
was the official photographer with the A.I.F. He is an Australian and
his heart is in his work.40

The portrait of Hurley (and the film industry) that is painted in this letter to the editor is one
in which he is as much a part of the war effort as the infantryman. The writer states: ‘Captain
Hurley was the official photographer with the A.I.F. He is an Australian and his heart is in his
work’. This is the ‘hero shot’ of Hurley, the combat-cameraman, and it is the same image of
Hurley standing ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’ with the soldiers in the trenches that underscores
debate about his role in the making of the Chauvel film. A behind-the-scenes account
provided by Chauvel’s wife expands on the metaphor of Hurley ‘going over with the front
line’. In her biography, Elsa Chauvel explains how Hurley literally went back into the
trenches to film the fictional Australian troops for the climactic scene41. She describes in
detail the way he shot the film’s famous cavalry sequence, particularly how he organised the
‘close-in’ shots of the Light Horsemen:

He asked Charles to have a big hole dug in the sand, with some
planks over it and sandbags: “Just leave a hole for the camera lens – I
want to get down into that pit,” he insisted: “Then I want you to send
the lot over me as I want to see their bellies.” Few who saw the film
will forget those shots.42

Elsa Chauvel’s version of how Frank Hurley armed with only his camera, just as he was in
the battle zone, went back into the trenches while the grand men of the Light Horse rode over

42 Chauvel citation as above, 1973: p.81.
the top of the trenches is reminiscent of his heroic exploits as a cameraman during the Great War. This is the image of Hurley that the film industry sought to capitalise on in discussions about his war films, and more generally the Anzac sentiment that has been used to revitalise cinema production at critical junctures – namely, the early period of both the First and Second World Wars. With regards to the latter, Shirley and Adams have noted the Chauvel film’s importance to the film industry, arguing that its international box office success gave hope at a time when grave fears were held for the continued existence of Australian film production. This is an example of the ‘reassurance’ that the Anzac legend was thought to bring to the film industry in its heroic struggle with the dominant cinema.

In this newspaper review of *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, the conjunctively heroic image of Hurley the ‘combat-cameraman’ itself stands for the very struggle of the film industry.

Generally and rightfully acclaimed the best film yet made in Australia, “Forty Thousand Horsemen,” produced by Charles Chauvel, additional exterior photography by Captain Frank Hurley, produced with the cooperation of the Department of Defence and officers and men of the 1st and 2nd Australian Cavalry Divisions, commences a season of five nights tomorrow at the Ozone Theatre…The film, which tenses the nerves to the utmost, is a magnificent tribute to the memory of the grand men of the first Light Horse, who made that charge of deathless memory, the famous Beersheba Charge, said not to be surpassed by any such charge in history…The Australian outdoor photography is absolute perfection.

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43 Shirley & Adams citation as above, 1989: p.163.
44 The Border Watch, 23rd of January, 1941: p.5.
The implacable position adopted in this review is that of Hurley in the trenches with the troops, almost as if he was still the actuality cameraman. It is the supposed truth of the image that here takes precedence over the fictional context to the story and the film. At the mythic level this is the image of the film industry – its struggle – that is projected in this article, which is similar to the image that is projected in Hurley’s actuality war films that were taken of the same battleground. In this review, the culminating point of the symbolic connection between the combat-cameraman (Hurley/film industry) and mythology (‘the grand men of the first Light Horse’) is the reviewer’s concluding statement that ‘The Australian outdoor photography is absolute perfection’. The film industry here is conceived of as matching the heroism of the Light Horse charge – of the national distinctiveness – the outcome of which is a heroic new epoch in national screen production; a film that was ‘Generally and rightfully acclaimed the best film yet made in Australia’.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter the argument has been made that Frank Hurley’s films were the starting point for discussions that culminated in a portrayal of the film industry that was in the heroic image of the national identity. Hurley’s expeditionary and war films are part of an oeuvre of films in which the tendency to describe Australian film as ‘heroic’ was fundamental to debate about the cinema’s own journey or struggle. In this regard his films, such as that of the nation’s interior – *Unknown Australia* – are among the earliest examples of how Australian cinema has been infused with the values and ideals of bush nationalism. In retrospect, when the Hurley film of the nation’s interior is considered alongside those from the war zone – as this chapter has done – we get an immediate sense of how the Bush legend later morphed into the heroic Anzac legend. Furthermore, Hurley’s documentary films that were shot during the
Great War and his cinematography for Chauvel’s epic about the same conflict were pivotal to the cultural appropriation of the Anzac legend.
In this chapter it is argued that the Anzac Legend was frequently invoked in public discussions about Australia’s fictional war films, from the release of the earliest recruiting pictures during the First World War through to the Second World War. Diane Collins has suggested a close proximity of the early Australian cinema to the mythos of the Anzac, writing that “the generation that produced the Anzacs was the first to grow up in a world with movies”\(^1\). Implicit in Collins’ statement is the suggestion that not only did the Anzac generation grow up with the movies, but that as a generation, they saw their own self-image in the movies, film defined them in a radically new way, producing the rite of passage that made them a generation. There is an implicit claim here that should be made explicit: how film played a key role in both creating and disseminating the Anzac myth. This claim is being linked to a further claim: rather than just the seeing of the Anzac legend produced on the screen, it was equally the case that the film industry saw itself in the Anzac myth. Australian cinema created itself in the image of the Anzacs, the result of which was to characterise Australian film as similarly ‘heroic’, particularly when faced with its struggle against the dominant Hollywood cinema.

In his examination of the institution of the Bush Legend in Australian cinema during the 1920s, John Tulloch alludes to these uses of the Anzac mythology when he writes:

The Anzacs refurbished the bush legend powerfully, at just the time that the Australian film industry was trying, most self-consciously, to get off the ground.  

I intend to engage with and further expand on this hypothesis, arguing that the film industry’s tendency to portray itself in the heroic image of the Anzac myth resulted in the film industry ‘becoming’ the legend. The implications of the film industry’s construction of this image for itself were that, when faced with the over-powering dominance of the Hollywood industry, the Australian film industry could still see itself as heroic in defeat. Paradoxically, it is as if the use of the Anzac legend, although ostensibly a means to advocate for Australian content and Australian independence, would ultimately offer reassurance in the defeat to the larger and more powerful overseas interests.

An exchange between the Anzac myth and the rise of the Australian film industry was initially established with the tranche of war films released during the early stages of the First World War. The following newspaper review of the documentary film, With the Anzacs at Gallipoli (1916), describes the making of the film in precisely the same sort of heroic terms as those which were typically reserved for the ‘diggers’:

The picture was taken under the direction of the war correspondent, Mr. Ashmead Bartlett. It is evident that he has been right on the spot with the gallant lads in camps and trenches, and on the quaint landing barges, looking much like ancient Roman galleys or clumsy Viking

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3 The Anzacs are also referred to as ‘Diggers’, as Peter Hoffenberg explains in “Landscape, Memory and the Australian War Experience, 1915-18”; Journal of Contemporary History 36(1), 2001, pp. 111-131.
crafts … The Anzacs are shown in grim struggles with the Turks, of whom they bring in batches of prisoners on occasion. On some of the scenes, shells are seen bursting right in front of the Australian trenches.\textsuperscript{4}

It is important here that a connection is established between the filmmaker who is ‘right on the spot’ and the ‘gallant lads’, the ‘diggers’. Although it is not overtly stated, the review is making the reader match the heroism of the lads with the filmmaker himself. The reader, and by relay the spectator, is awestruck as he or she is placed at the scene itself in the midst of the shells ‘bursting right in front of the Australian trenches’. Being able to be placed in the trenches with the diggers as they undertake their heroic struggle will itself stand for the very struggle of the Australian film industry. This method of depicting Australian film as ‘heroic’, placing it within the image of the Anzacs, developed over the ensuing two decades, characterising public debate about Australian cinema.

The culminating point to this imagining of the Australian film industry is best exemplified by the public discourse surrounding Charles Chauvel’s \textit{Forty Thousand Horsemen} (1940). As one reviewer wrote, the film condenses the history of the association between the film industry and the Anzac legend:

Here’s something that bears the badge of courage — the courage of a small nation at war, the courage of battling Anzacs in a pitiless desert.

And the courage of men who conceived and made Australia’s finest motion picture.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{The [Perth] Daily News}, 9\textsuperscript{th} of October 1916; p.2.

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{The [Perth] Daily News}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} of May 1941.
The tendency of linking the mythic elements of the Anzac Legend with the cinema was at times clearly and effusively stated, and yet at the same time, and this was crucial, not at all confined to those films with demonstrable war content. A striking example of this is the reception of the 1917 film, *The Hayseeds*, the first film in a wave of bush comedies and therefore seemingly representative of a departure from war-themed films. However despite this, the following newspaper review urges readers to directly relate the film – and the film industry – with the Anzac story:

“The Hayseeds” is a [picture] play which all Australians should see, for it reveals that dogged spirit of determination which has proved itself on Gallipoli and in France to be a potent trait of our national character.6

The reviewer’s use of emotive visual imagery, speaking of ‘the dogged spirit of determination which has proved itself on Gallipoli and in France’, constructs a conspicuous comparison given that *The Hayseeds* contains no war content. This has the effect of equating the heroic battle the ‘diggers’ are engaged in with the film industry’s own heroic struggle. Moreover, the manner in which the reviewer has contextualised the ‘dogged spirit’ that proved itself on the battlefield as being emblematic of the national character alludes to the Anzac myth’s lineage, which dates back to the bush nationalism of the 1890s.

This tendency is evident not only in the world of the films from this period but also in the public discourse on the film industry, and both the films and the discourse have worked to construct this conception of the film industry. Tulloch alludes to this connection when he writes of the “concatenation of the bush, Anzacs and cinema found in the *Picture Show* [magazine], and which in film probably existed most poignantly in the lost *Ginger Mick* [the

follow-up film to *The Sentimental Bloke*”\(^7\). The reference to the functioning of the *Picture Show* magazine is part of a much larger trend in terms of the way the Anzac legend has been used at various moments to construct an image of the film industry, and most particularly so at times of crisis. The appearance of Anzac-themed films at pivotal moments – the First World War, the early 1930s and immediately after the Second World War – is more than just coincidence. Not only was the Anzac legend used to construct an image of the film industry over this period, but the three instances referred to thus far also coincided with moves to re-establish film production following periods of decline.

The formation of the powerful ‘combine’\(^8\) just prior to the Great War – the result of which was restricted access to local cinema screens for Australian films – and the related problem of locating suitable stories to attract local audiences back to Australian film, was offset to some extent by the initial popularity of Australian war subjects in the early stages of the war\(^9\). The emergence of the heroic figure of the Bushman-Anzac at this critical juncture is therefore significant because, as Heather Radi has observed:

> The new story of the Anzacs bridged the gap between the pioneering past and the urban present by giving the people of the city the right to the qualities of the outback\(^10\).

This is consistent with the way the first wave of Australian war films that appeared on the nation’s screens from 1915 were ‘sold’ to enthusiastic and patriotic Australian audiences. The following newspaper account of *The Hero of the Dardanelles* (1915) contemplates the symbolic connection between the bush-bred, athletic national ‘type’ and the ‘first’ Anzacs:

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\(^7\) Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.351.
\(^8\) The combine was formed in 1912 and comprised of Australasian Films which dominated distribution, and Union Theatres which dominated exhibition.
\(^10\) Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.351.
The hero of the picture followed the example of thousands of Australians by replacing the tennis racket and the cricket bat with the rifle and leaving for the war front.\footnote{The Adelaide Advertiser, 22\textsuperscript{nd} of July, 1915}

The representation of the mythical Australian soldier in this review is such that he is characterised as emerging from the ‘bush’ before evolving into the archetypal Bushman-Anzac. The phrase ‘the hero of the picture’ has the additional effect of portraying the film, and the film industry, as similarly heroic – that is, the film industry is bestowed with the same heroic traits that are derivative of the bush ethos and, in effect, ‘becomes’ the legend. This is the ‘hero shot’ of the bushman-soldier that has typified Anzac-related films beginning with this film – 
The Hero of the Dardanelles – and continuing through to Peter Weir’s much later version, Gallipoli (1981).

After the First World War, the appearance of war-related films coincided with two other critical points for the film industry when the cinema was endeavouring to re-establish itself, the Anzac mythology effectively acting as the launch pad for the film industry. Popular releases such as Fellers (1930), Diggers (1931) and the follow-up, Diggers in Blighty (1933), along with Waltzing Matilda (1933), should be viewed within the context of the major industrial changes that came about as a result of the emergence of sound production, and which initially led to the collapse of local film production\footnote{Pike & Cooper note that in 1929, only one Australian feature film was released as the local industry grappled with technical and cost issues associated with sound, in Australian Film 1900-1977 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998); p.87.}. This is what the leading screen trade newspaper, Everyones, reported about the film industry in 1929:

For the first time in the history of the business since the late W.A. Gibson made “The Kelly Gang” in 1906, a year has passed in which not one Australian feature production has gone into general release.
For local producers 1929 has been a complete blank … Uncertainty following Government interference [i.e. the 1927 Royal Commission] started the slump last year, and talkies this year delivered the coup-de-grace.¹³

Eftee Films’ first release Diggers is a useful example of how the film industry has used the Anzac legend to ‘self-consciously’ get off the ground at pivotal moments. Daniel Reynaud argues that the film was not only Eftee’s first feature release, but it “could also claim to be Australia’s first all-talking feature, if a couple of hasty, incompetent and unsuccessful films rushed out by rivals are ignored”¹⁴. This is consistent with how the film was promoted in the leading trade papers, in that Diggers was depicted as a pioneering Australian ‘talkies’ production. In The Film Weekly, this contention was based on the recyclability of Hanna’s earlier role in the stage version of the same story:

Pat Hanna, in the leading role, is so well known to Aussies as to make it almost superfluous to remark that for many years he headed the “Pat Hanna Diggers” troupe … [The film] opens with a Diggers Re-Union at which reminiscences recall scenes at the front, which are then thrown on the screen, leading gradually up to 1931 again.¹⁵

The recyclability of the legend and the reviewer’s emphasis on how the war scenes are ‘thrown on the screen’ culminates in a depiction of the film that is in the image of the national character. This symbolic connection is made more distinct by the way the reviewer first discusses the reminiscences of the diggers’ reunion and then recounts the way the story leads up to the present day. In other words, the nationalist ideal of the First World War

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Anzacs is conceived of in this review as influencing events in the present – the imagery of how the film recalls scenes from the front and then throws them on to the screen leaves the reader with the distinct impression that the historic events portrayed in the film are symbolically connected to the development of Australia’s talking film industry, that the same history is being made.

The tendency of the film industry to construct itself in this image – that is, in the heroic image of the diggers – particularly when faced with its struggle against the dominant Hollywood cinema characterises the remainder of the same review:

As those of us know, the production itself provides most satisfactory entertainment indeed – far better than that to be found in any number of more ambitiously presented overseas productions – and should be encouraged by exhibitors throughout Australia and New Zealand.\(^{16}\)

The *Film Weekly* article is typical of film discourse in which the struggle of the Anzacs substitutes for the film industry’s own struggle. The paper’s conceptualising of this battle leaves little to the imagination of the reader, in terms of how the writer describes *Diggers* as ‘far better than that to be found in any number of more ambitiously presented overseas productions’. It is this repeated contrasting of Australian film with the imported product, this style of conjecture about the merits of the local film industry, which implores the reader to consider that the film industry is immersed in an epic, ‘David and Goliath’ like contest against the international cinema.

In the other leading trade publication, *Everyones*, the symbolic connection between the legend and the youthful talking film industry is more clearly realised:

\(^{16}\) *The Film Weekly, 19\(^{th}\) of November 1931*: p.6.
The first Australian all-talking feature deserves the support of the whole industry. In sound and photography it will stand comparison with any imported production…From start to finish the picture is a thorough affair. One technical achievement not yet commented upon is the battlefields, the estaminets, and the ruined villages of France has been caught and reproduced. Whoever was responsible for those settings was a real craftsman. As the pioneer of Australian talking picture production, “Diggers” is a splendid effort.17

The action contained in the world of the film and described in the following terms – ‘From start to finish the picture is a thorough affair. One technical achievement not yet commented upon is the battlefields, the estaminets, and the ruined villages of France has been caught and reproduced’ – is directly related to the heroic struggle to build a viable Australian sound film industry. It is the heroic exploits of the diggers that stand for, and are seen to culminate in, the development of the talking film production industry. As the reviewer goes on to explain: ‘Whoever was responsible for those settings was a real craftsman. As the pioneer of Australian talking picture production, “Diggers” is a splendid effort’. It is the vividness and refinement of the film’s battlefield sequences, that is to say, the realism of the image, its truthfulness, that are invoked in this article as mandatory for the advancement of Australia’s talking film industry. This review must be seen as condensing much preceding public discourse on Australian cinema, with the point being reached where the realism of the battlefield, the spectator being there in the battle, can come to stand for, even more than the narrative itself, the film industry.

The potent image of the ‘heroic digger’ fighting an imposing overseas enemy against insurmountable odds, and how this substitutes as a metaphor for the film industry, similarly

17 *Everyones*, 18th of November 1931: pp.10/27.
characterises public discourse on *Forty Thousand Horsemen*. Charles Chauvel’s film celebrates the ‘first Anzacs’ of the Great War although it was released soon after the commencement of the Second World War\(^{18}\). The film’s release, therefore, coincided with a juncture when war had conspired to all but crush Australian features production\(^{19}\), the situation so dire that historians like John Baxter have since described this phase of the film industry in the following terms: “By the time anyone thought to stop and look, the Australian film industry had disappeared”\(^{20}\).

In this context, discourse on *Forty Thousand Horsemen* was centred as much on the film industry’s own fight for survival as it was on the battle scenes depicted in the film’s much vaunted action sequences. This conception of the film as metaphorically relating to the struggle of the film industry highlights two important points. Firstly, commentary about the film industry was cognisant of how Australian films had been relegated to a secondary status in their own market, therefore influencing public sentiment about the film industry. The second point relates to the theme that underpins this chapter, in terms of how the Anzac legend has been used to build an image for the film industry, and especially at pivotal moments when it has sought to re-establish a presence in the domestic cinema market.

While it is not directly stated in this newspaper review of *Forty Thousand Horsemen* published in *The Bulletin*, the sentiment that underpins the article is centred on the emotionally-charged and heroic figure of the advancing Light Horse Brigade, which the writer is ‘imagining’ as being the equivalent to a similarly heroic advance by the film industry:

\(^{18}\) It is also worth noting here that Chauvel planned the film well before the war had begun.
\(^{19}\) Shirley & Adams note the film’s international success offered hope at a time when grave fears were held for the continued existence of the local industry; *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years* (Hong Kong: Currency Press, 1989); p.163.
As yet the thought of American films being eventually relegated to their proper place – as an occasional novelty to supplement the local supply – isn’t much more than wishful thinking, but this latest Australian show is a healthy step in the right direction. It leaves previous efforts far in the rear, and it’s a first rate movie by any standard – an Australian film for which no excuses need be made.\(^{21}\)

*The Sydney Morning Herald* associated the symbolism of the story’s heroic Light Horse advance on foreign territory with an equally heroic advance by the film industry on world cinema markets:

There have been some good Australian films before this one but “Forty Thousand Horsemen” has every right to be regarded as the first “really great Australian picture.” Never before has an Australian producer-director attempted mass spectacle on the scale revealed in “Forty Thousand Horsemen.” The sequence representing the famous charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba is as dynamic in its dramatic realism and sustained battle action as any imaginative Hollywood or English producer could have made it.\(^{22}\)

There is an implied symbolic link established here between the national ethos and the film industry, in that the film and the Anzac legend are so interconnected that they are seemingly the same: that is, they are cut from the same cloth. That is in essence what the writer is implying in describing the famous charge of the Light Horse at Beersheba as ‘dynamic’, ‘dramatic realism’ and ‘sustained’. These are the same attributes that the diggers displayed in combat and it is at this point that the film industry ‘becomes’ the legend. The bond between

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\(^{21}\) See *The Bulletin*, 25\(^{th}\) December 1940: p.28  
\(^{22}\) See *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30\(^{th}\) of December 1940.
the two is cemented further when the writer concludes: ‘Never before has an Australian producer-director attempted mass spectacle on the scale revealed in “Forty Thousand Horsemen”. The implication of this statement is that the film’s vivid and dramatic depiction of the historic charge by the Light Horse equates to a similarly historic advance by the film industry. The visual imagery conjured up by this statement is given credence and authenticity by the film’s world-wide box office success.23

The idea that in this film the film industry sees itself in the same heroic image as the ‘digger’ is no better conveyed than in the following passage:

The story and the dialogue is simply a means to an end, a chance to celebrate the dash and devilry of the Australian soldier, and to recreate that heroic charge of the Forty Thousand Horsemen – a moment which could scarcely have been more effective had Errol Flynn himself been riding at their head.24

Here, the reviewer has left nothing to chance in terms of how the reader is intended to align the heroic image of the Anzacs with that of the film industry, going to the extent of supplanting the eponymous image of Errol Flynn in the place of the mythical Australian soldier. The intention of this overt myth-making which contemplates both Flynn and the film industry in the image of the ‘dash and devilry of the Australian soldier’ culminates in a portrayal of the national type and the film industry as being so closely interweaved that they seem almost inseparable and therefore thoroughly symbiotic. The conspicuous reference to Flynn – who does not even appear in the film – suggests that the film industry and the story of the Anzacs are one of the same, each helping to construct the other’s image.

23 Elsa Chauvel has noted in her biography of Charles Chauvel that at its peak, the film played in more than six thousand theatres across the U.S. In My Life with Charles Chauvel (Singapore: Shakespeare Head Press, 1973): p.86.
24 The [Perth] Western Mail, 4th of December 1941; p.22
In other words, discourse on *Forty Thousand Horsemen* was inclined to emphasise the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the myth, or the nation, and the cinema. Certainly, reviews that emphasised the film’s penchant for ‘legend-building’ were configured in such a way that they strongly implied a symbiotic relation between the two. In the following newspaper review, the film’s depiction of what was considered a historic and heroic military encounter was characterised as an equally heroic chapter in the growth and development of the film industry. Thus, the nation’s ‘coming of age’ at seminal moments such as the military battle depicted in *Forty Thousand Horsemen* is routinely contemplated in public discourse as a ‘coming of age’ for the film industry:

Because of its heroic, historic story as much as for its magnitude and the censorship dispute about sections of it, no local production has ever been received with such interest. It is a picture which Australia can salute…It is a film which few thought could have been produced in Australia.25

Remarkably in this quote the film metaphorically becomes the Australian flag, with one saluting the image as one salutes the flag. In this way the truthfulness of the image, its realism, is again placed above all else. This tendency is extended in the following review from *The Rockhampton Bulletin*. It is in the mise-en-scene that the overpowering truthfulness of the film is located. Even breaking through the narrative, it is a heightened sense of presence that is achieved. It is as if the protective screen has broken down and one is in the battle itself. Thus it is that the truth of what is represented cannot be denied:

Galloping columns of mounted troops, the scream of desert combat, and a fervent air of patriotism supply colourful excitement in Charles

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25 *The [Launceston] Examiner, 8th* of March 1941; p.8
Chauvel’s Australian film, "Forty Thousand Horsemen." It is a panorama of men whose actions made history, and whose deeds recaptured will make history in the field of local picture endeavour.26

The adding of the last phrase, ‘in the field of local picture endeavour’ is not simply just a casual supplementary addition. It is a crucial component, an essential part of the film’s subject matter. The same newspaper further contemplated the historic prospect of an Australian-made film, and by implication the domestic film industry, emulating the heroic advance of the Light Horse:

This daring and capable production of something entirely different in motion pictures is capable of repeating the brilliant deeds of the Australian Light Horse with another invasion – this time the foreign film market, towards which the youthful film industry in Australia has been turning with eager eyes and hopeful hearts," he [Sydney writer Frank O’Loughlen] commented as part of an article in the "Country Life" newspaper.27

The final instalment in The Rockhampton Bulletin’s series of articles about Chauvel’s film demonstrates the degree to which public discussions consolidated the view that in certain seminal examples – of which Forty Thousand Horsemen was considered to be one – the film industry was predisposed to ‘becoming’ the legend:

There have, of course, been "greater" motion pictures. But none of them were (sic) produced in Australia. "Forty Thousand Horsemen" is a great Australian picture; a film for which no apologies are needed. It

The Bush Legend

Forty Thousand Horsemen is a worthwhile case study because Chauvel’s film, perhaps more than any other of the early cinema, represents the idea that the fate of film industry is metaphorically tied to the heroic image of the legend. It is also the point at which a representation of the national character, and by implication the film industry’s identity, is made possible through an amalgam of the Bush and Anzac legends in the manner suggested earlier by Tulloch. This formulation is critical to understanding not only how in a movie such as Chauvel’s epic the film industry has sought to depict itself in the heroic image of the Anzacs but, as Tulloch has also alluded to, the reason for this myth-making, which is for the film industry to self-consciously get off the ground during moments of crisis.29

Tulloch goes on to explain that the heroic deeds of the Australian soldiers on the battlefields at Gallipoli and in the European trenches were incorporated into the more traditional bush values:

…not only did the Australian soldiers pioneer a new ‘bushman’ style of fighting, but the Australian performance was judged to be distinctly within the bush traditions – of high physical fitness, ability to adapt to unusual conditions, respect but not class servility before

29 Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.351.
30 Tulloch notation as above, 1981: p.351.
officers, and that bush blend of individualism and cooperation, ‘independent judgment and readiness to self-effacement in a common cause’.  

As a ‘refurbishment’ of the bush nationalism that dates back to the 1890s, Bruce Molloy has noted *Forty Thousand Horsemen’s* underlying “connection of the military tradition with the mythology of the bush”, which he describes as “conscious and purposeful”. One implication of this symbolic, if not symbiotic connection between the bush and Anzac myths is that *Forty Thousand Horsemen* is also ideally suited as a propaganda film because, as Molloy has argued, the film dramatises the “courage and self-sacrifice, and the success, of the Australian troops, supported with the emotional appeal of national songs”. Graham Shirley has similarly observed this trait of the Chauvel film, and he further strengthens our understanding of the film’s nationalist and propaganda credentials when he states that: “This kind of legend-building had been around since the time of [the Great War film] *The Hero of the Dardanelles*”.

Despite *Forty Thousand Horsemen’s* story being set entirely overseas, the film’s opening monologue leaves the audience in no doubt as to the origins of the fighting qualities of the diggers, which we are told are derivative of the bush:

> When Germany stretched greedy hands towards the Middle East in the War of 1914-1918 – a great cavalry force came into being. They were the men from Australia and New Zealand – The ANZACS – the "mad bushmen" – the men from "Down Under." Call them what you

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31 Tulloch notation as above, 1981: p.351.
32 Molloy notation as above, 1990: p.150.
33 Molloy notation as above, 1990: p.150.
will – their glories can never grow dim. They met the Germanised army in the burning desert of Sinai. They fought and suffered to emerge triumphant – the greatest cavalry force of modern times. To these dauntless riders and their gallant horses, this story is dedicated, to them with pride.35

The film’s monologue is similar to much of the discourse thus far referred to, in that the metaphor of the battle waged by the diggers equates to the struggle that also confronted the local cinema industry, certainly at the point in time when this film was released. The analogy of Germany ‘stretching its greedy hands’ could just as readily stand for the dominance of the film industry by a dominant, overseas power. The doggedness and fighting spirit of the ‘mad bushmen’, as the diggers are described in the monologue, are subsequently canonised throughout the film’s narrative culminating in a depiction of the film, and the film industry, in the heroic image of the legend.

This conceptualisation of the ‘bushman of the battlefield’ represents an accurate account of the way that Australia’s early war films – much earlier than Forty Thousand Horsemen – were presented to audiences, both in terms of how the films were thought to relate to dominant ideas about the national character and the way these same values and ideals were transposed onto the local cinema production itself. The following extract from a newspaper review of the documentary war film, Australia at War (1916), demonstrates how the bush theme anchored many of these discussions:

The film is divided into sections, and deals most effectively with the various phases of war life. The first section shows where Anzacs are

35 From Forty Thousand Horsemen, Charles Chauvel director: 1941.
bred. As most people are familiar with the city life in peace times, the films deal only with life in the Australian bush.\(^{36}\)

The reviewer’s reasoning for why so little – or virtually none – of the film should focus on city life seems rather strained and disingenuous. However the use of the phrase ‘where the Anzacs are bred’ is by comparison very forceful in its declaration that it is from the bush that the Anzacs arise, that a natural force links the two. To understand the Anzacs the claim is being made, one must first understand and appreciate what is so distinctive and unique about the Australian bush.

This connecting of the bush with the Anzac legend is evident in many Australian films released from around the end of the First World War, films which although they may or may not have had war content, were framed as war films. The Snowy Baker film, *The Lure of the Bush* (1918), is a particularly good representative example, because although it is not a war film discussions about Snowy Baker are reminiscent of the earlier article which substituted Errol Flynn for the mythical Australian soldier. In the case of Baker, he is typically characterised in discourse on his films as following the ‘hero’s journey’ theme; that is, the hero’s journey of the digger\(^{37}\).

The next article about *The Lure of the Bush* uses similar rhetoric to describe Baker’s on-screen character who originally emigrated from Britain, emerged triumphant, before being transformed into a version of the complete or ‘finished’ bushman-soldier. Further still, Baker’s Anzac-like heroics are contextualised as essential not only to the cultural construction of the national character, but also in the way that the film industry is depicting itself in the same image, particularly in its heroic struggle against the dominant Hollywood


\(^{37}\) This formulation is consistent with the way that the early war films were discussed in public discourse.
film. Of particular interest is the final sentence, in which Snowy Baker’s stunt work is favourably compared to those of the Hollywood actors:

Snowy's stunts are many and varied, from taking a header with a horse into a river and riding buck jumpers to knocking out the bully of the shearing shed. He plays the part of a jackaroo (monocle and all), who becomes a 'dinkum Aussie' before the show is over, and wins 'a pretty Australian girl,' in the person of Rita Tress, for his reward. Snowy has a big advantage over American actors, who usually hire doubles to do the dangerous stunts, whereas Snowy does 'em all off his own bat. 38

Just as the earlier Adelaide Advertiser review contemplates The Hayseeds’ popularity as being attributed to the film’s adeptness at capturing the ‘dogged determination’ of the diggers, so too were Snowy Baker’s Anzac-like heroics characterised as profoundly influential in The Lure of the Bush being written about as a milestone in local cinema production. In some reviews of The Lure of the Bush – such as the article included below – the film industry is depicted as similarly engaged in a heroic struggle against an equally formidable adversary:

The success of “The Lure of the Bush" should settle once and for all the argument as to whether Australian-made films can compete with those imported. 39

This review is consistent with a style of writing about Australian films, in that while Baker’s performance was considered persuasive as a measure of what the film industry was capable

38 The Zeehan and Dundas Herald, 21st of February 1919
of, there was nevertheless an undercurrent – a prevailing sense of pessimism – in terms of what the film industry was also pitted against. In the case of Snowy Baker, the formidable odds that his characters confronted in his films are discussed in such a way that they seem indistinguishable from the challenges faced by the Australian screen industry.

The following review of *The Lure of the Bush* is indicative of how the dominant discourses relating to this film – those of the ‘bush’, ‘Anzacs’ and ‘cinema’ – are seen to converge:

It is a really live production, which is sure of popularity not only in Australia but also overseas, where it will show to audiences with a vividness which could not be achieved in any other way; the free, open life, the scenery – sometimes of rugged grandeur and sometimes of soft beauty – and all else that goes to make up that almost indescribable “lure” which the Australian bush undeniably possesses.\(^{40}\)

Although not contained in this extract, the reviewer started off the review by establishing the link between this film, and by implication the Anzac ethos, with the bush, by stating that the film succeeds ‘in reproducing what may be termed the atmosphere of the Australian bush’\(^{41}\).

The writer, having established the story’s bush origins, goes on to speculate about the film’s appeal, not only to local but also international audiences. This is the point where, in the manner that Tulloch explained earlier, the bush myth is ‘refurbished’ in the guise of the Anzac legend, and in such a way that is far more subtle and understated than could ever be achieved in a war film. The verbose language which the reviewer uses to contemplate the film’s potential appeal to overseas audiences seems highly suggestive of the ‘digger’ on the battlefields of Europe.

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\(^{40}\) *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27\(^{th}\) of August, 1918: p.8.

\(^{41}\) *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27\(^{th}\) of August, 1918: p.8.
Also of interest is the way the reviewer argues that the film ‘will show to [overseas] audiences with a vividness which could not be achieved in any other way’. The use of emotive nationalist imagery such as ‘free, open life’ is deeply ingrained in the national psyche – the national mythology – and therefore evokes a sense of the same values and ideals for which the Anzacs fought and bled. The underlying implication is that the film industry is immersed in a similar struggle for freedom – for its very independence – and in doing so should emulate the diggers in an all-out assault on overseas markets.

The entertainment trade journal, *Australian Variety and Show World*, delivers a similar verdict, although in this case with regard to Snowy Baker’s earlier feature, *The Enemy Within* (1918):

> We have seen the picture [*The Enemy Within*], and can only say that it is the best Australian picture produced to date. The action in this play is bewildering in every detail, there being many realistic fights, in one [in] particular, where Baker attempts to smash up a gang of spies. It is in this scene that his athletic form is displayed.  

As in the case of *The Lure of the Bush*, it was Baker’s muscular performance and heroic stuntwork, the description of which are highly reminiscent of the Anzacs, which were considered the film’s most alluring qualities. If we consider the phrase – ‘The action in this play is bewildering in every detail… where Baker attempts to smash up a gang of spies’ – then we find that the action sequence and the film’s distinctiveness, and that of the film industry, are in fact as one. It is this emotive imagery that is repeated in discourse on the cinema during this period, and which prompts us to conclude that so many of these reviews

[42 *Australian Variety and Show World*, 8th of March 1918.]
are imbued with the Anzac spirit, at the same time imposing the ‘heroic’ feats of a character such as Baker onto the cinema itself.

At the same time, the cultural construction of Snowy Baker in the formidable image of the Anzacs is rhetorically consistent with more general discussions about Australian cinema. Some public discourse sought to overtly construct a heroic image for the film industry that was unambiguously in the indomitable image of the mythical Australian soldier. This article is noteworthy because it is about the film industry and not any one film in particular:

The war is over, and if we can turn out films worthy enough there is a world-wide market. The films must have some individuality; they must differ from the American and Continental films shown here at present in the same way as our Australian soldiers commandeered an individuality that has made history on the battlefields of Europe, so the pictures we produce and send away must have that individuality also … Have we not strong, active intelligent and handsome women and men suitable for pictures — to say nothing of the possible employment of returned soldiers in connection with such an enterprise.43

The writer here demonstrates the extent to which the nationalist ideal of the ‘heroic film industry’ and the discourse of ‘Anzac’ were considered as one, and then projected onto the image that the film industry was culturally constructing for itself. The reviewer could not be more direct in terms of compelling the reader to consider that the film industry should be distinctive, as distinctive as the heroic diggers. The reviewer states: ‘The films must…differ from the American and Continental films shown here…in the same way as our Australian

43 The Cumberland and Argus Fruitgrowers Advocate, 10th of May 1919
soldiers commandeered an individuality’, and concludes with the statement, ‘so the pictures we produce and send away must have that individuality also’. The article goes on to issue what can only be interpreted as a call to arms, imploring the film industry to be built upon the very same values and ideals that the Anzac legend is itself founded on. The writer leaves nothing to the imagination of the reader in terms of the symbiotic connection between the nationalist myth and the film industry, in the way the article calls for ‘active, intelligent and handsome women and men’ to commandeer the cinema. The suggestion here is that the film industry should seek to create history on foreign shores just as the diggers did on the battlefields of Europe.

**Heroic in Defeat**

The analysis thus far has culminated in a formulation of the film industry as culturally constructing itself in the ‘heroic’ image of the Anzac myth – or the point at which the film industry ‘becomes’ the legend. But there is something evident in the preceding newspaper article that is worthy of delving deeper into, and which ties in with Tulloch’s conceptualisation of the film industry being immersed in a titanic struggle against huge, impersonal forces – what he has termed the Australian film pioneer up against the crushing monopolies.\(^{44}\) This theme underwrites the analysis of discourse on the cinema in this section, and while there is a continuing emphasis on an understanding of the film industry as depicting itself in the ‘heroic’ image of the diggers, this is achieved with one eye to the conception of the impoverished Australian filmmaker up against the ‘crushing monopolies’ of Hollywood.

\(^{44}\) Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.63.
The opening phrase from the preceding newspaper extract – ‘The war is over’ – although a clear reference to the end of the First World War is crucial. This statement, in conjunction with the way the reviewer then goes on to distinguish between the individuality of Australian compared to overseas-made films, at the same time infusing local cinema production with the Anzac ethos, is more than a casual comment. The militaristic connotations associated with this statement have the effect of embellishing the idea that a ‘state of war’ existed in the Australian cinema, and that the key combatants in this ‘film war’ were considered to be the local film industry up against the huge, impersonal forces that controlled the screen trade.

This formulation is cognisant of the way that this period has been conceptualised in other studies of Australian film history, such as Tulloch’s two-volume analysis of the early cinema’s struggle against Hollywood hegemony.\(^{45}\) In a similar manner, Brian Yecies has examined the coming of sound to the Australian film industry in the mid to late 1920s. His work is useful in this context because his analysis of the leading trade newspapers, *Everyones* and *The Film Weekly*, is focussed on their overt use of militaristic rhetoric to associate the arrival of sound technology with the ‘Americanisation’ of the film industry. Yecies describes the rhetoric that was used in the trade papers as a “virtual war of words”:\(^{46}\)

> Both trade magazines frequently described the coming of sound as a technology battle—a 'Talkie war'. In retrospect, it seems as though this 'war' was really about resisting the 'Americanisation' of modernity in Australia.\(^{47}\)

The argument in this chapter, which is centred on the extent to which the film industry exploited the Anzac legend to construct an image for itself, differs from that of Yecies. The

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\(^{45}\) Tulloch’s two historical accounts look at the 1920s and 1930s (1981/82).


\(^{47}\) Yecies citation as above, 2004: pp.54-83.
intention behind the close cohabitation of mythology and film industry was not necessarily the outright repudiation of Hollywood’s control of the film trade, but rather it is rhetorically consistent with how local interests advocated for increased screen time for Australian films. In other words, the hegemony of the cinema’s dominant power relations was not always directly threatened or challenged. The conundrum apparent in much of the discourse on the film industry was how to advocate for increased screen time and production investment while at the same confronting the realities of Hollywood’s dominance over the screen trade. We would also do well here to consider Tulloch’s argument about the interrelationship between social mythology and cinema. He states: “narrative certainly functions as social myth; but it is a myth that is mediated through the operation of the film industry”\textsuperscript{48}.

Another extract from the earlier article that proclaimed ‘The war is over’ highlights how notions of the heroic film industry could be juxtaposed with the commercial realities of the Hollywood cinema’s dominance in the market:

Here is a chance to patronise a local industry and keep some of the profits being made in the film industry in Australia, instead of sending millions of pounds annually out of the country for the importing of foreign films.\textsuperscript{49}

Although commentary such as this also reveals the zeal with which local film industry interests campaigned for increased screen time, the context of this public debate was such that it was likely they were never lobbying for the outright repudiation of the American film industry’s dominance. What is most conspicuous in this extract is the justification that the writer has used to campaign for more Australian films on local screens, arguing that it would ‘keep some of the profits being made in the film industry in Australia’. This is crucial for two


\textsuperscript{49} \textit{The Cumberland and Argus Fruitgrowers Advocate} as above.
reasons. The first is that there is a suggestion the Anzac legend, while undoubtedly used to construct a heroic image for the film industry, belonged as much to the screen trade\textsuperscript{50} as it did to the production sector. Secondly it reinforces the film industry’s rhetorical position, which was more often than not inclined towards a ‘heroic-in-defeat’ approach to the future of the cinema. The underlying implication of this style of commentary was that Australian films were on the periphery of the cinema economy.

An opinion article written by the renowned features producer Beaumont Smith is illustrative of this tendency to characterise the film industry as being ‘shelled in the trenches’, a rhetorical position that in this article is conscripted for the purposes of eliciting more screen time for Australian films:

Australians want Australian pictures. It is not only because of patriotic motives – it is a curiosity to see our own life, characteristics and scenes in the movie mirror…Australian films can live only by fighting for their existence. If they let up they will be pushed out by the American import…Australasian Films and Union Theatres [the combine] have only to look up their books to know that my productions have shown them handsome profits. Therefore it does not need just patriotism to stir them to exhibit Australian pictures – they know there are financial rewards even greater than sentimental ones.\textsuperscript{51}

The militarist tone of Smith’s mostly personalised account is embellished by virtue of the fact that the article was published in the returned servicemen’s newspaper,\textit{Smith’s Weekly}. In this extract, Smith’s portrayal of the ‘heroic’ Australian filmmaker evokes the same, renowned

\textsuperscript{50} The term ‘screen trade’ denotes the distribution and exhibition sectors of the film industry, and carries connotations that these sectors are aligned with the commercial interests of the dominant Hollywood cinema.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Smith’s Weekly}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} of August 1919: p.2.
fighting qualities of the diggers. The analogy that he uses, that ‘Australian films can live only by fighting for their existence’ is emblematic of what has been argued thus far about the editorial intent of some Australian film discourse, in terms of how the image of the film producer is pitched alongside that of the mythicised Australian soldier – that their struggle is the same.

Smith’s position is entrenched in a portrayal of the impoverished filmmaker who is pitted against the powerful interests that control the screen trade. As he suggests at one point: ‘If they [local filmmakers] let up they will be pushed out by the American import’. Such emotive imagery is singularly aimed at suggesting that a battle was being waged in the cinema as intense and fierce as anything faced by the diggers. Survival on the battlefield is rhetorically related to the film industry’s own battle for survival against what is superimposed in the reader’s mind as an equally formidable enemy. The reader is compelled to consider the consequences of defeat to the ‘crushing’ film monopolies as being tantamount to defeat in the arena of war. Smith’s deliberate symbolic connection between the film industry and seeing ‘our own life’ on the screen also has the effect of comparing the values and ideals that the diggers fought for with the film industry’s own struggle for survival.

In short, Smith’s position in this article amounts to a rhetorical ‘call to arms’, his comments framed in such a way that they invoke the legendary fighting prowess of the Anzacs. On the other hand, it is just as likely that his remarks were framed in such a way that they were aimed at securing additional screen time for locally-made films, notably his own, as opposed to the outright resistance of Hollywood dominance which might have been achieved, for instance, if he and others had just as stridently lobbied for the abolition of the ‘block’ or ‘blind booking’ practices. Tulloch has explained that most Australian production during this phase was modest, and the significance of the ‘block’ and ‘blind’ booking practices is that
they effectively pre-financed American productions. Some Australian producers were forced to rely on floating public companies to survive and depended on the success of every single film. Smith was one local filmmaker who succeeded in achieving a level of continuous production but, as Tulloch also explains, this was because he already had the financial means, had well established trade connections, and made the type of two-reel comedy support films that exhibitor Stuart Doyle needed for his American-styled cinema programmes.

Smith’s direct plea to the film trade therefore, and in particular the following phrase – ‘Australasian Films and Union Theatres [the ‘combine’] have only to look up their books to know that my productions have shown them handsome profits’ – alludes to the supplementary role of Australian films in the programmes of the major cinema circuits as opposed to an implacable position that might have advocated the outright rejection of the block and blind-booking system. Smith’s conclusion that there were just as many ‘financial rewards’ in screening local pictures as there were patriotic reasons serves only to reinforce the hegemonic structure of the cinema’s existing power relations, normalising the idea that Australian films were little more than accompaniments to Hollywood productions.

The Sentimental Bloke

Beaumont Smith’s comments are, however, discursively consistent with the conception of the powerless individual filmmaker pitted against the overseas behemoth. This section looks at Raymond Longford’s The Sentimental Bloke (1919) as an example of how the mythos of the Anzac seeped into the narratives of films which had no ostensible war content, in much the same way as the earlier analysis of the Beaumont Smith film, The Hayseeds. Tulloch referred

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52 Tulloch citation as above, 1982: pp. 52-53.
53 Tulloch citation as above, 1982: pp. 52-53.
to this connection when he wrote of the “concatenation of the bush, Anzacs and cinema found in the Picture Show [magazine], and which in film probably existed most poignantly in the lost Ginger Mick”\textsuperscript{54}. The Sentimental Bloke needs to be read as a story about the film industry – it is an allegory of the film industry. Tulloch has characterised the film as representing the point at which the discourses of cinema and Anzac intersect, which is evident in the director Raymond Longford’s conception of the film industry:

Raymond Longford’s vision of the potential of an Australian film industry was always a Romantic one: the struggle of the heroic individual pioneers and bitter artists of genius against the crushing forces of modern civilisation.\textsuperscript{55}

Tulloch further argues that it is this conflict itself that Longford’s narratives are the symptomatic representations of:

His [Longford’s] conception of the individual [Australian film] pioneer, up against the crushing monopolies as David to Goliath, and that opposition, between small, individual, independent, human qualities and large, impersonal forces is deeply imprinted in the structure of the Sentimental Bloke \textsuperscript{56}.

At the core of this idea that the film is an allegory of the film industry is what Tulloch has observed of the filmmaker. Tulloch says of Longford: “He interpreted his own role in the industry as that of a pioneer constantly victimised by monopoly forces”\textsuperscript{57}. Tulloch argues that despite the film’s tendency towards ‘sentimental and consensual resolutions’ Longford’s

\textsuperscript{54} Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.351.
\textsuperscript{56} Tulloch notation as above, 1981: p.63.
\textsuperscript{57} Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.65.
narrative is in fact emblazoned with an inherent contradiction between ‘pioneering individualism and colossal impersonalities’\(^ {58}\). In considering *The Sentimental Bloke* as an allegory of the film industry it is the film’s ending – or its resolution – that is of most interest, leaving little to the imagination in terms of the underlying theme of the film pioneer up against the crushing monopolies. At the core of this conceptualisation is an important ideological shift in the Anzac legend itself; important because this shift enables us to make sense of the changes apparent in the film’s main protagonist, ‘Bill’, and at the same time how the film functions as an allegory of the film industry.

The ideological shift in Australian nationalism has been examined by Molloy, who argues that conservative elements appropriated this nationalist spirit that, in the years prior to the First World War, was radical-nationalist in nature. Molloy observes that the causes of the shift are intricately connected with the development of the Anzac legend, the outcome of which was a conversion of the Australian military’s exploits into a pro-Empire sentiment\(^ {59}\). Reynaud has observed the same ideological struggle, but in the context of the cinematic depictions of the Great-War version of the Anzac legend. Reynaud’s account of this ideological struggle is not dissimilar to that of Molloy, concluding that central to this ideological contest was the struggle for a ‘respectable-heroic’ image:

> The Anzac legend itself was for many years contested territory, fought over in particular between conservative official forces striving to construct an Imperial, respectable heroic image, and various left-

\(^{58}\) Tulloch citation as above, 1981: pp.64-65.

wing groups promoting a radical nationalist rebel, more consonant
with the egalitarian values of the bushranger and bush settler myth.\textsuperscript{60}

The transformation alluded to here is influential in terms of how we interpret \textit{The Sentimental Bloke} as an allegory of the film industry. For example, in the early part of the film ‘Bill’ is defined by a set of traits that have long been associated with the ‘Bushman’ – among them larrkinism, an obvious lack of discipline and a fondness for the drink – all of which culminate in a short prison stint as penance for his sins. This character arc is most conspicuous by the end of the story where ‘Bill’ is shown to have reformed to such an extent that he is married and settled on a rural property, which is located well away from the city where the story begins and where his vices were allowed to flourish, with his wife and newborn son in tow. These closing scenes that show him toiling on the land anticipate a future (and a nationalist discourse) that is redolent of the Pioneer legend\textsuperscript{61}, and which prioritises conservative values such as individual endeavour, family and hard work.

The implicitness of the Anzac legend in the film’s mostly consensual outcome is eloquently summed up by Collins in her description of this aspect of the story. She has argued that the film’s closing sequences are indicative of “the kind of conservative nationalism that organisations like the Returned Servicemen’s League and the Country Party…would have found congenial”\textsuperscript{62}. Tulloch has also noted the “conventionality of the ending (the bush, the family, etc.)”\textsuperscript{63}. In other words, the film’s ending is most remarkable for the way that ‘Bill’ has relinquished the radicalised traits which had tainted his character earlier in the story. The

\textsuperscript{60} Reynaud citation as above, 2007: pp.2-3.
\textsuperscript{61} J.B. Hirst describes the pioneer Legend as “a nationalist legend which deals in an heroic way with the experience of European settlement in Australia”, from “The Pioneer Legend”, \textit{Historical Studies} 18 (71), 1978; p.316.
\textsuperscript{63} Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.44.
outcome of such an ending consolidates the notion of a ‘respectable-heroic’ image as the dominant nationalist discourse for both nation and film industry.

Moreover, if we accept the notion that Longford’s film is an allegory of the film industry, in that the sub-text of the story is imbricated in a representation of the impoverished filmmaker up against the impersonal forces that control the film industry, then the conservative nature of the film’s ending alludes to a ‘heroic in defeat’ outcome for the cinema. If, as Tulloch is suggesting, Longford imposed his own struggle with the ‘crushing monopolies’ of the film industry onto the narrative itself, then ‘Bill’s’ eventual abandonment of his more radical character traits is profoundly significant for both his character development in the film and the film industry. The mythical displacement apparent in ‘Bill’, which transports him from a radicalised to a ‘conservative nationalism’, as Collins has described it, must surely stand for the film industry’s abandonment of its own independence.

The ‘First’ Australian War Films

The thematic line of development that connects the previous discussion about The Sentimental Bloke with the analysis of early war films that follows is the film industry’s tendency to allegorise itself, a tendency of Australian cinema that pre-dates the Longford film. In this section two films, A Hero of the Dardanelles and another film about the Gallipoli campaign, Within Our Gates or Deeds that Won Gallipoli (both 1915), are examined. The symbolism associated with the Gallipoli campaign as the birthplace of the Anzac legend, with all that this implies about heroism in defeat, makes these early films useful case studies into how the film industry saw itself in the same image. The metaphor of heroism ‘with or without triumph’ has profound importance in terms of how we interpret discourse on the early war films as also implying the struggle of the film industry.
This newspaper review of *A Hero of the Dardanelles*, the first long-form narrative-fiction film about the Gallipoli campaign released soon after the landings in 1915, is a useful example:

The film [*A Hero of the Dardanelles*] will portray the experiences of a soldier right from the time he enlists until he emerges from the battle a hero. The "Hero of the Dardanelles" is a grand picture, because it exemplifies our country's patriotism and perpetuates our army's noblest accomplishments. No better battle scenes in moving pictures have been seen than those depicting “The Landing at Gallipoli.”

Everything is shown, the guns of the battleships thundering death, the landing of the heats under the murderous fire of machine guns and rifles and the heroic charge up the heights, now famous in history.  

The article prioritises the fighting qualities of the ‘Bushman-Anzacs’ in such a way that the film, and by implication the cinema, are characterised as immersed in a similarly heroic battle. The discourses of ‘Anzac’ and ‘cinema’ are, as a result, conflated: that is, the imagery of the ‘digger’ and that of the film industry are so thoroughly symbiotic that both are depicted as engaged in a fierce battle against similarly imposing odds. As the writer states: ‘The "Hero of the Dardanelles" is a grand picture, because it exemplifies our country's patriotism and perpetuates our army's noblest accomplishments’. In this review, the myth and the cinema are so interrelated that the reader can imagine ‘the heroic charge up the heights’ relating to the film industry as much as it does to the diggers. The reviewer is daring the reader to conceive of the film industry, like the diggers themselves, as creating history; that the emotive Gallipoli action depicted in the film is tantamount to the creation of an equally distinctive identity for the film industry. The reviewer writes: ‘Everything is shown, the guns of the

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64 *The Riverine Herald: Echuca and Moama Advertiser*, 7th of September 1915.
battleships thundering death, the landing of the heats under the murderous fire of machine
guns and rifles and the heroic charge up the heights, now famous in history’. Emotive visual
imagery such as ‘the guns of the battleships thundering death’ implies heroism, but not that
the campaign itself was a success, only that it was heroic. This is revealing in terms of how
the film industry saw the reality of its own struggle in the heroic images on the screen.

In another review, this time of Within Our Gates or Deeds that Won Gallipoli, the film
industry is again conceived of as ‘heroic’:

It [Within Our Gates or Deeds that Won Gallipoli] is a stirring drama
… but above all a vivid [and] realistic representation of the landing of
our men at Gallipoli, the storming of the cruel, rugged, and
precipitous heights of the peninsular, the charges up many veritable
“Shrapnel Valleys,” the surmounting of heights, the sniping of the
enemy snipers, and the work of our gallant medical corps, succouring
the brave ones who had fallen for their Empire and for freedom. In
addition to this there was a view of the Turkish field guns in action,
and of the operations of their cavalry and infantry. The plot itself was
absorbing, treating the question of vital importance to the Empire –
the German spy system, the ramifications of which are seemingly
unlimited.65

The importance of the effect of the real – ‘vivid and realistic representation’ – is that the
undisputed truth value of this image is itself the film presenting its own image of itself. The
truth of this image is the truth – and value – of film, and the film industry, itself. It is in these
realistic moments that the film is allegorising itself. The paradox here though, is that these are

65 The Brisbane Courier, 9th of September 1915.
the moments when it is precisely fiction that is seemingly dispensed with. In the case of the films examined in this chapter, this tendency is illustrated by the insertion of documentary war footage. This is what the writer is alluding to in this passage: the ‘vivid [and] realistic representation of the landing of our men at Gallipoli, the storming of the cruel, rugged, and precipitous heights of the peninsular, the charges up many veritable “Shrapnel Valleys,” the surmounting of heights, the sniping of the enemy snipers’. These are the moments which are most thoroughly ideological. A characteristic of these reviews is placing up front the realism of the image, and in some ways the narrative itself is presented as secondary.

The review of *Within our Gates* implies the struggle of the film industry, particularly in the emphasis on the idea of the ‘ambush’ that awaited the Australian soldiers on the Gallipoli peninsula, which is the same as that which awaited the film industry at the same juncture. The metaphor is drawn out by the repeated references to empire and the Turkish guns in action, and all that this imagery invokes about Australia’s dominion status. This dominion status also stands for the film industry’s subverted status in relation to the dominant international cinema. There is an implied surrender contained in these words – a loss of independence – that applies equally to nation and film industry.

**Conclusion**

On the other hand, the heroic images of the Anzacs in full flight in this and the other films referred to throughout the chapter also provided reassurance to the film industry that it could ‘hold its own’, just as the Anzac legend provided Australians with the same confidence. This chapter has argued that Chauvel’s war-time classic, *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, is the most thoroughly realised example of how the film industry linked the heroic exploits of the diggers to its own heroic struggle against an equally fierce adversary (Hollywood). It was further
argued that the notion of the ‘impoverished filmmaker’ is best characterised during the inter-war period by Raymond Longford, who projected his own struggle as the pioneering, victimised filmmaker onto his silent cinema classic, *The Sentimental Bloke*. The conservative ending to Longford’s film, which is tied into shifting notions about what the Anzac legend came to represent, also alerts us to the implied loss of independence for both nation and film industry.
This chapter examines the influence of the Anzac legend on Australian films produced between the end of the Second World War and 1950, with a particular emphasis on the two films, *The Overlanders* and *Smithy*, both of which were released in 1946. The significance of these two films is that they were the first major film releases in the immediate period after the war when local film production had been severely curtailed. The future hopes of the film industry thus rested with the box office performance of these two Anzac-themed films, making them useful case studies into how Australian cinema has sought to depict itself in the heroic image of the Anzac legend at pivotal moments as it was seeking to re-establish a presence in the domestic market. Further still, the overseas-backed funding model of each film opens up new possibilities for an analysis that emphasises the film industry’s self-reflexive tendencies, in terms of how the cinema ‘sees its own struggle’ against Hollywood in the heroic images of the diggers on the screen.

To undertake this analysis, I will be adapting John Tulloch’s hypothesis from the previous chapter and applying it to the study of this different phase of the history of Australian cinema. The previous chapter argued for an understanding of the interrelationship between cinema and myth based on Tulloch’s conception of the early film industry, developing in particular the implications of his observation on how “the Anzacs refurbished the bush legend
powerfully, at just the time that the Australian film industry was trying, most self-consciously, to get off the ground”¹. In this chapter it will be argued that the film industry again in this later time period equally sought to depict itself in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. The reason for this can also be related back to an attempt by the film industry to self-consciously ‘get off the ground’, that is, in this case, to overcome how during the war years the nation’s war effort and other factors conspired to ravage local cinema production.

The idea that the film industry was in decline during the war years is concomitant with how this phase of Australian cinema is historicised. Graham Shirley explains that due to film stock shortages and investor caution, Charles Chauvel’s *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944) was the only feature film made and released between 1942 and 1945². Even after the war, and despite the box office success of both *The Overlanders* and *Smithy*, Shirley explains that of the further three features planned for 1946-47 not one entered into production³. By the time of the theatrical release of *Smithy* and *The Overlanders* the film industry’s momentum was already on the wane⁴:

In a postwar social climate that placed emphasis on national growth and international prominence, community support for a local film industry was to diminish more than at any time previously.⁵

The production of the foreign-financed *Smithy* and *The Overlanders* was initially however met with optimism, leading to high hopes for the re-establishment of continuous features production in Australia. This is how the influential trade paper, *The Film Weekly*, welcomed

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3 Shirley citation as above, 1994: p.28.
their box-office triumph, arguing that “The box-office success, firstly of Columbia’s “Smithy”, and now of Ealing’s “The Overlanders”, has stimulated plans for further big budget Australian film production”⁶. As this statement clearly indicates, the entry into the market of overseas-based studios was the main source of the industry’s renewed optimism – that these developments would lead to more ‘big budget’ film production in Australia and bring substantial commercial ‘spin-off’ effects for the nation’s embattled film producers. In an earlier edition of The Film Weekly, the connection between the arrival of the foreign studios and plans for a boost in filmmaking activity is made more explicit:

We think Australia will receive more publicity abroad from full-length commercial features made by reputable people, including the established producers of Hollywood and Britain. With up-to-date studios, equipment and adequate supply of trained technicians on the job, they’ll come – as Columbia and Ealing have come, on harder ground – and their pictures, added to those made by Australian companies with such much needed facilities – will be worth seeing, and convey the Australian way of life more effectively than documentary.⁷

Paradoxically, discourse such as this article also presents evidence of the film industry’s dilemma, described in this chapter by the metaphor of ‘invasion’. In a militaristic sense, the threat of Japanese invasion hangs over the main protagonists in both films, although to varying degrees. However, the metaphor of ‘invasion’ also relates to the idea that both films can be read as an allegory of the film industry. For example, Smithy was financed by surplus funds that Columbia had left in Australia during the war but which it was unable to repatriate.

⁷ The Film Weekly, 19th of June, 1945: p.3.
after the war due to federal government currency restrictions. Shirley and Adams explain that Columbia was persuaded by the head of its Australian branch, N.P. Pery, to use some of the funds to make a feature film in Australia. Pery chose Cinesound director Ken G. Hall to make the film, “and gave as his brief a subject that would portray the life of a world famous Australian.” The selection of Kingsford-Smith as the subject of the story not only expresses in film the life of “one of the archetypal Australian heroes,” but it also means that the film is deeply imbricated in Australian mythology, not least of which is the Anzac legend.

In considering the film’s mythologising of the ‘digger’ we would also do well to consider why Hall chose to depict the aviator’s life ahead of other famous Australians, among them Ned Kelly and Dame Nellie Melba. Pike and Cooper have explained about Kingsford-Smith that “…his death while attempting to set new records was inherently more romantic than Melba’s decline into old age and sickness.” There is an implicit reference here to the cultural-symbolic value of the ‘heroic’ Anzac legend in the planning and production of Smithy: that Kingsford-Smith’s background as a Great War ‘digger’ was influential on both the making of the film and the film’s subsequent importance to the Australian film industry.

This symbolic connection between the Anzac legend and the film industry is the basis of the following newspaper article about the film:

One night whilst dining with Ken G. Hall, he [Mr. Pery] brought up the subject of picture-making. Discussion centred around script possibilities of making a film in Australia. Mr. Pery, as a world traveller, immediately suggested two distinguished Australians – Sir

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10 Before the Interval: Australian mythology and feature films, 1930-1960 (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990); p.39
Charles Kingsford Smith and William Morris Hughes. As the Pacific war was at that time being intensified, he decided on the story of "Smithy." After 15 months of preparation Mr. Pery was satisfied finally that he had a story that combined "human interest with the life of a great Australian."\(^{12}\)

The writer’s linking of the producer’s intention to fictionalise the life of a great Australian with the war in the Pacific implies that Kingsford-Smith’s Anzac background was pivotal to the decision to base the film on his life, and that the film was devised for purposes of propaganda. The film’s war theme is established in the opening scenes, which flashback to Kingsford-Smith’s Great War heroics in the skies over France. The fictionalising of the heroic story of ‘a great Australian’ – of which Kingsford-Smith was considered the most heroic – was considered mandatory for the future of the film industry. As the reviewer states, ‘the production is an event of outstanding importance to the Motion Picture Industry in this country’. On the one hand, this statement re-imagines the film (industry) in the heroic image of Kingsford-Smith, the ‘digger’. But the further claim that Smithy was ‘Australia’s first Hollywood produced picture’ also reveals the film industry’s underlying dilemma – American hegemony. The inherent conflict between the ‘national’ and the ‘international’ weaves its way through the narrative/thematic structure of the film, just as it does in The Overlanders.

The Overlanders’ claims to Anzac authenticity are more obviously apparent when we consider that the story is set against the backdrop of a historic World War Two cattle trek across the country. The significance of the box-office success of The Overlanders is that, unlike Columbia, it persuaded Britain’s Ealing Studios to become the first overseas company

to produce films in Australia on a regular basis. As Shirley and Adams have explained about the film, “this venture was to attract more outside producers over the next fourteen years”. The other important aspect of *The Overlanders* in terms of how we conceive of the film industry as ‘heroic’ is that this film, similar to *Smithy*, was conceived of for war-time propaganda. Geoff Mayer argues that the decision to send director Harry Watt to Australia while the war was still on came after a request to Britain from the Australian Government for greater recognition of the nation’s role in the conflict, particularly in Britain.

Peter Limbrick has also discussed this aspect of the film and argues that the federal government, believing the nation’s war efforts had not been adequately covered on the screen, made an approach to the British Ministry of Information for greater recognition. Limbrick explains that the planning of the film for purposes of propaganda is evident throughout most areas of the production process, including the casting of the key players:

The production of *The Overlanders* was supported by the Australian armed forces in multiple ways. Daphne Campbell, the female star, was released from duties in the Australian Army Medical Women’s Services to make the film, and Flying Officer Ralph Smart came from the Royal Australian Air Force to work on the script.

Pike and Cooper have detailed the ‘embeddedness’ of the film’s production within the Australian military context, and found that filming began in Sydney in April 1945, before “the unit of some twenty-five people was then flown by the R.A.A.F. to Alice Springs, where

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17 Limbrick citation as above, 2007: pp.68-95.
they were based in an Army camp”\textsuperscript{18}. This aspect of the production outlined by both Limbrick and Pike and Cooper implies the symbolic proximity of the film to the Anzac mystique not only because of how this film was conceived of for war-time propaganda, but also because it enjoyed the direct involvement of the military. The underlying implication of these accounts about the film’s ‘locational qualities’ is an association between the armed services and the film that results in a blurring of the line between fact and fiction.

In the following article from \textit{The Adelaide Mail} newspaper, the close proximity of the production unit to the armed services is clearly stated, as is the film’s often stated commitment to documentary accuracy:

He [Australian director Jon Heyer] has been senior assistant for five months to Mr. Harry Watt director of ‘The Overlanders’, which depicts the great cattle trek of 1942 when Japanese invasion threatened. Heyer's work has involved a four weeks' aerial and land survey of the Murranji and other cattle routes, filming from the air and the ground mobs of cattle now on the track. He covered 6,000 miles by air and 2,000 miles by truck. R.A.A.F. and Army co-operation made this possible. The stock routes were very dry, he said, and difficulties of filming the cattle on the track were great. From the air atmospheric conditions prevented low-level flying after 9 a.m. Because of air bumps they had to fly at higher levels and lose detail.\textsuperscript{19}

There is both a clearly articulated and an implied threat of ‘invasion’ in this article. The former refers to the looming threat of Japanese invasion that hangs over the drove party throughout the story. But ‘invasion’ also describes how the film industry sees itself in this

\textsuperscript{18} Pike & Cooper citation as above, 1998: p.204.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{The Adelaide Mail}, 7\textsuperscript{th} of July, 1945: p.3.
film. The description of the assistant director, John Heyer, emulating the tenacity and endurance of the trek as he scouted for suitable shooting locations is an example of how the film industry ‘matches’ the heroic cattle trek – or ‘becomes the legend’. What is noteworthy also is how the writer details the major obstacles encountered by Heyer along his journey which are identical to those encountered by the characters. In this regard the writer describes Heyer’s journey – and that of the film industry – as: ‘The stock routes were very dry, he said, and difficulties of filming the cattle on the track were great’. The symbolic link between filmmaker and mythology is further extended, in terms of how the Army assisted Heyer during his journey – ‘He covered 6,000 miles by air and 2,000 miles by truck…R.A.A.F. and Army co-operation made this possible’. In this passage the reader is implored to equate the heroism of the filmmaker with that of the cattle drove and imagine that both are threatened with ‘invasion’.

For the film industry, this is not simply a rhetorical invasion that is implied. Indeed, the significance of The Overlanders and more broadly of Ealing Studios to this study extends to how the fate of the filmmaker, or the studio, is emblematic of this phase of Australian cinema: that is, how we might relate the Ealing experience to the underlying dilemma of the ‘competing imperialisms’ in the film industry. Limbrick has examined The Overlanders and two other Ealing productions as examples of what he has termed, ‘Australian westerns’. He explains that the failure of Ealing to continue making films in Australia was due to its inability to understand that in post-war Australia it was not the British connection that defined the nation’s imperial relations, but rather the far reaching impact of the United
States: “Ealing’s failure to make more films in Australia is inescapably tied to the dominance of Hollywood in the former British colony.”

The Overlanders

The metaphor of ‘invasion’, and what this implies about the film industry, therefore relates to how The Overlanders is situated within the post-war cinematic landscape. Whereas Smithy is indicative of the shift in Australia’s post-war foreign policy priorities towards the United States, The Overlanders emphasises the nation’s imperial ties with Britain. Bruce Molloy has argued about the film:

In broad outline, The Overlanders depicts the efforts of a group of characters drawn from a range of Commonwealth countries (recalling in this respect the aircrew of [director] Watt’s famous earlier documentary, Target for Tonight) to drove a large herd of cattle from Wyndham to Queensland.

The film’s ‘Britishness’ is also a commentary on its generic qualities: that is, the idea that The Overlanders represents a “reframing of the British [documentary] tradition”. This documentary style is implicated in how the film industry sees itself in this film, as a site of

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21 Limbrick citation as above, 2007: pp.68-95.
23 Molloy citation as above, 1990: p.166.
cultural conflict between the competing imperialisms of Britain and America\textsuperscript{25}, because the British documentary tradition is understood as a stylistic response to Hollywood hegemony. Stuart Cunningham has written about this aspect of the 1940s and ‘50s Australian films, and explains that the inclusion of documentary footage was part of the “exciting range of film style, format and experimentation”\textsuperscript{26} compared to earlier periods of the cinema. Cunningham describes \textit{The Overlanders} and another of Ealing’s films, \textit{Eureka Stockade} (1949), as typical of the innovation “against the Hollywood paradigm”\textsuperscript{27}, adding that the films’ documentary qualities are indebted to the British tradition, which in turn helped to shape the film industry’s innovative response to Hollywood dominance\textsuperscript{28}.

In other words, \textit{The Overlanders} is emblematic of the film industry’s stylistic response to its own ‘impoverishment’. Cunningham even invokes the same ‘David and Goliath’ analogy that Tulloch\textsuperscript{29} uses in describing the pre-Second World War period\textsuperscript{30}. This formulation operates at the level of industry but it is concomitant with the argument that within the narrative and thematic structure of Australian war films there are signs of the way that the film industry is implored to ‘take up arms’ – in a rhetorical sense – and ‘fight back’ in line with the indomitable image of the ‘digger’. The cattle trek and the threat of invasion are metaphors; the former for the film industry and the latter for the dominant international cinema.

If we are to directly apply the metaphor to the production of this film, then Watt stands for the impoverished pioneering filmmaker who is pitted against the powerful forces of the screen trade-controlled film industry. This conflict is in fact the basis of an article published

\textsuperscript{25} Cunningham has discussed this idea; that is, the way the cinema of the pre-WW2 period has been conceived of as “subtended by ‘competing imperialisms’ (1989: p.55).
\textsuperscript{26} Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.62.
\textsuperscript{27} Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.61.
\textsuperscript{28} Cunningham refers to the “ethos of Australian innovation in the post-war cinema”, which is evident in Watts’ \textit{The Overlanders} and \textit{Eureka Stockade}; citation as above, 1989: p.64.
\textsuperscript{29} Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.351.
\textsuperscript{30} Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.55.
in *The Film Weekly* trade paper that is critical of comments made by Watt in the months leading up to the release of *The Overlanders*, and which were in support of the British documentary movement of which Watt was a renowned disciple. Watt not only defends the documentary film as central to the ideal of a ‘national culture’ but he does so in a manner that his comments were widely interpreted by sections of the screen trade press as a countermeasure to the dominance of the Hollywood film, a position that drew the ire of *The Film Weekly* writer:

> Yet Mr Watt’s slant of commercial cinema is almost condescending: its attitude is merely “to give the public blondes and bathrooms”. He adds: “For 25 years the documentary film movement in England has fought that outlook, and it still has to be overcome in Australia”.  

This is critical to an understanding of the Australian cinematic climate in which *The Overlanders* was produced and released. It is also pivotal to a reading of the film as a ‘stylistic defence’ of the film industry – of the national culture – in the face of a foreign (American) invasion, and thus to how we are able to re-cast Watt in the image of the ‘impoverished filmmaker’ in a similar way to Longford, Chauvel and Hall. In retrospect the rhetorical battle that is evident in this article between the individual, pioneering filmmaker (Watt) and the powerful forces of a Hollywood-aligned screen trade press (*Film Weekly*) is pre-emptive of both Watt’s departure from Australia after he made *Eureka Stockade* in 1949 – although he returned briefly to direct *The Siege of Pinchgut* in 1959 – and Ealing’s eventual exit after the same film in 1959.

Limbrick has also written of *The Overlanders*’ documentary heritage, and explains that Ealing Studios sent Watt to Australia to make the film largely on the basis of his previous

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work as a documentary filmmaker\textsuperscript{32}. The suggestion here is that the filmmaker had planned on the production of an epic, ‘heroic’ picture, and one that prevaricates between fiction and documentary truthfulness. Cunningham has noted about this aspect of the film that The Overlanders’ stylistic strategies negotiate “a path between fictional and documentary modes”\textsuperscript{33}. He insists that the importance to the narrative of the Dan McAlpine character (played by Chips Rafferty in the film) relates to how McAlpine

\[
\text{…is split between [the] fictional crux of the narrative, the laconic man of few words and emphatic actions, and documentary voice-over,}
\]
\[
\text{dispensing detailed knowledge of the technicalities of droving with an earnest loquaciousness.}\textsuperscript{34}
\]

Molloy argues about the McAlpine voice-overs that they add to “the sense of documentary authenticity”\textsuperscript{35} in the film. For the audience these are important textual traits that embellish the idea that the events depicted in the story transcend simple story-telling and more closely resemble a historical account of the heroic war-time cattle trek – a heroic epoch in the nation’s history – and which culminate in a sense that the film industry is as epic as the heroic trek itself. We would do well here to also consider Cunningham’s observation that intensive location shooting – or ‘location-ism’ – is pivotal to the film’s commitment to the documentary-drama genre\textsuperscript{36}. Pike and Cooper have similarly remarked about this aspect of the film:

\[
\text{Elements of romance and comedy were woven lightly into Watt’s screenplay to provide commercial ballast, but his film was primarily}
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Limbrick citation as above, 2007: p0. 74-75.  \\
\textsuperscript{33} Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.66.  \\
\textsuperscript{34} Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.65.  \\
\textsuperscript{35} Molloy citation as above: p.170.  \\
\textsuperscript{36} Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.66.  \\
\end{flushright}
documentary in spirit, with most of its drama arising from the natural hazards of the trek – poison weed, dry bores, boggy creeks, horse-breaking and stampedes.\textsuperscript{37}

This quotation alerts us to the underlying influence in this film of the Bush legend. It is the bush myth that Pike and Cooper are alluding to when they explain that the film’s spirit and drama spring from the ‘natural hazards of the trek’. There are frequent reminders throughout the story of how the values and ideals associated with the Legend of the Bushman are transposed onto the heroic image of the Anzac-themed cattle trek, the culmination of which is that the droving theme is depicted in the heroic image of the Bush-Anzac legend. This heroic theme is established early in the story, when Dan McAlpine is shown searching for drovers to join him on the cattle trek. When some of the drovers turn down his job offer and opt instead to go overseas and fight in the war McAlpine stares them down and declares: “This is a war job. Bullocks are more important than bullets”.

The implied symbiotic relationship between the Bush and Anzac legends is more directly established in a much later scene that takes place in central Australia, when the droving party comes across a convoy of Australian servicemen on its way to the war\textsuperscript{38}. Molloy has noted that the symbolic importance of the scene relates to how

\begin{quote}
...this encounter between the embodiment of two manifestations of Australian myths occurs geographically in the centre of the continent, but symbolically in the heart of Australian mythology.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

This convergence of the Bush and Anzac legends is reminiscent of Australian narratives during this phase of the cinema, including \textit{Smithy}. In a scene that is outlined later in the

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Australian Film 1900-1977} (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998): p.204.
\textsuperscript{38} Molloy citation as above, 1990: p.170.
\textsuperscript{39} Molloy citation as above, 1990: p.170.
chapter, Kingsford-Smith tells the story of a ‘knight’ (i.e. himself) who must go back to the ‘Never-Never’ land – or the bush – to reclaim his courage so he can continue on in his heroic journey. In this film as in the scene from The Overlanders, the events take place at a point in the narrative when the films’ main protagonists acknowledge the source of their inspiration – the Australian outback – before finding the courage to continue on in their heroic endeavour. The culmination of this convergence of the bush and ‘Anzac’ in both films is the providing of an image for the film industry that is equally heroic.

In the following newspaper article about The Overlanders it is this same spirit of the ‘indomitable people of the outback’ – that is, the ideals that are associated with the bush and which proved themselves against a looming invasion – that the reviewer suggests is also indispensable to film industry identity:

There is widespread expectation that "Overlanders," a story of the indomitable people of the outback, who undertook the wartime cattle-trek from the Kimberleys to Queensland during the days of threatened Japanese invasion, will be a really great picture of Australia, and a great money-spinner here and abroad.\(^40\)

The writer’s observation that The Overlanders ‘will be a really great picture of Australia’ is where the film industry is re-imagined in the heroic image of the Bush-Anzac legend. The film is placed into the same heroic context as the cattle trek, which is described as taking place ‘during the days of threatened Japanese invasion’. This is the courage and endurance that the film industry is implored to match against a similar invasion on the nation’s cinema screens. The idea that the film will be a ‘great money-spinner here and abroad’, therefore, presents a way forward for the film industry in its own heroic struggle. At the mythic level

\(^{40}\) The [Hobart] Mercury, 29\(^{th}\) of September, 1945: p.9.
this is, in essence, what the Anzac legend invokes – the idea that the mythology provided
reassurance to the film industry that it could hold and defend its territory while flourishing on
foreign soil, like the diggers themselves. In a bid to reverse the ‘invasion’ on the nation’s
cinema screens the film industry in this review is metaphorically implored to launch a
counter-offensive on foreign film markets.

This article reveals the extent to which the metaphor of ‘invasion’ was associated with public
debate about *The Overlanders*. A further reason that we can see traces of the film industry’s
struggle in this article is because of the emphasis the writer places on the film’s commitment
to historical accuracy and documentary truthfulness. The following review from *The
Australasian Exhibitor* emphasises this idea about the film’s claims to historical
‘authenticity’:

The romance is very pale which again contributes to the authenticity
of the subject. The driving of the somewhat small herd of cattle gets
monotonous and the incidents are lacking in variety. “The
Overlanders” is a superb documentary. All one has to do is to
persuade oneself that one is actually traversing that route and not
merely going around and around in circles at Alice Springs, after a
jolly start-off at Wyndham – or North Head. There are one or two
highlights in the film that will compare with anything you’ve seen.41

Of particular note is the description of the film as ‘superb documentary’, which in turn
reveals how the film industry sees itself in this story. This is highly intuitive of the film
industry’s stylistic response to its own threatened invasion – an example of how the film
industry is imploring itself to ‘fight back’ in its own epic contest. This conception of

Australian cinema as heroic is equally obvious in the writer’s suggestion that all ‘one has to do is to persuade oneself that one is actually traversing that route and not merely going around and around in circles at Alice Springs’. The reader here is placed into the action of the film and asked to metaphorically equate the vividness of the image of the Anzac cattle trek with the heroic struggle of the film industry. The concluding comment – ‘There are one or two highlights in the film that will compare with anything you’ve seen’ – is where the film industry is re-imagined as achieving against the odds, similar to the drove party depicted in the story, and emerging just as triumphant.

A review published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* is more explicit in terms of how the reviewer makes a connection between the Anzac heroism of the drove party and the film industry:

> Although founded on fact, the great overlanding of cattle from the Northern Territory when a Japanese invasion seemed imminent, the film is more than cinema fiction-history. It might be described as a great feature-documentary.\(^{42}\)

The action of the film is placed into the context of the underlying theme of ‘invasion’, in terms of how the theme applies to both the cattle drove party and the film industry. This is what the reviewer is referring to in claiming that ‘the film is more than cinema fiction-history’. It might be described as a great feature-documentary. This is a reference to how the film industry also sees its own heroic struggle on the screen, in the context of ‘when a Japanese invasion seemed imminent’. The writer here has condensed the historical relationship between ‘Anzac’ and cinema, the result of which is that the ‘digger’s’ seminal qualities of endurance, tenacity and courage – which are all characterised by the cattle drove

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\(^{42}\) *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30\(^{th}\) of September, 1946: p.10.
party – have translated into a heroic epoch in Australian cinema production. The film industry and national identity in this review are characterised as so thoroughly symbiotic that they have formed into a single identity, each building on the image of the other.

**Smithy**

The backdrop to *The Overlanders* of a heroic war-time cattle drive lends itself to a study of the interrelationship between Australian film and the Anzac legend. *Smithy*’s claims in this regard, although not as obviously apparent, are still worthy of closer scrutiny. Molloy’s argument relating to the film’s mythic tendencies is useful here. He has stated that “*Smithy*, although financed by Columbia, deserves attention for its depiction of the life of one of the archetypal Australian heroes”. In this section it is argued that the film’s depiction of Kingsford-Smith as the ‘archetypal Australian hero’ is closely related to the protagonist’s earlier incarnation as an Anzac war hero. The story begins in the present day, which in the context of the film is the Second World War, and from there reconstructs Kingsford-Smith’s life through flashback. After some brief World War Two fighter plane scenes, the action cuts to a military bar as some of Kingsford-Smith’s fellow soldiers from the Great War recount heroic tales from the frontline. It is in the bar scene that the symbolic connection between Kingsford-Smith, the ‘digger’, and his later persona as the pioneering aviator is first established.

One of Kingsford-Smith’s war mates re-tells the story of how they were recruited as pilots during the Great War in the following dialogue:

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We were all in the same squadron together in France – must have been 1916. Planes were being put together with wire, and glue and hope. England needed pilots badly. So she called for volunteers from the armies in France. They combed the ranks for madmen to train for commission. Needless to say she got some Australians.

The description of Kingsford-Smith and the other Australian pilots as ‘madmen’ is reminiscent of Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, a film that is renowned for an intensely mythologised portrayal of the Great War-Anzac. The prologue from Chauvel’s film is similar to that of *Smithy* in terms of how it describes the Australian soldiers as the ‘Mad Bushmen’.

The description of Australia’s pilots in *Smithy* as ‘madmen’ is significant because it forms part of the film’s mythic heritage with the war genre. In *Smithy*, the bar scene is immediately followed by flashbacks to a youthful and smiling Kingsford-Smith at the cockpit of his combat plane in 1916, an ostensibly heroic image that is interspersed with actuality footage of aerial dog fights and of planes dive bombing. The intrusion of documentary footage in this sequence embellishes the realism of the image – of the events depicted on the screen – thereby enhancing the prospect that the film industry in this film is in the heroic image of the Anzac legend.

This heroic image of Kingsford-Smith in his fighter plane is the first and lasting impression of him that the viewer has. Furthermore, these combat scenes at the beginning provide crucial context to Kingsford-Smith’s pioneering-aviation records because the subsequent events depicted in the film are in the same heroic image: that is, of the Great-War fighter pilot. In this film there is a mythic convergence of bush and Anzac, along with the equally heroic
Pioneer legend\textsuperscript{44}. Molloy’s examination of the relationship between social mythology and Australian film narratives released between 1930 and 1960 is useful in this regard. On the one hand Molloy explains that in Australian narratives “the bush theme intersects with attitudes on family life through the notion of pioneering”\textsuperscript{45}, which suggests that like the Anzac legend, the pioneering theme is underpinned by the bush mythology. But in also considering \textit{Smithy} as an expression of the pioneering legend, it is worth taking into account the influence of what Molloy terms as ‘mythic transformations’\textsuperscript{46}. Among the transformations that Molloy writes of are those characters who bring special skills to the modification of the environment – an extension of the pioneering theme. He goes on to explain: “A similar status is awarded to aviators, who are seen, logically enough, as modern pioneers asserting their mastery over the elements and defying the tyranny of distance”\textsuperscript{47}.

This is at the core of the heroic portrayal of Kingsford-Smith’s numerous aviation feats throughout the film – that is, as the pioneering flyer – while these achievements are also bestowed with an Anzac reverence. Kingsford-Smith’s record-breaking aviation achievements are pioneering in the truest sense, in as much as how he is shown as the first flyer to cross the Pacific Ocean. But this story, and its unavoidably tragic ending in which Kingsford-Smith is forever lost at the end, also characterises the Anzac legend in its purest form, which simply implies heroism. This is in many respects an Anzac story, not only because Kingsford-Smith’s military service forms an integral part of his character development, but also because of the underlying sentiment of heroism. In this story, there is an inescapable sense of heroic toil in the face of insurmountable, if not tragic odds that is

\textsuperscript{44} J.B. Hirst describes the pioneer Legend as “a nationalist legend which deals in a heroic way with the experience of European settlement in Australia”, from “The Pioneer Legend”, \textit{Historical Studies} 18 (71), 1978; p.316.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Before the Interval: Australian mythology and feature films, 1930-1960} (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990); p18.
\textsuperscript{46} Molloy citation as above, 1990: p.22.
\textsuperscript{47} Molloy citation as above, 1990: p.22.
associated with just about all of Kingsford-Smith’s endeavours, and this applies equally to his activities in the air and on the ground.

Furthermore, the underlying influence of the bush mythology is what inspires and compels him to pursue his many aviation and business activities. For example in one scene after he has successfully crossed the Pacific Ocean, Kingsford-Smith is depicted as deflated and aimless as he contemplates his immediate future. He tells his nephews a fictional tale about a heroic ‘knight’ – himself – who must return to the ‘Never-Never’ land, the bush, to reclaim his mojo. In the story the knight, who feels old and tired, returns to his spiritual heartland, the heart of the national mythology, to recover his will and courage so he can continue on in his heroic journey. At the mythic level, this is the point in the narrative where the Bush and Pioneer legends intersect in the manner that Molloy has suggested, the culmination of which is the underlying presence of the bush mythology in what is an essentially heroic, pioneering story. While the film industry in this film is depicted in the heroic image of the ‘soldier-aviator’ when we take into account the way the story is prefaced by Kingsford-Smith’s Anzac heritage, in this scene he is also shown reclaiming the bush as the source of his inspiration and his heroism.

The idea that the Anzac legend achieves rhetorical hierarchy in this film is consolidated by the way that Kingsford-Smith’s most significant accomplishments are placed within a military context. The list of achievements ranges from the awarding of his Military Cross and his investiture at Buckingham Palace, to the retiring of his iconic plane, the *Southern Cross*, and even his marriage. At all of these pivotal moments in the narrative Kingsford-Smith is dressed in his Royal Australian Air Force uniform. In other words, the heroic figure of the combat fighter pilot stays with him throughout the story, consolidating his many aviation achievements as not only heroic but in the indomitable image of the Great-War Anzac.
The Impoverished Pioneer

Kingsford-Smith is simultaneously portrayed in the film as the heroic but victimised pioneer. His struggle in this film relates equally to the number of setbacks and disappointments that he endures, some of which are in the air, although many relate to his business ambitions.

Whether in the air as a flyer or on the ground as an aviator-businessman, Kingsford-Smith is characterised as being pitted against insurmountable odds. From the outset he is thwarted in his numerous attempts to raise funds for his oceanic flights, while he is also rejected by the government when the Prime Minister of the day\footnote{Of more than incidental value is the fact that the former Prime Minister Billy Hughes, like aviator P.G. Taylor both play themselves in this film, thus further blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, and strengthening the film’s sense of realism and therefore the likelihood that this film (and the film industry) are in the heroic image of the legend.} refuses to allow him to enter a Britain to Australia air race. His bids for lucrative postal service contracts are also refused despite his record-breaking feats in the skies.

Shirley has argued about the film that “Smithy’s central theme is one of pioneering zeal in opposition to apathy and conservatism”\footnote{Shirley citation as above, 1994: p.28.}. The film’s pioneering zeal is pivotal to how we might consider Smithy as an allegory of the film industry. In this regard it is worth again drawing on John Tulloch’s hypothesis regarding how Raymond Longford used The Sentimental Bloke (1919) to figure himself as the film pioneer pitted against the huge, crushing monopolies of the film industry – positioning himself in a kind of David versus Goliath battle\footnote{Tulloch citation as above, 1981: p.63.}. Tulloch argued that Longford’s narrative is the attempt to resolve an inherent contradiction between ‘pioneering individualism and colossal impersonalities’\footnote{Tulloch citation as above, 1981: pp.64-65.}.
There is evidence of this same colossal struggle of the film industry in *Smithy*. Molloy explains that the film appeared on screens just as the film’s director Ken G. Hall had learned of the Greater Union exhibition chain’s (GUO) decision not to allow its wholly owned production company, Cinesound, to resume continuous features production\(^\text{52}\). This development, along with a number of other setbacks to Hall’s plans to kick-start local film production after the war, was a source of frustration for the director\(^\text{53}\). Greater Union’s decision not to invest in any further Australian film production was a setback not only for Hall but for the film industry\(^\text{54}\). This frustration found its way into several key scenes in which Kingsford-Smith experiences setbacks, even inspiring some of the film’s dialogue\(^\text{55}\). Molloy refers to one such scene close to the end of the film in which Kingsford-Smith is shown laying on his sick bed, itself a powerful metaphor for the film industry. When told of a lucrative postal service decision that had gone against his company, Kingsford-Smith responds with: “Powerful, aren’t they?"\(^\text{56}\)

This review of the film published in *The Film Weekly* is immersed in a portrayal of Kingsford-Smith as the victimised pioneer:

> “Smithy” is an accurate biographical film document of the late Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith. The action opens at the end of World War 1, when the young flyer, after recovering from wounds, attends an investiture at Buckingham Palace to receive a decoration. Because of inexperience in long-distance flying, he is refused permission by Australia’s Prime Minister to compete for the Government’s £10,000

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\(^53\) Molloy citation as above, 1990: pp.39-40.

\(^54\) Shirley citation as above, 1994: pp.30-31.

\(^55\) Molloy citation as above, 1990: pp.39-40.

\(^56\) Molloy citation as above, 1990: pp.39-40.
prize for the first London-Australia flight. He visits America to secure backing for a Pacific flight – and fails. He returns home, secures an insufficient State grant to finance the venture, and returns to the United States. He buys the Southern Cross from Douglas Mawson, but still lacks enough capital. He and Charles Ulm several times attempt to win a prize for endurance flying, without success. Through Kay Sutton (Joy Nichols) they meet the American millionaire Allan Hancock, who backs the pacific flight. The flyers land in Australia, and are received as heroes.\textsuperscript{57}

The film’s documentary and Anzac credentials are both highlighted in the review, further strengthening the bond between the film (industry) and the Anzac legend. Thus, the writer explains: ‘Smithy is an accurate biographical film document of the late Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith. The action opens at the end of World War 1’. Otherwise, the reviewer’s portrayal of Kingsford-Smith tends to emphasise the impoverished pioneer who is pitted against monopolistic forces that constantly conspire to thwart him. The reviewer says of Kingsford-Smith at one point: ‘He visits America to secure backing for a Pacific flight – and fails. He returns home, secures an insufficient State grant to finance the venture, and returns to the United States’. If we think of Smithy’s funding model – subsidised by Columbia’s surplus war funds before the Hollywood studio makes an equally hasty exit from Australia – the narrative (of film and review) is imitative of the plight of the film industry at this historical juncture. In other words, Kingsford-Smith’s turn towards America mirrors that of the film industry while the hesitant nature of the support that he receives in the U.S. reflects Columbia’s equivocation about remaining in Australia.

\textsuperscript{57} The Film Weekly, 4\textsuperscript{th} of July 1946: p.5.
Paradoxically in this film, Kingsford-Smith is portrayed as heroic as much as for what he fails to achieve as he is for his many accomplishments in the skies. These mishits include his aborted attempt in the England to Australia air race at the beginning of the story after the Prime Minister intervenes; his numerous failed attempts to secure lucrative air postal service contracts; and his ultimately doomed attempt to cross from England to Australia that culminates in his heroic death at the end. All of these events are pivotal to the characterisation of the main protagonist as the heroic, ‘victimised pioneer’. Moreover, the underlying sentiment of the story is such that, despite Kingsford-Smith’s numerous and heroic achievements, the inevitability of his fate is never in question.

**Invasion**

This sense of fatalism is consistent with how the film industry sees its own struggle in the film, with the representation of Kingsford-Smith as the powerless, individual pioneer a metaphor for the ‘impoverished film industry’. Just as with *The Overlanders*, the threat of invasion casts a dark shadow over the action in *Smithy*. There are frequent reminders throughout the narrative of the threat of a looming Japanese invasion, and this is especially the case in the scenes both before and after the historic Pacific Ocean crossing, the result of which is that Kingsford-Smith’s aviation heroics are inscribed with a militaristic imperative. For example, in the scene immediately after the Pacific crossing he addresses a dinner in his honour and remarks: “Don’t let us forget that if commercial planes can fly the Pacific bombers can too”. At the level of metaphor, the depiction of the film industry as ‘heroic’ is within this context of ‘invasion’, which is inflected onto the nation/film industry’s own shift
towards America/Hollywood, and the consequences that this new allegiance had for
Australia’s independent production sector.\(^{58}\)

In this review published in *The Bulletin* newspaper, the writer begins by establishing the
symbolic connection between Kingsford-Smith, the ‘soldier-warrior’, and the world-
renowned aviator:

> From such impressions, and from his own account of his ferocious
> and elated low-level machine-gun attacks on German troops in 1914-18, the man emerges as a fighter, fierce and efficient. The force that
drove him was his pleasure in personal combat which he found in
pitting himself against long ocean flights, as others have set
themselves against mountains, deserts and ice-fields.\(^{59}\)

The opening word imagery – ‘From such impressions, and from his own account of his
ferocious and elated low-level machine-gun attacks on German troops in 1914-18, the man
emerges as a fighter, fierce and efficient’ – is as important to the review as the visual images
are to the film itself. This is truth in the image for both Kingsford-Smith and the film industry
– the image of the heroic ‘digger’. The idea that ‘the man emerges as a fighter, fierce and
efficient’ from the Great War is how he remains in time, or should remain throughout the
film. In this article, Kingsford-Smith’s aviation achievements occupy the same rarefied space
as his war-time heroics, the writer observing that ‘the force that drove him was his pleasure in
personal combat which he found in pitting himself against long ocean flights’. This is the
point where the film industry ‘becomes the legend’ because the story, although ostensibly
about the aviator’s record flights, is put into the context of his Great War heroics. The idea of

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\(^{58}\) Historical accounts of the film industry typically contextualise the 1940s and ‘50s as a period dominated by oversea-based productions in Australia, such as that by Geoff Mayer in “The Phantom Stockman: Lee Robinson, Chips Rafferty and the Film Industry Nobody Wanted”, *Metro Magazine* (142), 2005; p.16.

\(^{59}\) *The Bulletin*, 3\(^{rd}\) of July, 1946: p.24
Kingsford-Smith pitting himself and prevailing against immeasurable odds – captured in the film’s opening flashbacks to World War One over France – is the defining image of Kingsford-Smith in this film. This is the ‘hero shot’ and the image that the film industry is implored to emulate.

The next extract from the same review highlights the extent to which the film industry is urged to cast itself in the image of the ‘soldier-warrior’:

In the early passages of the film Ron Randall, with some very capable acting, presents a direct and enthusiastic young man credible enough to be accepted as the young Smithy, and sufficiently impressive almost to vary the first half of the film. But he seems to lack the maturity to conceive the older Smithy – although in fairness it should be stated that the authors have given him precious little to work on. There is not strength in the character, no fierceness, nothing of the fighter, and not enough accent on the strange affinity between him and his “Old Bus”, or even his qualities as pilot. There are only some close-ups of a pleasant young man at the controls, and rather too many long-shots of an aeroplane flying through storms or skimming low over the ocean.  

The writer’s emphasis on the portrayal of Kingsford-Smith is important for two reasons. The first is that it is consistent with how the film has been discussed in other histories of the film industry, including that by Pike and Cooper, who argue that the representation of the main protagonist “owes something to Hollywood conventions of heroism”. Daniel Reynaud similarly describes Randall’s performance as “conforming to the image of the typical

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60 The Bulletin citation as above
Hollywood lead"\textsuperscript{62}. These accounts are the same as \textit{The Bulletin}’s, in terms of how the reviewer argues that the film fails to properly capture the renowned determination of Kingsford-Smith – that there was not enough ‘Anzac distinctiveness’ in the film except for the first few minutes of World War One action. As a result the film industry is conceived of as similarly diminished, for the very reason that Randall’s performance was thought to borrow too heavily from Hollywood convention and is therefore symptomatic of the underlying dilemma of American hegemony in the film industry.

This leads to the second reason: the idea that in discourse such as this review the film industry is urged to borrow more heavily from Anzac heroism. The reviewer’s main issue with Randall’s performance is that he has failed to deliver the type of performance that could be considered emblematic of the ‘soldier-warrior’. At one point, the reviewer even uses the phrase ‘warrior’ to describe the real-life Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith: ‘People who knew him have recorded that Smithy never talked very much; he looked like a warrior – there was something fierce about him’\textsuperscript{63}. This is a reference to how Kingsford-Smith is depicted as the heroic Great War-fighter pilot in the opening scenes of the story, during which he shoots down enemy planes before he is heroically shot down himself. The reviewer’s comment, that ‘there is not strength in the character, no fierceness, nothing of the fighter’, but rather ‘there are only some close-ups of a pleasant young man at the controls’, simply implies that although the story is prefaced by Kingsford-Smith’s war-time heroics the remainder of the narrative has failed to adequately sustain this heroic image.

If the film is to be read as an allegory of the film industry then its reticence to sustain a depiction of Kingsford-Smith that is in the image of the soldier-warrior – or the ‘digger’ – also implies a diminished outcome for the film industry in the fight against Hollywood. This


\textsuperscript{63} This quote is taken from elsewhere in the review. \textit{The Bulletin} citation as above.
is consistent with how the film was presented to audiences and exhibitors in the influential film trade papers. The underlying theme of the following Film Weekly piece is that Smithy represented a heroic new chapter for the film industry, although within the context of the cinema’s ‘secondary’ status:

Development of Australian feature film production as a stable secondary industry was freely predicted last night following the spectacular success of “Smithy” at the State [theatre]. Among theatre men, distributors and experienced critics the opinion was unanimous that “Smithy” reached world standards in production technique and quality of treatment.64

Whether intentional or not the reference here to the film industry as a ‘secondary industry’ implies that Australian cinema was stranded on the margins of the domestic film economy. Furthermore, the conception of the film industry as ‘secondary’ is etched into the narrative of the film in its numerous examples of self-reflexiveness. In one scene early in the story, Kingsford-Smith is shown visiting his brother Harold in San Francisco where he has gone in search of backers for his record-breaking Pacific Ocean crossing. At one point Kingsford-Smith says to his brother, who has lived in the United States for several years: “Say Harold, what’s happened to our Aussie accent?” The quip about his brother’s accent might just as easily stand for the Americanisation of the film industry, as do the other moments of incongruousness for the cinema in this film. In the scene immediately before this one Kingsford-Smith is shown travelling through the United States countryside on his way to his brother’s home. The scene takes place in a train as Kingsford-Smith explains to another passenger why he wants to be the first aviator to cross the Pacific Ocean.

The scene as unfolds as follows:

**Kingsford-Smith:** As a matter of fact, I’m going to fly the Pacific.

**Kay:** Fly the Pacific? Why?

**Kingsford-Smith:** Why? It’s hard to say in a few words. All that west out there, a few years ago was wild and unknown. One man crossed it and dozens followed. Your country was better off for it. Well, it’s the same thing with the Pacific. When air travel is proved safe whole new possibilities will be opened up. Well, someone’s got to be crazy enough to lead the way.

The significance of this exchange lies in the way that Kingsford-Smith simultaneously gestures towards the vast American west as he extols the heroic deeds of that nation’s pioneering settlers and not of his own nation’s pioneers. Shirley has explained about this aspect of the film that the treatment of the Pacific Ocean crossing is such that it means “as much to Uncle Sam as it does to Australia”\(^6\). In another scene Kingsford-Smith and fellow explorer Sir Hubert Wilkins are shown discussing their plans for further record-breaking flights, associating their expeditions with Christopher Columbus’s founding of America. This is not the only time during the narrative that the comparison to Columbus is made. By making explicit the connection between Kingsford-Smith’s pioneering ambitions and the conquering of the Americas, *Smithy* inadvertently gestures toward the inevitability of Australian cinema, in terms of the direction that it would take, or was taking, at the time that the film first appeared on screens. Kingsford-Smith’s likening of his own heroic feats to the expansion of the American west in the earlier scene, for example, seems little different to the

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\(^6\) Shirley citation as above, 1994: p.28.
filming, in Australia, of this movie by the studio Columbia, which is emblematic of the American pioneering theme – of Hollywood ‘expansionism’.

When we take into account Columbia’s hasty exit after this film and the consequences for both Cinesound and the ‘individual, pioneering filmmaker’ Ken G. Hall, then Smithy was paradoxically both a source of optimism for the film industry as well as helping to hasten the demise of independent film production. John Baxter has alluded to the same inevitable decline for the film industry: “Smithy marked the end of Australia’s flirtation with studio film production and of Hall’s career as a feature director”66. Thus, while Kingsford-Smith’s numerous feats, not least the Pacific crossing, are undoubtedly portrayed in the heroic image of the ‘Anzac-aviator’ – culminating in a depiction of the film industry that is just as heroic – Smithy also reveals much about Hollywood’s ascendency during this phase of the cinema.

**Conclusion**

This is consistent with the analysis earlier in the chapter about The Overlanders, where it was argued that Watt’s film also culminates in a depiction of the film industry that is in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. On the other hand, the Ealing Studios experience reveals just as much about the film industry’s transition away from Britain and towards the United States after the war. If we are to think about The Overlanders as reflecting the film industry’s underlying anxieties about cultural imperialism then both this film and Smithy more than likely are pre-emptive of how the relationship between cinema and national identity grew more strained into the next decade. This is the basis of the argument in the next chapter which examines the location films made in Australia in the 1950s. These films correspond to a time,

as Molloy’s words on the fate of the film industry after *The Overlanders* suggest, when the invasion is all but complete:

Undoubtedly *The Overlanders* constitutes the high-water mark in Ealing Studios’ celebration of the Australian character…The low-water mark of Ealing’s portrayal of the Australian character was to occur in *The Siege of Pinchgut* [1959] which had no scenes in the bush at all, and in which even the major Australian roles were played by non-Australian actors.\(^{67}\)

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\(^{67}\) Molloy citation as above, 1990: p.171.
This chapter examines the location filmmaking of the 1950s, with a particular emphasis on the influence of the Anzac legend on the two overseas-made films, *On the Beach* (1959) and *The Desert Rats* (1953). The following question is asked: what does the heroic portrayal of the Anzac legend in these Hollywood-financed productions reveal about the film industry’s relation to the dominant Hollywood cinema? Like the war films examined in the previous chapters, this way of conceiving of the film industry as ‘heroic’ is underpinned by the bush mythology. The underlying influence of radical nationalism in Australian films, and what the Bush legend implies about the presence of a dominant cultural power in Australian culture, shapes our understanding of how the film industry sees its own heroic struggle in the two films. It is argued that the Bush-Anzac legend is the source of optimism not only for the main protagonists of each story but for the film industry in its own heroic journey. In a rhetorical sense, there was an expectation in both films and in discourse on the films that the Anzac legend could revitalise the nation’s fledgling film industry.

The film industry of the 1950s is routinely discussed as dominated by ‘location films’ made by American, but also British film companies in Australia. Tom O’Regan calls the 1950s …a period which is more often than not important for what did not happen than for what did: local cinema exhibition and distribution
withdrew from film production thereby disenfranchising local producers and forcing them into what are generally seen to be either under-capitalised or culturally inauthentic "location films".¹

Stuart Cunningham has similarly written about the 1950s that it was a decade of international co-productions and foreign-financed films made in Australia². These conspired to overshadow the Australian product in terms of visibility and quality³. Cunningham explains about this phase of the cinema that “It is a project, essentially, of ‘exploitation film-making – exploitation of the antipodean as exoticism’⁴. In some respects, the study of the 1950s’ film industry represents a consolidation of the themes that were explored in the previous chapter that focussed on Smithy and The Overlanders (1946). Whereas the metaphor in relation to those films was ‘invasion’, in this period the theme that typifies discussions about On the Beach and The Desert Rats is that of a ‘gallant stand’. This is the context to the underlying dilemma of American hegemony in Australia’s film industry, while also illustrating how the film industry saw itself as heroic in response to Hollywood’s dominance.

Both of these overseas-produced films are usually presented as evidence of the ideological space between film industry and national identity during this decade, a symptom of the demise of independent film production. However, rather than examine this phase of the cinema as a time of ‘nothing happening’, as is routinely implied in studies about the film industry, The Desert Rats and On the Beach present an opportunity to explore the survival of the national screen culture and the centrality of the Anzac legend to the survival of that culture. The underlying influence of Bush-Anzac themes in both films helped to keep alive

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3 Bruce Molloy, Before the Interval: Australian mythology and feature films, 1930-1960 (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990); p.39
4 Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.68.
the idea of a film industry during a decade that Cunningham has described as “the lowest point that the Australian cinema had reached”\(^5\). Brian McFarlane has argued that home-grown feature films were all but invisible during this phase, adding that “It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that there was no indigenous Australian cinema in the twenty years after the war”\(^6\). Dermody and Jacka’s assessment of the cinema’s post-war period is just as bleak, and argue that “by the beginning of the sixties Australia had been without a film industry for over twenty years”\(^7\).

Alternatively, Helen Grace’s argument about the ‘persistence of culture’ represents a revisionist approach to the same phase of the film industry, which she argues is derided as a culture of absence: as a place of “nothing happening, where history has never begun”\(^8\). Grace argues about the ‘persistence of culture’ that it is a space where a fierce survival of spirit inhabits a landscape that is left behind, a space in which feature film production merely persisted, “rather like a hardy plant in the desert”\(^9\). In the context of On the Beach, the film that she is writing about, the picture receives scant attention because for the film industry it is representative of the type of film that “we do not want here in a landscape of persistence, which is resistant to the importation of foreignness in all its forms.”\(^10\) Grace goes on to explain that the metaphor of ‘persistence’ becomes the basis for an image of Reticent heroism, rather than anti-heroism, applied to the culture as a whole and embodied most strongly in the figure of Tom Kruse in

\(^5\) Cunningham citation as above, 1989: pp. 67-68.
\(^9\) Grace citation as above, 2001: pp.289-301.
\(^10\) Grace citation as above, 2001: pp. 289-301.
John Heyer’s *Back of Beyond* [1954], projected forward to Mel Gibson in the *Mad Max* trilogy [in the 1980s].

In *On the Beach*, the film’s reticent heroism is characterised by the Gregory Peck-played Dwight Towers, who emerges as a ‘reluctant Anzac’ as the story unfolds. The Bush-Anzac legend has an underlying influence in this process of transformation just as it does in *The Desert Rats*, in which reticent heroism is applicable to the character of MacRoberts, the Richard Burton-played British commander of the Australian troops. Like Towers, by the end of *The Desert Rats* MacRoberts has mythically transformed into the heroic image of the Australian troops that, for most of the story, he has reluctantly commanded. In both films the transformation that is apparent in the main protagonists is central to how the film industry is depicted in the heroic image of the Anzac legend because the fierceness and transformative powers of the mythology are portrayed as influential even on non-Australian combatants. This is a reluctant, or a ‘reticent’ form of Anzac heroism that is encoded in the main characterisations, with the transformation that is apparent in the non-Australian combatants consolidating the ‘Australianness’ of the films in question.

This is how the films were presented to audiences in public discourse. The following newspaper review of *The Desert Rats* published in *The Sunday Mail* describes the Hollywood-made film as ‘Australian’:

> British film critics are flaying the American film, 'The Desert Rats', for allegedly exaggerating the Australian's share in the defence of Tobruk. The film is built around the Tobruk experiences of one Australian battalion led by a young British officer. No other troops are depicted. Sample reviews are:- *[The London] Daily Express:* The

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11 Grace citation as above, 2001” pp.289-301.
Australians fought there, but I do not think that is sufficient reason for
having the sound track burst out in 'Waltzing Matilda' every time
there is a lull in the firing — every time, that is, until the awaited
reinforcements arrive.\textsuperscript{12}

The reference to the film exaggerating the role of the Australian troops ‘in the defence of
Tobruk’ establishes the discourse of the ‘bushman-soldier’ as the film’s main stereotype. This
is what the reviewer implies when writing that ‘No other troops are depicted’ – that the film
culminates in a heroic depiction of the Bush-Anzac legend. The subsequent citing of The
London Express review is crucial to how Waltzing Matilda in this film, just as it does in On
the Beach, stands for the indomitable fighting qualities of the ‘digger’. The British source of
the commentary suggests that the song had achieved international renown as a motif for the
Anzac legend, a mythic lineage that was established in earlier Anzac-themed films, including
those by Pat Hanna in the early days of the sound cinema\textsuperscript{13}. Pike and Cooper have further
explained about the song that the box office success of Forty Thousand Horsemen in the
early 1940s popularised Waltzing Matilda overseas. They quote from a New York Times
review of Chauvel’s film that establishes the symbolic link between the song and the mythos
of the Anzac. The review reads in part: “Those earlier Anzacs were men’s men, all of them,
and when they rode toward battle with a full-throated “Waltzing Mathilde” (sic) they were
fearful folk”\textsuperscript{14}. If we compare this quotation with this passage from the London Express –
‘The Australians fought there, but I do not think that is sufficient reason for having the sound
track burst out in ‘Waltzing Matilda’ every time there is a lull in the firing’ – there is the same
underlying theme that the song substitutes for Anzac heroism.

\textsuperscript{12} The [Brisbane] Sunday Mail, 26\textsuperscript{th} of April, 1953: p.4.
\textsuperscript{13} Pike & Cooper note how the song was used in Hanna’s films including Diggers (1931), the follow-up Diggers
in Blighty (1933) and the self-titled film, Waltzing Matilda (1933). In Australian Film 1900-1977 (Melbourne:
\textsuperscript{14} Pike & Cooper citation as above, 1998: p.193.
Historical accounts of *On the Beach* similarly acknowledge the symbolic connection between the song and the film’s ‘Australianness’. In his description of Stanley Kramer’s film as among the most identifiable movies of the decade, Douglas Brode alludes to the symbolic importance of the song to the film’s theme:

> The haunting Australian folk song “Waltzing Matilda” was at first intended for use in only one scene. But director Kramer found it so appropriate to the mood of his piece that he requested…to make it the dominant musical theme of the picture.\(^{15}\)

This symbolic importance of *Waltzing Matilda* and what the song implies about ‘Anzac heroism’ is pivotal to how both films are depicted in the heroic image of the legend, at the same time alerting us to the mythic heritage they share with earlier Australian war films. In *The Desert Rats* this mythic heritage extends beyond the use of the song and is highly visible, much more so than in *On the Beach*, because the film’s depiction of the Australian soldier is consistent with earlier cinematic versions that also owe their allegiance to 1890s’ radical nationalism. These radical nationalist origins are an important factor in the argument that the film industry, in this film, is portrayed in the same heroic image as the Bush-Anzac legend, because the most conspicuous of the story’s characterisations\(^{16}\) is that of the ‘bushman-soldier’. In this context, *The Desert Rats* has an obvious predecessor – Charles Chauvel’s earlier version of the same battle, *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944). Both films feature Chips Rafferty in key roles, while Rafferty’s recognisability with cinematic notions of ‘Bush-Anzac

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\(^{16}\) Stuart Cunningham has observed that in documentary dramas like this film, that the most conspicuous of the story’s figures display a “heightened degree of typification of character”. Citation as above, 1989: p.63.
Australianness also strengthens the case that the film industry sees its own heroic struggle in *The Desert Rats*.

An article published in *The Barrier Miner* newspaper described *The Desert Rats* as "Hollywood's version of *The Rats of Tobruk". Both films celebrate the bushman-fighting prowess of the Australian soldiers – as the ‘bush heroes’ of desert warfare – which is pivotal to their cultural construction of the national identity. As Shirley and Adams have pointed out in relation to *The Rats of Tobruk*, Chauvel’s motivation for making the film during the height of the Second World War was such that he wanted to mythologise the bush origins of the Australian soldiers, just as he also did in *Forty Thousand Horsemen*:

Concerned at the absence of the Australian soldier from feature films, Chauvel intended to pay tribute to the heroes of desert and jungle warfare, who provided the closest parallel to the First World War, exploits depicted in *Forty Thousand Horsemen*.19

Like Chauvel’s film, *The Desert Rats* is immersed in a representation of the Australian soldiers based on their skill as desert-jungle fighters. This is how the film was presented to audiences in discourse on the film, as a tribute to the indomitable fighting prowess of the ‘Bushman-Anzac’:

‘The Desert Rats’ is the studio’s square-off – to Australia in particular. It’s a generous tribute to the 9th Division’s part in the defence of Tobruk. In fact, it gives the impression the Diggers were the only Allied troops in the siege. And, helped by some shots from

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17 Andrew Zielinski argues that Rafferty’s previous roles in Chauvel’s war films and *The Overlanders* meant that he was widely regarded, at home and abroad, as the stereotypical ‘Bushman-Anzac’. The Persistence of the Bush Myth*, *Screen Education*, 45 (2007): pp.135-139.
19 *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years* (Hong Kong: Currency Press, 1989); p. 168.
the documentary “Desert Victory”, its fighting sequences are exciting and credible.²⁰

The reviewer’s remark that the film ‘gives the impression the Diggers were the only Allied troops in the siege’ is a tipping of the hat to the bushman’s heroic fighting style: the ‘never-say-die’ spirit that is synonymous with the Anzac legend. The added statement – ‘…helped by some shots from the documentary “Desert Victory”, its fighting sequences are exciting and credible’ – alludes to the efficacy of the film in conflating the history of the battle at Tobruk with the mythology, which relates to the discourse of the ‘Bushman-Anzac’. The story’s blending of fictional action sequences with documentary footage (from Desert Victory) is characterised in this review as heightening the realism of the film’s combat sequences. It is this blurring of the line between fictional recreation and documentary truthfulness that embellishes the heroic feats of the diggers who are at the centre of the action.

The suggested proximity to the genre of the documentary-drama is another important aspect of the mythic heritage that The Desert Rats shares with earlier Australian war films. Chauvel’s two war epics also make frequent use of documentary inserts and, in the case of The Rats of Tobruk, an omniscient narrator who dispenses important information about the military campaign as it unfolds. Cunningham has examined the 1940s’ and ‘50s’ Australian cinema, with a particular emphasis on The Overlanders (1946), and argues that films like The Overlanders owe their allegiance to the documentary-drama, which represents a “reframing of the British tradition”²¹. The significance of the (British) documentary tradition in the local cinematic context was that it formed the stylistic response to the problem of Hollywood hegemony, which in turn implies the self reflexivity of the film industry. The inclusion of

²¹ Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.63.
documentary footage in some films, therefore, was part of the “exciting range of film style, format and experimentation”\(^{22}\) as a response to Hollywood dominance. In other words, The Overlanders and another of the Ealing films, Eureka Stockade (1949), were typical of the film industry’s innovation “against the Hollywood paradigm”\(^{23}\).

The Desert Rats is in the same documentary tradition, further suggesting that the film industry’s heroic struggle is evident within the narrative structure of the film – that is, as a site of cultural imperialism. This is consistent with how The Desert Rats has been problematised in other historical accounts. In discussing the film’s portrayal of the Tobruk campaign, Jeff Doyle has argued that the film industry might also have “taken issue about our marginalisation within its [the film’s] imaginary”\(^{24}\). At the level of metaphor, this is how the film’s underlying theme of a ‘gallant stand’ – of Anzac heroism – is relatable to the film industry’s heroic struggle against the Hollywood cinema. This is truth in the image for the film industry, the theme of a ‘gallant stand’, in as much as Anzac heroism is characterised by the gallant lads who singlehandedly hold back Rommel’s advancing forces. The heroic images on the screen equate to how the film industry, in this film, realises the extent of the struggle for its own independence.

In the following review taken from The Film Bulletin publication, the writer’s comment that the film ‘re-enacts the gallant stand by Australian forces’ is not only a reference to the film’s commitment to docu-drama realism, but it also tends to implicate the film industry in the same heroic struggle:

\(^{22}\) Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.62.
\(^{23}\) Cunningham citation as above, 1989: p.61.
“The Desert Rats” re-enacts the gallant stand by Australian forces at Tobruk in mid-1941 under the hammer blow pressures of Rommel’s Africa corps.²⁵

On the Beach

The metaphor of a ‘gallant stand’ also substitutes for the struggle of the film industry in On the Beach, the most prominent of the 1950s’ location films. In Kramer’s picture the underlying influence of the Anzac legend is, on the one hand, obvious when we consider the ubiquitous presence of Waltzing Matilda and what the song implies about Anzac heroism. However, unlike in The Desert Rats there is no military battle that is concurrently fought in On the Beach. Indeed, the military battle in Kramer’s film has been fought and lost even before the opening credits roll. As a result, the Anzac legend simply implies ‘heroism’, the motif for which is the repeated playing of the song. The dilemma that confronts the characters/film industry in this story relates to heroism in the face of certain death/defeat. This is the Anzac legend in its purest form, as John Hirst has explained about the mythology: “It is a legend not of sweeping military victories so much as triumph against the odds, of courage and ingenuity in the face of adversity”²⁶. This is the context of the ‘real’ battle in this story, which is set against the backdrop of post-apocalyptic Australia: to go on living in the face of certain death; to be heroic to the end. This is what the theme of a ‘gallant stand’ implies in On the Beach, willing the main characters to heroically soldier on, while the metaphor also characterises how the film industry sees itself in the same heroic image.

²⁵ The Film Bulletin, 18th of May, 1953: p.10.
The metaphor of a ‘gallant last stand’ underscores discourse on the film, including this review published in *The Modern Screen*:

The end of the world is near after an atomic war. Gregory Peck, Anthony Perkins and Fred Astaire are part of a crew of an American atomic submarine headed for Australia, the only safe place left. Perkins’ wife, Donna Anderson, is pregnant; Ava Gardner is in love with Peck (who remembers only his dead wife and child). Astaire finds nothing left to him but suicide auto-racing. The banner in Melbourne’s square says “There’s still time brother.” Find out how much!27

The observation that Australia is ‘the only safe place left’ is consistent with how the scenario is established immediately after the opening credits, in which a radio broadcast pronounces: “The atomic war has ended but the Prime Minister reports no proof of survival of human life anywhere but here”. This ‘end of world scenario’ and the conjunctive idea that Australia is the last surviving place are concomitant with the theme of a ‘gallant last stand’. The symbolic importance of Bush-Anzac heroism, which is reinforced by the repeated playing of *Waltzing Matilda*, is that it influences the character motivations at strategic moments during the narrative, at the same time alerting the audience to the film’s ‘Australianness’. This is consistent with how the film has been written about in terms of how it conveys a unique Australian sentiment. Helen Grace has found that while the film version differs from Nevil Shute’s novel of the same name the movie closely resembles Shute’s book in the portrayal of a distinctive Australian ethos. Grace has argued: “Shute’s importance in registering Australia

as a social utopian space in the 1950s should not be underestimated”\textsuperscript{28}. This point is critical to an understanding of how the film is distinguishable from ‘typical Hollywood’.

Further still, the documentary-styled treatment of the story’s serious thematic content – that is, its tendency towards realism – is equally important to this ‘distinctiveness’. Like \textit{The Desert Rats}, the tendency towards realism helps to establish \textit{On the Beach}’s heritage with the Australian war genre, in particular with \textit{The Overlanders} (1946), in terms of what this heritage reveals about the film industry’s response to Hollywood hegemony. Tom O’Regan explains about the location films of the 1950s that they were influenced by the earlier documentary-dramas, most notably \textit{The Overlanders}, and not by Hollywood:

\begin{quote}

The significant catalyst for the Australian "location film" was the docu-drama, \textit{The Overlanders}, filmed on outback location. Its international and local success, coupled with the Australian presence of Harry Watt in the latter part of the 1940s as its outspoken advocate, made it a touchstone film. It set a new agenda for Australian filmmakers and critics alike which lasted into the 1950s.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

These locational qualities of \textit{On the Beach} were often referred to in public debate about the film. In a review published in \textit{The Film Weekly}, the film’s documentary mode of story-telling and the conjunctive emphasis on ‘location-ism’ were considered pivotal to the film’s distinctiveness – its ‘Australianness’:

\begin{quote}

Almost terrifying in its stark realism, “On the Beach” rates as one of the top motion pictures of 1959 – a great motion picture which comes close to being an absolute masterpiece. Kramer has pulled no punches
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{28} Grace citation as above, 2001: p.293.
\textsuperscript{29} O’Regan citation as above, 1988: pp. 1-25
in handling his dramatic story material, giving the film an impact which should do much to heighten the horror of atomic war and deepen the desire for peace. “On the Beach” may not be considered entertainment by many patrons, but it is a production which they will not be able to leave.\(^\text{30}\)

The writer’s argument that the film ‘may not be considered entertainment by many patrons but it is a production which they will not be able to leave’ is more than a general statement about the ‘horror of atomic war’. The implication here is that the realistic treatment of the film’s serious thematic content is the key point of difference between Kramer’s film and the typical Hollywood film. This point of difference is only partly relatable to the film’s generic traits which derive from the documentary-drama, and what these qualities reveal to us about the film industry’s stylistic distance from Hollywood. Rather, this commentary is also reminiscent of an established line of thematic development in public discussions about Australian war films that was examined in the previous chapters, and which suggests that the film industry was somehow ‘punching above its weight’ in its heroic struggle with the Hollywood film industry\(^\text{31}\). This is the underlying sentiment of *The Film Weekly*'s review: the suggestion that this film ushered in a new epoch in Australian cinema production.

**The Reluctant Anzac**

There were also ideological considerations as to why the location films stressed outdoor settings – or the bush landscape – reasons that were deeply imbricated in “what kind of


\(^{31}\) For example, Chapter 2 examined the early documentaries of Frank Hurley, some of which predated the Anzac legend. In discourse, Hurley was routinely discussed as ‘punching above his weight’, which became a recurring theme in discussions about the heroic film industry.
Australian filmmaking would be acceptable in international and local cinema markets”\(^\text{32}\). The emphasis on ‘landscape exploitationism’ indicated the importance of documentary stylistic elements to the feature film output of the decade\(^\text{33}\). But O’Regan’s argument also alludes to the influence of the Bush legend in location films that include *On the Beach*. Graeme Turner has pointed out in his study of the representation of the bush in the nation’s cinema and literature that “the legend is one to which our film industry has continually turned to produce images of Australia for both local and overseas consumption”\(^\text{34}\). Bruce Molloy has similarly argued in relation to *The Sundowners* (1960) that it is probably the most successful of the location films in capturing the Australian atmosphere because “this sense of Australianness is helped further by the settings of bush landscape and country town”\(^\text{35}\). Molloy’s argument highlights the importance of the classic ‘bush versus city’ divide, one of the most recurring (radical-nationalist) binary oppositions in Australian film narratives.

At first glance *On the Beach*’s nationalist credentials appear less certain than those of *The Sundowners*, with the Kramer film’s proximity to the national identity questioned in most historical accounts about the film industry. Shirley and Adams contend that *On the Beach* “could give no more than an adequate impression of national identity than [other international films] *Pinchgut* or *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll”\(^\text{36}\). Brian McFarlane has similarly said of the film that it “might have been made anywhere”\(^\text{37}\), while Molloy describes both *On the Beach* and *The Sundowners* as the most obvious examples of the ‘internationalisation’ of Australian stories and themes during this phase of the cinema\(^\text{38}\). Molloy’s emphasis on the

\(^{32}\) O’Regan citation as above, 1988: pp.1-25.  
\(^{33}\) O’Regan citation as above, 1988: pp. 1-25.  
\(^{35}\) Molloy citation as above, 1993: p.87.  
\(^{36}\) *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years* (Hong Kong: Currency Press, 1989); p.208.  
film’s depiction of the city is useful here, in spite of how he concludes that this aspect plays no significant part in the story’s overall relations:

*On the Beach*...is drawn from Nevil Shute’s novel describing a group of American and Australian characters waiting in Melbourne for a fatal radiation cloud following a nuclear holocaust which has obliterated human life in the northern hemisphere. The leading characters are played by Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire and Anthony Perkins, and the setting in Melbourne plays no significant part in depiction of either characters or society.\(^{39}\)

The Bush-City Divide

In this section, it is argued that the reliance in Kramer’s film on the ‘bush-city’ binary opposition is understated in most historical accounts about the film’s importance to ideas about the national identity. Indeed, this set of opposites is pivotal to how the film industry, in this film, culminates in the heroic image of the Bush-Anzac legend\(^{40}\). In examining the importance of the ‘city-bush’ opposition the emphasis is on the character development of Dwight Towers, and what will be referred to as his transition to ‘Anzac heroism’. It is Towers’ eventual defiance in the face of certain death – a symbolic point that he arrives at because of the conjunctive influence of the Bush and Anzac legends – that culminates in a heroic image for both him and the film industry.

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\(^{39}\) Molloy citation as above, 1993: p.87.

\(^{40}\) Andrew Zielinski argues that in the films there is typically “the positive values of the bush juxtaposed with the negative constraints of the city. In *Australian Cinema in the 1930 and 1940s*: Citation as above, 2007: pp.135-139.
While glimpses of the bush in Kramer’s film are scattered they are nevertheless significant. Only good things are depicted as happening in the outback: Towers and his local romantic interest, Moira Davidson, romantically unite; the Australian scientist ‘Julian’ wins the Australian Grand Prix motor race at a country track; and in an earlier scene all of the story’s key characters are shown enjoying a day at a rural-beachside setting. On the other hand the city – in this case Melbourne – is the site of impending doom and disaster. This is where much of the lead-up to the approaching radiation cloud is planned for and discussed, and it is also where ‘the end’ is confirmed. In the film’s climactic scenes the end of the world is portrayed through a rapid montage of images of an abandoned central Melbourne. Photographic in nature these images have the appearance of still photographs, capturing the stark realism of a post-apocalyptic metropolis.

The city-bush distinction in this film is most clearly realised in the transformation that is apparent in Towers as the story progresses. In the first half of the film, Towers is shown as emotionally detached to the point of ineptness, as he struggles with his personal demons because of the profound consequences of decisions that were out of his control. This is the struggle for Towers in this story – to find the will to continue on in the direst of circumstances. In a scene outside the Flinders Street Railway Station, for example, Towers refuses Davidson’s advances and explains his inability to come to terms with the fate of his wife and children who perished during the war in the United States. This is where we see Towers at his most vulnerable, and for the first and only time in the story he appears flustered and emotional, which is at odds with his otherwise dignified and controlled demeanour.

This is in part what he says to Davidson:

See in the Navy, during the war I got used to the idea that something might happen to me, I might not make it. But I also got used to the
idea that my wife and children [were] safe at home, see, they’d be alright, no matter what. What I didn’t reckon with was that in this kind of monstrous war something might happen to them, and not to me. Well it did, and I can’t cope with it.

Towers is transformed from how we see him here – consumed by despair – to such an extent that by the story’s mid-point he has begun to recover his will to continue on in his heroic journey. In the sequence immediately before the mid-point, Towers travels back to the United States where the submarine’s combined Australian-American crew confirms that there were no human survivors from the nuclear war. This scene is pre-emptive of the film’s conclusion in that the images of an abandoned San Francisco resemble those of Melbourne at the end, consolidating the mythic depiction of the ‘city’ as the crucible of the end of the world. This is in stark contrast to the next scene, which is immediately after the mid-point, and is set in the sprawling Australian outback.

The idyllic outback imagery of this scene depicts the bush as the symbolic, or the mythic heart of the story, while the instrumental version of Waltzing Matilda that plays across the action consolidates the underlying theme of Bush-Anzac nationalism. This is a pivotal moment in the narrative, particularly in Towers’ character arc, because this is where he begins to recover his will to continue on in his heroic journey, a transformation that takes place in the Australian bush – the heart of the national mythology. Soon after the establishing shot of the outback, Towers and Davidson are shown spontaneously embracing, a stark contrast to their earlier, angst-ridden encounter at the city train station. This is the point in the narrative where Towers ‘turns the corner’ in his heroic journey; where he decides to abandon his former life and begin living again. In the context of this film his decision

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41 Molloy refers to the outback, specifically central Australia, as the heart of the mythology in his analysis of a scene from The Overlanders: citation as above, 1990: p.170.
seems profoundly heroic when we consider that the world is edging towards an inevitable cataclysm.

The portrayal of the bush in this way – that is, as the source of Towers’ inspiration in the struggle to continue on in his heroic journey – is characteristic of how the outback is presented in film narratives during this phase of Australian cinema. In this regard, the scene from *On the Beach* is mythically reminiscent of an equally symbolic moment in *Smithy*, in which Kingsford-Smith tells his nephews the story about a ‘knight’ (Kingsford-Smith) who must return to the Never-Never land in order to recover his courage to continue on in his (Kingsford-Smith’s) heroic journey. The Towers-Davidson scene has the same gravitas as the scene from *Smithy* that was outlined in the previous chapter. The transformation that is apparent in Towers is reaffirmed a few scenes later when, during an intimate dinner with Davidson at a rural fishing retreat his transition to Anzac heroism is not only confirmed, but it is also pivotal to establishing the film’s mythic heritage with the Australian war genre. It is this symbolic connection to earlier war films – the idea that Kramer’s film shares an ‘Anzac heritage’ – that alerts us to the possibility that *On the Beach* culminates in a depiction of the film industry that is in the heroic image of the legend; that the film industry sees its own heroic struggle in this film.

During the dinner scene with Davidson, Towers is at first shown to be in a deeply contemplative mood. At one point he purposely rises from the room’s log fire just as the song’s most heroic phrase – “You’ll never take me alive, said he” – floods the soundtrack. The song is performed as a vocal arrangement and in the absence of dialogue from either of the characters the score substitutes for character. The action in this scene is the clearest example in the film of how Towers displays an Anzac-like heroism. In his ‘emotional journey’ this is the culminating point for Towers, particularly in the way that he determinedly approaches Davidson before the two characters are shown in a prolonged embrace. At the
symbolic level this is where Towers commits to ‘not to be taken alive’ – just as the song’s lyrics suggest – and which is, as a result, the same underlying sentiment of the image. This is truth in the image for both Towers and the film industry – to not be taken alive. At its most basic level the Anzac legend simply implies heroism. The song, by virtue of how it is used in this scene to substitute for character, consolidates the film’s underlying theme of heroism in the face of certain death/defeat.

The significance of this scene also lies in how it establishes the film’s mythic lineage, if we are to undertake a comparative analysis with an equally important scene from *Forty Thousand Horsemen*. In the Chauvel film the song is used in a similar manner – to imply the central protagonists’ determination not to yield, to not be taken alive. As two of the Australian soldiers, Jim and Larry, lay dying the same section of the song – “You’ll never take me alive, said he” – plays over the action. As in Kramer’s film, the song is played as a vocal arrangement and in such a way that the score substitutes for character. While Jim and Larry perish moments later, theirs is represented as a heroic death that is in the unyielding and self-sacrificing manner of the mythical Australian soldier.

In the Chauvel film, this unyielding heroism is the underlying message for Australia’s film industry. The heroic portrayal of the Great-War Anzac combined with the film’s worldwide box-office success gave ‘reassurance’ to the film industry in its historic struggle with the Hollywood cinema, at a pivotal moment when the Second World War had severely curtailed Australian independent film production. Shirley and Adams explain that the film’s international appeal came just as grave concerns were held for the existence of feature film production in Australia. In Chauvel’s film, the nation’s cinema is implored to match the heroism of the ‘advancing light horsemen’ in its heroic struggle with the American film industry. The mythic similarities between the ‘Jim and Larry’ death scene and the Towers-

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*Shirley & Adams citation as above, 1989; p.163*
Davidson scene in *On the Beach*, when we take into account what *Waltzing Matilda* implies about Anzac heroism, suggests that this is also the underlying message for the film industry in Kramer’s film – to not yield, or to not be taken alive.

**The Bushman-Soldier**

The Anzac legend is portrayed as equally influential on MacRoberts, the main protagonist in *The Desert Rats*. The transformative effect of the Anzac spirit on MacRoberts is such that it enamours him to continue on in his heroic battle, which in the context of this film is the military campaign at Tobruk. As in the example of Towers in *On the Beach*, the legend’s transformative powers intervene at a juncture in the narrative when MacRoberts has seemingly lost all hope. Towards the end of the story he wants to abandon the position that the Australian troops have defended all through the film, which is before the Allied reinforcements arrive to rescue them. The heroically stubborn Australian troops, led by the Chips Rafferty-played ‘Blue Smith’, and their refusal to yield to Rommel’s advancing forces is what eventually enamours MacRoberts to ‘dig in’ until the Allied reinforcements arrive.

Although MacRoberts is shown as in command of the Australian soldiers for much of the story, and at times leads them with stoicism and distinction, the underlying influence of the Bush-Anzac legend in this film is also never in doubt. The events that take place towards the end – that is, MacRoberts’ transition to Anzac heroism – are therefore symbolically consistent with the way the story is presented from the beginning, which is in the heroic image of the ‘digger’. The story’s underlying Bush-Anzac theme is established by the narrator who, at strategic moments throughout the narrative, disseminates important information about the military campaign, particularly in terms of the decisive role played by
the Australian troops. For example, this extract is taken from the narrator’s opening monologue:

Suez – the key to the Middle East and with the British in full retreat nothing stood in Rommel’s way but the tiny garrison of empire troops cut off in the Fortress town of Tobruk ... This is the story of Tobruk and the men who made up its garrison. Of the fight they made against the pick of Hitler’s troops and of the nickname they won with blood and bore with pride – ‘The Desert Rats’.

The references to the British in full retreat, the result of which was that ‘nothing stood in Rommel’s way but the tiny garrison of empire [Australian] troops cut off in the fortress town of Tobruk’, establishes the scale of the struggle that confronted the Australian troops at Tobruk. The overarching nationalist theme of Anzac heroism is consolidated when the narrator ends his monologue and we see an Australian soldier (Rafferty’s ‘Blue Smith’) emerged defiantly from the trenches and back into battle at exactly the moment that a rousing rendition of *Waltzing Matilda* floods the soundtrack. The song plays over the ensuing combat scenes and across the opening credits. The idea that the events depicted in the film are a tribute to the heroic Australian troops is repeatedly reaffirmed throughout the film by the narrator who describes the events that have unfolded, or are about to unfold, in overtly heroic terms. In other words, this is presented from the outset as a story about how the resourceful and outnumbered Australian contingent time and again prevails against a formidable opponent. It is this metaphor of a heroic struggle – or in the context of this film, a ‘gallant stand’ – that has historically formed the symbolic connection between the film industry and the Anzac legend. It is this same theme of heroic struggle, therefore, that also enables us to consider that the film industry sees its own struggle in this foreign-made film.
Furthermore, by the end of the film the transformative powers of the legend have resulted in MacRoberts undergoing a similar transition to ‘Anzac heroism’ as that which is evident in Towers in *On the Beach*. In each film, the transformation in the main protagonist is pivotal to how the film is culturally constructed in the heroic image of the Anzac legend – its ‘Australianness’ – because the lead characters are also the most conspicuous of the non-Australian combatants. For MacRoberts, his transition to Anzac heroism is confirmed when he and the Australian battalion come under sustained attack in the film’s closing scenes, which begin with a fierce bombardment that forces them to take cover in the trenches as they await the reinforcements to arrive. Moments prior to the bombardment MacRoberts is shown to be deeply conflicted as to whether he should continue with the military operation during a robust discussion with his assistant, Bartlett. He eventually decides to abandon the position and instructs Bartlett to send out the message to the rest of the troops to withdraw. Bartlett argues the point, but under orders he reluctantly agrees and heads out to the forward position to relay the order to the rest of the troops. A few moments later, MacRoberts follows him out of the dug-out to rejoin the battalion.

The next shot is of an anxious MacRoberts surveying the position only to find that his battalion has remained at the post contrary to his orders. He confronts Rafferty’s ‘Blue Smith’, who confirms that the Australian troops have refused to abandon their position, defying a direct order from their commander. It is at this point that the Australian troops, in particular Smith, are symbolically as close to the ideal of the mythical Australian soldier as at any other stage in the film, although for much of the film the depiction of the Australians stays close to the radical nationalist version of the type, based on their celebrated “passion for
drink, tendency to disobey orders, and effectiveness as fighters when left to their own devices”\textsuperscript{43}.  

The scene that features MacRoberts and Smith unfolds as follows:

\textbf{MacRoberts}: What’s the matter with you? I ordered you to get these men out of here. Where’s Bartlett, I’ll have him court martialled. 

\textbf{Blue Smith}: He told us Sir, but it don’t make no difference. The men won’t go. We ain’t going, neither.

\textbf{MacRoberts}: Won’t go? Where’s Bartlett? 

\textbf{Blue Smith}: He went out to the forward position, Sir. Alone!  

\textit{The air raid signal sounds.}

\textbf{Blue Smith}: That’ll be him. Come on Sir.

At the end of the scene Smith again overrides his commanding officer, this time physically leading him to the safety of the trenches. It is in the next few moments when the bombing begins that the film is most heroically in the image of Australia’s ‘digger’, and concomitantly MacRoberts appears at his most vulnerable. For the first and only time in the story the Australian troops are shown as acting independently of their British commanding officers and at a critical juncture in the campaign. By the end of the bombing raid the Australian troops’ stubborn heroics have proved pivotal to the success of the military campaign, with their decision to determinedly hold out until the Allied tanks arrive paying off as soon as the bombing has ended.

Moreover, it is MacRoberts who is the first to defiantly emerge from the trenches, with his demeanour dramatically transformed from the sense of hopelessness and indecision that consumed him before the bombing began, to the point that he is once again shown to be in command of his battalion, imploring the Australian soldiers to emerge from their trenches before leading them to higher ground. The sense of a heroic military triumph is consolidated by the subsequent images of the Allied tanks, or the cavalry coming to the rescue of the Australian troops. The fictional recreation is juxtaposed with documentary footage of the actual events in 1941, and which is taken from the documentary, Desert Victory. The blending of fictional re-enactment with actuality footage has the further effect of embellishing the heroic decision by the Australian troops to hold out against Rommel’s advancing forces, cloaking this military triumph in the heroic image of the ‘digger’. Of equal significance in these events is MacRoberts’ implied transition to ‘Anzac heroism’, which is pivotal to how the film industry in this film culminates in an image that is as heroic as the Anzac legend, for the very reason that the theme of the ‘bushman-soldier’ is consolidated as the film’s dominant nationalist discourse.

The Reluctant Film Industry

The rousing rendition of Waltzing Matilda that accompanies these heroic images on the screen – that is, of the Australian soldiers celebrating as the Allied tanks roll in from the distance – further consolidates the story’s underlying theme of Anzac heroism. The presence of the song across the opening and closing credits also confirms the notion that the song substitutes for the Anzac legend in this story. This is truth in the image for the film industry in this film, to emulate the heroism of the Australian soldiers in its own heroic struggle against Hollywood. At the mythic level, the narrator’s closing monologue that the
Australians’ ‘stubborn courage’ at Tobruk won them an ‘unforgettable place in the world’s history of battles’ is a friendly nudge to the nation’s besieged film industry to match the courage of the ‘sweating, dirty, hopelessly outnumbered [Australian] garrison’.

But the heroic events that take place in these final scenes – that is, the arrival of the Allied armoured tanks to rescue the under siege Australian soldiers and their British commander – also presents a dilemma for the film industry in its relation to the dominant Hollywood cinema. Although Waltzing Matilda is a motif for the Anzac heroism in this film, just as it is in On the Beach, the song’s use across the opening and closing credits of both films also implies its seamless integration, along with what the song symbolises, into the dominant cinematic discourse of Hollywood. In The Desert Rats the song’s playing at the end to coincide with the arrival of a more powerful military force coming to the rescue of the Australian troops, when this emotive visual imagery is related to the struggle of the film industry, highlights the underlying dilemma of Hollywood hegemony.

This is also truth in the image for the film industry in this film: the idea that despite the Australian soldiers’ heroics there is the presence in this story of a more powerful military force, just as there is a more powerful cinematic force in the film industry. The inclusion of documentary footage of the Allied reinforcements coming to their rescue at the end of the film consolidates the metaphor of a more powerful force. Although the nationality of the cavalry force(s) in the documentary footage is never revealed the closing monologue that is voiced by an American narrator, and which accompanies these scenes, provides enough scope to consider that the implications for the film industry relate to the ‘Americanisation’ of Australian content and themes.

This reading is consistent with the critical reaction to the film, in terms of how public discourse was inclined to emphasise the film’s ‘compromised Australianness’:
To the accompaniment of a jazzed-up Waltzing Matilda, the boom of the cannon and assorted accents, the siege of Tobruk is re-lived and re-fought in a film, “The Desert Rats”. And 20th Century Fox has been surprisingly painstaking in making this tribute to Australia's 'Rats.' That is, of course, apart from a few technicalities like the aforesaid rendition of Waltzing Matilda and the predominance of Cockney accented Diggers.44

The opening sentence – ‘to the accompaniment of a jazzed-up Waltzing Matilda, the boom of the cannon and assorted accents, the siege of Tobruk is re-lived and re-fought’ – emphasises the most heroic mythic elements of the legend. The idea that the battle is 'relived and refought' in this film is where the reader is made to match the heroism of the gallant lads with the film itself when we consider that The Desert Rats in this review is presented as 'Australian'. The reader is placed in the trenches with the diggers as they undertake their heroic struggle, while this imagery also stands for the struggle of the national film industry. The review, therefore, follows a line of thematic development in writing about Australian war films that associates the heroic depiction of the film industry with the Anzac image, and the fact that the film was shot overseas is a secondary consideration45. This is a method of depicting Australian film as ‘heroic’, thus placing it within the image of the Anzacs, a recurring theme in public debate about Australian cinema that began with the first tranche of war films during the Great War and was still apparent during this phase of the cinema.

Paradoxically, the reviewer’s observation that ‘20th Century Fox has been surprisingly painstaking in making this tribute to Australia’s Rats' is more than just a statement about the heroics of ‘Australia’s Rats’ in this film. This sentence also reads like a commentary about

45 In this and the other reviews that I have referred to, where the film was made is not even mentioned.
the struggle of the film industry during this decade, particularly when we consider the underlying dilemma of location filmmaking in Australia. There is a suggestion in discourse such as this review that the film, however heroic and well intentioned, culminates in a muddled expression of Australian nationalism. As the reviewer goes on to observe, the film is notable for “…a jazzed-up Waltzing Matilda [and] the boom of the cannon and assorted accents’, the implication of which is a compromised identity for both nation and film industry.

Hollywoodisation

In *On the Beach*, the playing of *Waltzing Matilda* across the opening and closing credits, and all the way through the film, also simultaneously stands for Anzac heroism and the seamless integration of Australian themes and motifs into the cinematic discourse of Hollywood. In the Kramer film the ‘Americanisation’ of the film industry seems much less distant than it does in *The Desert Rats* – an offshore production that has Australian content\(^{46}\) – when we consider that *On the Beach* was filmed in Australia and therefore seems complicit in the marginalisation of local independent production\(^{47}\). The following review from *The Film Weekly* reflects on the song’s repeated use throughout the film:

> Finally, this reviewer must praise the dignified way in which “Waltzing Matilda” has been integrated into the film’s score. The song takes many forms during the film, and it does not surprise to

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\(^{46}\) Here I am also thinking of other Hollywood films with Australian content and which were filmed in the U.S., such as *Million Dollar Mermaid* – a biopic of swimmer Annette Kellerman (1952) – and *Botany Bay* (1953).

\(^{47}\) Stuart Cunningham has described location films such as *On the Beach* as “dangling the carrot of Hollywood largesse before largely excluded local film workers”. Citation as above, 1989: p.62.
learn that its use in the picture has caused it to become a solid overseas favourite.\textsuperscript{48}

The reviewer’s claim that \textit{Waltzing Matilda} had been successfully integrated into the film’s score implies that the song stands for Anzac heroism, although it also allows for an interpretation that suggests the commercialisation of both the song and the film industry when we consider that the song is deeply imbricated in cinematic notions of ‘Anzac-Australianness’. When considered in this way, the suggestion that ‘\textit{Waltzing Matilda} had been integrated into the film’s score’ reads like a searing commentary about the state of the film industry at this historical juncture, the implication being that the film industry had developed into little more than a branch office of the powerful Hollywood studios.

This reading works in conjunction with the imposing presence in this story of the American submarine, the ‘Sawfish’. The emphasis here is on the arrival of the ship, which coincides with the opening credits and its inevitable departure at the end. In both cases, \textit{Waltzing Matilda} accompanies the ship’s voyage. If we accept that the song was widely understood as a motif for ‘Anzac-Australian’ themes then its prolific use in this film, particularly at the beginning and the end, problematises the film industry in its relation to the dominant American cinema. In other words, the powerful image of the ‘Sawfish’ steaming towards Australia at the beginning, the American flag hoisted high as \textit{Waltzing Matilda} plays in the background, is able to also stand for the arrival of the location films in Australia in the decade or so after the Second World War.

The ‘Sawfish’ in this film is both a symbol of immense optimism and unfathomable pessimism for the local protagonists, not unlike what location filmmaking promised for Australia’s filmmakers. As the only ship capable of venturing back to the Northern

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{The Film Weekly, 4\textsuperscript{th} of February, 1960: p.8.}
Hemisphere to check for survivors for the very reason that it is more highly powered, the
crew briefly returns to Australia having confirmed the worst. This ‘end of world’ scenario is
the basis for the depiction of Australia as ‘the only safe place left’, and the related depiction
of the film industry in the heroic image of the Bush-Anzac legend. The optimism associated
with the submarine’s arrival which is followed by its equally hasty exit at the end is
metaphorically relatable to the impact of location filmmaking in Australia. In the film’s
penultimate scene as the atomic cloud is rapidly descending on Australia the ‘Sawfish’, with
its American crew that includes Towers, is shown leaving Australian shores, the American
flag again hoisted high as Waltzing Matilda floods the soundtrack. In hindsight, this image
seems like a metaphor for the film industry when we consider that the film industry was
similarly ‘left for dead’ with the departure of the location films at the close of the decade.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The appearance of Australian actor Grant Taylor in On the Beach who plays one of the
American sailors is more than a footnote: it is yet another powerful metaphor for the demise
of the film industry during the decade. Taylor had the lead roles in Chauvel’s 1940s war films
which evidently offered so much hope to the struggling film industry, particularly in the case
of Forty Thousand Horsemen. Taylor’s secondary role in Kramer’s film, in which he plays an
American support character and speaks with an American accent in an American-funded film
made in Australia, reflects the diminished standing of the film industry in the 1950s: its
descent into a ‘back lot’ for big-budget Hollywood productions. At the same time this film
and The Desert Rats, in particular the transition to Anzac heroism that is evident in the main

⁴⁹ Bruce Molloy has argued that American film companies in the 1940s and ‘50’s made location films in
Australia with the aim of exporting their frozen war-time profits by converting them into box-office receipts;
protagonists of each film, offered reassurance to the embattled local film industry – evidence of the survival of Australian film culture’s fierce spirit that was pivotal to the film industry revival that took place a decade after the last of the location films was released.
This chapter examines the New Australian Cinema\(^1\) of the 1970s and 1980s, and finds that the film industry was at its most self-referential in terms of how it saw its own historic struggle against the Hollywood cinema in the image of the Anzac legend. At the centre of this self-reflexiveness is the conception of the ‘impoverished’ film industry. In this phase of the cinema, the battle for the independence of the film industry is at its most fierce: the metaphorical struggle with Hollywood that was mostly implied in the earlier chapters has a firmer cultural nationalist footing during this phase. In the films that are case studied in this chapter – *Breaker Morant*, *Gallipoli* and *Emerald City* – the ‘impoverished film industry’ is implored to match the heroism of the Anzac warrior in the struggle to redress the historical imbalance with Hollywood.

This method of thinking about the film industry as immersed in a ‘David and Goliath’ struggle against the Hollywood behemoth is the industrial and historical context to the argument that the film industry has sought to depict itself in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. The earlier chapters explored the tendency of the film industry to incorporate the legend into its own identity at defining moments for cinema producers, as a means of luring

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\(^1\) The term ‘New Australian Cinema’ is generally accepted as a reference to the 1970s and ‘80s feature film revival.
audiences back to Australian film spectatorship. In this chapter, we find that the Anzac legend influences the notable war films *Breaker Morant* (1980) and *Gallipoli* (1981), and to such an extent that they were pivotal to the ‘return of the audience’ that culminated in the boom of 1981/82.

Dermody and Jacka’s account of the boom phase is particularly useful. They describe how a cluster of locally-made films, including *Gallipoli* – Peter Weir’s heroic story about the ‘first Anzacs’ – held their own against several big-budget Hollywood productions at the Australian box office:

> That was the summer in which *Mad Max 2, Puberty Blues, Gallipoli* and, to some extent, *Winter of Our Dreams*, succeeded so well against blockbusters like *Superman 2* and *The Empire Strikes Back* in the home market, that they seemed to have turned the tide somewhere in the minds and attitudes of the distributors – and on the incoming tide came *The Man from Snowy River*.

Diane Collins has similarly observed how Australians flocked to cinemas too see both *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli*, along with the *Mad Max* films, “in apparent preference to US pictures (*Star Wars* was outgrossed by *The Man from Snowy River)*. Although the Australian-made films that ‘struck gold’ at the box office included those that did not involve Anzac-related themes, such as *The Man from Snowy River*, the starting point for the boom

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3 Brian McFarlane notes that between 1970 and 1985, nearly 400 feature films were made in Australia, about 20 more than were made in the previous seventy years. In *Australian Cinema 1970-1985* (Richmond: William Heinemann, 1987): p.36.
was Bruce Beresford’s film about the military court-martial of three Australian soldiers accused of murder during the Boer War:\textsuperscript{7}

The successful films of the return period may well be marked as starting with \textit{Breaker Morant} the film to offer the easy chauvinism of defining ourselves against Britain, leaving all of our more difficult and intricate hybridisation well alone, and intact.\textsuperscript{8}

Dermody and Jacka identify \textit{Breaker Morant} as the ‘breakthrough success’ that won audiences at home and overseas\textsuperscript{9}. The subsequent importance of \textit{Gallipoli} is that along with the second instalment in the \textit{Mad Max} series (referred to as \textit{The Road Warrior} in the U.S. market), Weir’s film confirmed the “return of the audience“\textsuperscript{10}. Dermody and Jacka go on to explain about \textit{Gallipoli} that it

\begin{quote}
\ldots directly worked the convergent myths of Anzac and the tough, distinctive, sardonic collective bushman, developed by radical nationalist literary historians and conservative political interest alike, out of C.E.W. Bean’s war histories.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

Neil Rattigan argues that \textit{Gallipoli} is an obvious choice in discussions about the ‘rebirth’ of Australian cinema in the 1970s and ‘80s, a re-birth that not only coincided with, but foreshadowed the broader cultural revival in Australia\textsuperscript{12}. Many of the films explored Australian themes through historical reconstruction – that is, they were ‘period-dramas’ – and

\begin{footnotes}
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emphasised how the Australian identity evolved in the way that it did. Importantly, Rattigan argues that *Gallipoli* epitomises the revival films because of how the film combines the “rediscovery of a national identity lost or threatened with loss with a celebration of that national identity as already understood through the cultural myths”.

In his more recent study of cinematic representations of the Great War-Anzacs, Daniel Reynaud is less circumspect in terms of how he symbolically, if not commercially, connects the re-emergence of the Anzac legend, in films that include *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli*, with the underlying cultural-nationalist movement. Reynaud argues that the disappearance of the legend for almost thirty years before the renaissance was partly reflected by the way that local cultural expression was discouraged in favour of American and British cultural products:

> When the legend re-emerged, it did so at a time of great social change, when Australian nationalism also began to reassert itself. The legend underwent modification, being updated to cope with the stress of liberal new attitudes to war, but still retaining its fervent dogma of embodying the qualities of the true Australian.

This is an important distinction for two reasons. Firstly, the Anzac legend is conceptualised as a pivotal factor in the absence of a significant Australian screen presence before the film revival began in the 1970s. Secondly, the legend is depicted as equally influential in the ‘return of the audience’ that led to the boom of the early 1980s, an unequivocally ‘heroic achievement’ by the film industry in the contest with the dominant Hollywood cinema. This is the essence of the heroic struggle of the ‘digger’ in terms of how it is fictionalised in the

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15 Reynaud citation as above, 2007: p.178.
two military-themed films – *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli* – along with how the idea of ‘heroic struggle’ substitutes as a metaphor for the film industry. As Dermody and Jacka have explained, the two films “inspire an anger that unites the audience in a way that is quite seductive”\(^{16}\). Furthermore, both films appeal to an identical “Australian yearning to love itself and its history”\(^{17}\). The implication of this discursive approach is that the films invite the audience to consider the heroic images on the screen as equating to the nation’s own struggle to maturity: to go beyond the imperial ties to Britain depicted in the story of each film and (re-)imagine a higher ideal. There is a certain self-reflexiveness that is implied in this formulation that is symbiotic with the film industry’s tendency to assert itself – its nationalism – in films such as *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant* against an imposed cultural dominance from elsewhere.

This self-reflexive tendency, or the film industry seeing its own heroic struggle in the images on the screen, is encoded in the version of 1890s’ bush nationalism that is etched into the narrative framework of both films. For example, in *Breaker Morant* the emphasis on the Bushman-like fighting prowess of the Australian soldiers underscores the film’s cultural construction of the national identity. We are reminded throughout the story that the Bushveldt Carbineers, which is made up of colonials (mostly Australians) represents the epitome of these fighting qualities. In one scene that takes place during the court martial proceedings, the compound that holds the three Australian soldiers who are on trial for murder comes under attack. We see them briefly take up arms and almost singlehandedly they repel the surprise Boer attack. Furthermore, the execution of two of the Australian soldiers at the end for acting

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\(^{17}\) Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1988: p.158.
within inadmissible (British) orders is, on the one hand, concomitant with the essence of Anzac heroism\textsuperscript{18}, even if they are ultimately portrayed as ‘scapegoats of the empire’.

The heroism of the Australian soldiers that is alluded to throughout the narrative is mostly a reference to their defiance of the farcical, pre-ordained military court martial that results in their ‘heroic executions’ at the end (all three plead not guilty to all the charges against them). Reynaud has argued about \textit{Breaker Morant} that it pre-empts the Anzac legend, in as much as the film depicts an “anachronistic application of the Anzac legend to the Boer War”\textsuperscript{19}. The legend, even in such an “embryonic form”\textsuperscript{20}, simply implies ‘heroism’. This is the same heroism that the film industry is implored to match in this film. Jeff Doyle has observed about the film that if \textit{Breaker Morant} is able to be considered an ‘angry film’, this anger is aimed as much at the British as it is at the Boer enemy\textsuperscript{21}. The film’s emphasis on the binary opposition of ‘British versus Australian’ is encoded in the version of bush nationalism that underwrites both \textit{Breaker Morant} and \textit{Gallipoli}, and which ascribes the presence of a dominant cultural ‘Other’ in the film industry:

\begin{quote}
It is difficult to separate discussion of \textit{Breaker Morant} from that of \textit{Gallipoli}. It is almost as if \textit{Breaker} comes as a prophet of the shift to a ‘simply’ pro-Australian stance, combining a hard sell of patriotism, even narcissism, with a strong confidence that the audience’s recognition would lead to commercial success.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1988: p.153.
\textsuperscript{19} Reynaud citation as above, 2007: p.177.
\textsuperscript{20} Reynaud citation as above, 2007: p.177.
\textsuperscript{22} Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1988: p.153.
The heroically tragic ending to both films – in Breaker Morant it is the executions of two of the Australian soldiers and in Gallipoli it is the mass sacrifice in the story’s climactic scenes – provide “Australian audiences [with] an opportunity for pleasantly mournful contemplation of defeat in the most faultlessly honourable circumstances”. This again is a metaphor for the film industry in terms of what these films say about the plight of the nation’s cinema producers. The heroic (and doomed) struggle of the Australian soldiers that is fictionalised in each narrative is inflected onto the very struggle of the film industry: the ‘audience’ referred to in the above quotation implies the cinema’s self-reflexiveness; that it sees its own heroic struggle in the images on the screen.

In the following newspaper review of Gallipoli that was published in The Canberra Times, there is a clearer indication of how the heroic struggle of Australian film was thought to emulate that of the Anzacs:

This it does in a way that transcends the broad sweep of recorded history and the superficial approach of other films that examine the battle on a sweeping scale that makes for mindless spectacle without a sense of concern for the figures who fall. That is the film's chief purpose, to which it comes at the end of a journey that begins in the simplicity of the Western Australian outback, where the only issues of note are racial prejudice and sport. All along the way, Williamson and Weir do themselves and us proudly, with perceptive film-making and devoted story-telling, all with a deep concern for creating the reality

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of what once was. The film strongly evokes the character of
Australian-ness as it was in those days of self-reliance.25

The film’s chief purpose which is to trace the ‘journey that begins in the simplicity of the
Western Australian outback’ establishes bush nationalism as the dominant discourse, at the
same time equating the hero’s journey theme – the crux of Weir’s narrative – to the heroic
journey of the film industry. The emphasis that the writer places on the ‘figures who fall’, as
opposed to the ‘broad sweep of recorded history and the superficial approach of other
[Hollywood] films’, conveys an image of the film industry that is as heroic as the legend. This
‘concern for the figures who fall’ is presented to the reader as more than just a stylistic
difference to Hollywood: this is the potential remedy to the problem of American hegemony
in the film industry. The remedy alluded by the reviewer, although not directly stated, is the
power of ‘audience recognition’. The suggestion that audiences can see something of
themselves in the heroic images of the diggers on the screen is concomitant with the
emergence of the legend in the early twentieth century26. This is a cogent reference to the
heroic archetypes that inspire the action, or the ‘figures who fall’, the implication of which is
that the brand of Anzac nationalism in Gallipoli is the very basis upon which box office
success for the film industry can be assured.

The conspicuous reference to the screenwriter David Williamson and director Weir – who
‘do themselves and us proudly, with perceptive film-making and devoted story-telling’ –
consolidates the Anzac legend in this film as a metaphor for the film industry. The
filmmakers are characterised as matching the heroism of the gallant lads who are depicted in
the story. The film industry in this review is represented by both Williamson and Weir, and

26 Dianne Collins has alluded to this close symbolic connection, arguing that “the generation that produced the
Anzacs was the first to grow up in a world with movies”26. See Hollywood Down Under, Australians at the
the reference to them stands for the struggle of the film industry which, like the gallant lads at Gallipoli, is portrayed as immersed in a fierce battle. This is the pathway that is laid out in front of the film industry in its epic contest with the Hollywood cinema, encapsulated in the statement: ‘The film strongly evokes the character of Australian-ness as it was in those days of self-reliance’. In the struggle to put right the implied loss of independence after decades of cultural imperialism the film industry in this review – and in this film – is implored to emulate the renowned fighting qualities of the heroic ‘bushman-soldier’, of which self-reliance is perhaps the most redeeming character trait.

**Ambivalent Nationalism**

As Dermody and Jacka have proffered, “This is the context of the Anzac myth”\(^{27}\), which is a statement about how the legend was thought to symbolise heroism from the time that it emerged during the First World War. The nation’s allegiance then was to Britain and the war a chance to cultivate ‘warriorship’ on foreign battlefields that were far from home. The Australian troops “found themselves defining themselves militarily against both an enemy and a sometimes indifferent British command”\(^{28}\). The Second World War provided a similar test of the national character, although the threat to the homeland posed by Japanese invasion forged a new allegiance with the United States\(^{29}\). This new allegiance and all that it implies about delegating “responsibility for our own survival”\(^{30}\) was, as a result, “tempered with an

\(^{27}\) Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.46.
\(^{28}\) Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.46.
\(^{29}\) Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.46.
\(^{30}\) Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.46.
The dilemma for cultural nationalism when confronted with this new allegiance is that

Our frail, historically dated, and relentlessly male-gendered notion of what it is to be Australian looks very small and unthreatening indeed against our indifference to the facts and consequences of what we term our American ‘alignments’.  

Felicity Collins has also observed that the cultural nationalism of the 1970s and ‘80s “shored up the position of the Anglo-Celtic male as the embodiment of Australian nationhood in a highly acclaimed cycle of period films” that includes Gallipoli and Breaker Morant. Greg McCarthy argues something similar, that “The obsession with national identity…came at the expense of an exploration of the antagonisms within Australian society”. Graeme Turner explains that the first decade of the renaissance, in particular, is unlikely to be regarded “as attempting to construct a plurality of definitions about Australia”. But as Turner also explains, this is the essential function of the nationalist myth, to ‘resolve’ conflicts and differences within the nation:

The myth of nationalism that is rooted in the 1890s operates as a discourse through which narrative can naturalise a grim and static view of the powerlessness of the individual within the Australian context – without for all that appearing in any way to proscribe or rule out other views of Australian experience, or without appearing to

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31 Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.46.
32 Dermody & Jacka citation as above: pp.46-47.
suggest that the endurance of that experience is anything but honourable.\textsuperscript{36}

Just as problematic for the film industry is the shift that is evident in the nation’s allegiances away from Britain and towards the United States, and which is pivotal to understanding how the New Australian Cinema has asserted an ‘ambiguous nationalism’. The ambiguity that is evident in the films is two-fold. In the first decade of the revival Australian filmmakers are said to have searched for a unique national identity, although in the context of the nation’s dependent relationship with Britain\textsuperscript{37}: “The search for a distinct identity was a gaze back to the Colonial power to identify points of difference”\textsuperscript{38}. The obsession for a distinctive identity was overshadowed in the 1980s by the desire to be recognised by another imperial power, with Australian filmmakers turning their gaze, commercially and artistically, towards Hollywood\textsuperscript{39}. Neil Rattigan describes the shift in these terms:

The gradual eclipse of the importance of England in Australian cultural perceptions that many Australian films have hinted at and a few documented more fully (e.g., \textit{Breaker Morant} [1980], \textit{Gallipoli}, etc.) is completed by \textit{Crocodile Dundee}.\textsuperscript{40}

Anne Pender has looked into the ambivalent nature of the New Nationalism\textsuperscript{41} in her study of \textit{The Adventures of Barry McKenzie} (1972), one of the earliest and most popular of the comedy farce, or ‘Ocker’ films in the 1970s. The narrative dramatises the notion of Australian crassness abroad, with the film’s core thematic structure emphasising the ‘British

\textsuperscript{36} Turner citation as above, 1986: p.125.

\textsuperscript{37} McCarthy citation as above, 2001: pp.154-173.

\textsuperscript{38} McCarthy citation as above, 2001: pp 154-173.

\textsuperscript{39} McCarthy citation as above, 2001: pp.154-173.


\textsuperscript{41} Pender describes the New Nationalism of the 1970s as “designed to solely distinguish Australians from their British forebears”. Citation as above, 2005: pp.67-78.
 versus Australian’, or ‘old versus new’ set of opposites. Pender argues about Barry McKenzie that the film characterises the contradictions inherent in the New Nationalism of the 1970s and ‘80s, in that while there was a desire for new symbols of nationhood it was unclear what the new symbols should be:

The satire of Barry Humphries in the Barry McKenzie films vividly dramatises the anxiety and ambivalence inherent in the new nationalism and the post-imperial confusion experienced by Australians at this time”..

Studies of the film tend to emphasise the way that authentic Australian values, as embodied by the Barry McKenzie character, are comically and predictably played off against the stifling and incontrovertible sense of ‘Britishness’ that permeates through the story once it is re-located to London. Pender explains that the ambivalence contained in Barry McKenzie’s national identity formations relate back to the film’s inability to “throw off the symbols of colonialism”, also noting that the main protagonist ultimately rediscovers a ‘peculiar affection’ for the mother country. This is despite the fact that the underlying intention of the film – and that of the New Nationalism – was to distinguish Australians from their British forebears. As Pender notes, it is an ambivalence that is best characterised by Barry McKenzie’s final words to his Aunt Edna on his way home to Australia: “You know Auntie, in a funny kinda’ way I was just starting to like the Poms”.

Breaker Morant

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43 Anne Pender citation is as above.
Breaker Morant’s credibility as a statement of the New Nationalism is similarly undermined by the film’s reticence to meaningfully advance representations of Australian identity beyond the level of imperial attachment. The underlying contradiction of this film, just as it is in Gallipoli, is that the Australian soldiers in the story are sacrificed in the name of British imperialism. This necessarily implies that the nationalism depicted in the film is consistent with the 1890s’ radical nationalist tradition, in that the emphasis that is placed on the ‘Australia versus Britain’ binary opposition is the crux of the narrative. As Turner has stated in relation to both Breaker Morant and Gallipoli, “the paradigm of authority [in the films] is English”.

Josephine May has observed how both films use the military as a counterpoint to Australianness, similar to the way that the secondary schools in Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975) and The Getting of Wisdom (1977) function in those films. The culminating point for film industry and nation is a “…convenient symbolic architecture of Britishness against which Australianness can be highlighted”.

James Kirschke has argued about Breaker Morant that “His [the director Bruce Beresford’s] target…is the way the event has been used to delineate a civilized Britain from a barbarous Australia”. Furthermore, the ambiguity that is evident in the film’s expression of the Australian identity is typified by George Witton, one of the Australian soldiers in the story who stand trial for murder:

Witton, untested in battle, speaks earnestly of his desire to fight for the imperial family … Witton wants to be Australia’s “brave and noble type…the ‘Bushman Soldier’…elevated to mythical status for

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45 Turner citation as above, 1986: p.115.
This is at the core of the dilemma for the film industry in this film. On the one hand the centralising of the discourse of ‘Bushman-Solider’, qualities that Witton is said to embody or certainly aspire to, underscores the heroic depiction of the film industry in the image of the mythical Australian soldier. At the same time Witton’s earnest desire to fight for the imperial family is indicative of the conflicting loyalties in this film (and for that matter in *Gallipoli*) which exist between the ‘local/national’ and the ‘international’ (which in both films is ‘Britishness’). If we re-consider the scene in which the Australian soldiers help to fend off the Boer attack on their compound then we are able to get a clearer sense of the film’s conflicted nationalism. The problem with the action in this sequence is that it improbably re-affirms the Australians’ loyalty to empire, despite the fact that they are concurrently appearing before a British court martial accused of killing prisoners.

The scene begins with a surprise attack by the Boers on the British compound in the early hours of the morning, with several soldiers killed and the Boers shown advancing deep into British-held territory. As the Boers gain the upper hand the three Australians are let out of their cells and given weapons, with one of them proclaiming: “I’m not sure that I like you blokes enough to help you”. Despite their brief reluctance the actions of the Australian soldiers are pivotal in holding off the attack, as they are shown firstly evading a major bomb attack before they consummately turn the attack back on to the Boers with a barrage of machine gun fire, killing several Boers in the process and saving the entire position. The next scene cuts to inside the courtroom where the British court president proclaims their heroic efforts in fending off the attack as “irrelevant”. He refuses to countenance a pardon, despite

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48 Kirschke citation is as above, 2008: p.48.
the defence lawyer quoting from the military manual that an act of valour during a military court martial is the equivalent of a pardon.

The significance of how these events are juxtaposed is two-fold. Firstly, the heroic actions of the Australian soldiers consolidate the myth of the ‘bushman-soldier’ as the narrative’s dominant discourse upon which the film’s representation of Australianness rests. But the subsequent actions of the court president who refuses to consider a pardon for the three soldiers, despite the strong case mounted by the defence, reinforces the shambolic and preordained nature of the trial – the injustice of it all – when we consider how the Australians all the way through the film are characterised as ‘scapegoats of the empire’. This sequence tends to reinforce the natural hierarchies that are established from the outset and which are staunchly British. Furthermore, the Australian government’s assumed collusion in the court outcome – we are told at various points during the narrative that guilty verdicts would be welcomed just as much by Australia – is at the core of the film’s compromised Australianness. In other words, if we accept that the ‘Legend of the Bushman’ encapsulates the struggle towards national maturity, as the mythology is intended to, these episodes in the film undermine the independence of nation and film industry.

Other, similar acts of symbolic submission by the three Australian soldiers are scattered throughout the narrative. Morant’s own submissiveness is established in the opening court room scene, in which he ends a detailed explanation about the events that led to his arrest with the rationale – “I was, however, acting under orders”. The underlying complexity associated with this position is that it fails to shift even as the story progresses. If anything, Morant’s position is reinforced towards the end of the film when he and the other two soldiers learn of their fate. Upon the verdict and death sentence being handed down, Morant meekly salutes the court president before taking one hesitant step backwards. This default acquiescence by Morant is compounded by his decision not to take an opportunity to escape
in the days before he is due to front the firing squad, thereby accepting the inevitability of his fate. The final, symbolic act of defiance by Morant and Handcock in the climactic scene in which they are marched – ‘hand in hand’ – before the firing squad underscores their ambivalence and that of the film. In other words, the ‘wild colonial boy’, Handcock, and the ‘black sheep’, Morant, are reaffirmed as the ‘scapegoats of the empire’. Kirschke has similarly observed about the film’s characterisation of the Australian soldiers, that “Their conduct is as British as the empire could expect”\textsuperscript{49}.

Moreover, this is consistent with how the film was publically debated. Although the following review that was published in the \textit{Wall Street Journal} does not overtly state this point, implicit in the article is that the main characterisations are portrayed in the heroic image of the ‘Bushman-Anzac’. This is what the reviewer implies in stating that the three soldiers have something ‘distinctly Australian about them’. But the writer’s further observation that the Australians are ‘exemplary Edwardians as well’, and that like the film they ‘smack of their British heritage’, also alludes to an ambiguous identity for both nation and film industry:

\begin{quote}
All the three characters have something distinctly Australian about them. But, exemplary Edwardians as well, they also smack of their British heritage, as does the film containing them.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Gallipoli}

In \textit{Gallipoli}, the events depicted in the film are associated with the birth of Australian nationhood, symbolism that is deeply ingrained in the legend that emerged from the war

\textsuperscript{49} Kirschke citation as above, 2008: pp.45-53.
\textsuperscript{50} The \textit{Wall Street Journal}, January 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1981: p.7.
trenches in 1915. Graeme Turner has observed how the myth evokes the nation’s struggle, arguing that “Even Australia II’s victory [in the America’s Cup yacht race in 1983] provoked references to Gallipoli”\(^5^1\). The idea that Gallipoli is a motif for the national struggle, therefore, is concomitant with the argument that the mythology also characterises the film industry’s heroic struggle against the powerful Hollywood cinema. Weir’s film seems like the ‘natural successor’ to the 1915 silent picture, *A Hero of the Dardanelles*, inspiring a similar story of triumph and tragedy. The similarities between the two films in terms of the message they convey about the film industry have been documented by other writers. Sylvia Lawson compares the treatment in both films of like-minded scenes that are set against the Pyramids, and concludes: “There are sixty-six years of history between these two intensely mythic shots; there is almost no ideological space between them at all”\(^5^2\).

Like *Breaker Morant*, the tendency of *Gallipoli* to measure meanings of Australianness against British sensibilities is pivotal to the film’s construction of the national identity. The dilemma presented by the film’s emphasis on the binary opposition of ‘old versus new’ – or ‘Australia versus Britain’ – is best summed up by the wholesale slaughter at the end and which concludes in the death of Archy Hamilton, one of the film’s two main protagonists: “That Archy is one of the Australians sacrificed to protect the British is just the final stage of this incomprehension – and a slap in the eye for patriotism”\(^5^3\). This is at the core of the dilemma posed by the Australian involvement in the war in terms of how it is portrayed in the narrative: that is, the paradoxical juxtaposing of the nation’s imperial loyalties with the assertion of ‘home grown’ Australian values which, like Archy, hail from the bush. The story’s other protagonist, Frank Dunne, sums up the film’s conundrum when he insists to Archy in an earlier scene: “It’s not our bloody war. It’s an English war!”

\(^5^2\) Lawson quoted in MacFarlane, citation as above, 1987: p.48.
\(^5^3\) McFarlane citation as above, 1987: p.169.
In another extract from *The Canberra Times* review of the film, the meaningfulness of Gallipoli’s depiction of a distinctive Australian ethos is brought into question, with the film’s projection of Australian nationalism conceived of as muddled:

That is something of a special experience, as [director Peter] Weir leads us along the path of David Williamson’s script through an environment of the doom that we know to be inevitable. This generates a sense of hope that our awareness of history constantly proclaims to be futile yet the film never ceases to match the foolish optimism of the young men who went away to a war that really belonged to somebody else.54

As in the earlier extract, the reader is implored to equate the gallantry of the lads on the battlefield with the gallantry of the filmmakers, with the further references to Williamson and Weir substituting for the struggle of the film industry. But the way the reviewer also writes about the audience being taken ‘along the path of David Williamson’s script through an environment of the doom that we know to be inevitable’ brings into sharper focus the idea that in this film, the story of film industry and ‘digger’ is simply one of heroism. This is as much a statement about the heroic struggle of Australia’s film industry as it is about the combat scenes on the screen. Further still, the heroic journey of both nation and cinema is conflated here to such an extent that they seem thoroughly symbiotic. The doomed nature of the military campaign, ‘that we know to be inevitable’, simply implies Anzac heroism – to soldier on against the odds – and this is the heroism that the film industry is implored to emulate in its own fiercesome contest.

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The next passage implies the paradoxical nature of the film’s representation of Australian nationalism and the subversive effect it has on both nation and film industry. The reviewer writes: ‘This generates a sense of hope that our awareness of history constantly proclaims to be futile yet the film never ceases to match the foolish optimism of the young men who went away to a war that really belonged to somebody else’. The ‘foolish optimism’ of the Australian soldiers that the writer refers to is symptomatic of the conflicting loyalties between empire and nation that underlies the film’s character motivations. For example, McFarlane has explained how Archy is motivated by ‘empire’, while for Frank it is mateship that leads him to war. This is highly reminiscent of Breaker Morant in which Witton is the youthful, empire loyalist, not unlike Archy (although unlike Archy he lives), and Handcock is the ‘wild colonial boy’ – a more embittered version of Frank. Morant prevaricates between the two types – and the two nations – with his own Britishness at the core of his ambiguity and that of the film. In the end it is a misplaced sense of loyalty that prevents Morant from ‘turning’ on the old country. His most damning assessment comes as he and Handcock are about to be marched before the firing squad when, in a most British way, he calmly observes: “Well Peter, this is what comes of empire-building”.

In Gallipoli, conflicted nationalism relates to the idea that the ‘war really belonged to somebody else’, as The Canberra Times reviewer notes, and which echoes the words of Frank that this was England’s, not Australia’s war. As a result, the story’s ambiguous identity is inflected on to the struggle of the film industry, when we consider how the reviewer contends that the ‘film never ceases to match the foolish optimism’ of those who went away to war (and presumably never returned). The culminating point of this ‘foolish optimism’ is that nation and cinema are simultaneously immersed in a heroic contest against insurmountable, if not tragic odds. The symbiotic relationship that is established in this

review between cinema and myth – when we consider the ‘futile’ way that the film matches the ‘foolish optimism’ of the lads who went away to a war that belonged to somebody else – implies an identical outcome for both.

Hollywood or Bust

The paradoxical nature of what *Gallipoli* implies about the film industry at this historical juncture – that is, the manner in which the film mediates between myth and cinematic notions of Hollywood – is evident in the quotation that it somehow mirrors the ‘foolish optimism’ of the gallant lads depicted in the story. Diane Collins has argued about *Gallipoli* that as close as the film is to the central myths of Australia the Weir-Williamson Great War epic is also “…less a study of any of the inflated legends about the Anzacs than a tribute to the production styles of Hollywood”56. Implicit in this argument is the idea that the film is illustrative of the ambiguous nationalism that is associated with the New Australian Cinema, in the first instance because of how the film measures ‘Australianness’ as a counterpoint to British values and ideals. But the metaphor of ‘foolish optimism’ might just as easily stand for the way that the film anticipates the film industry’s increasing shift towards the dominant stylistic paradigm of Hollywood during this phase of the cinema.

This is at the core of the dilemma of the New Australian Cinema, a dilemma that is characterised by both *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant*. The search for an Australian identity was at first (in the 1970s) carried out within the context of the nation’s long-standing dependency on Britain57: “The search for a distinct identity was a gaze back to the Colonial

56 Collins citation as above, 1987: p.255.
57 McCarthy citation as above, 2001: pp.154-173.
power to identify points of difference”⁵⁸. But in the 1980s, as filmmakers turned their attention towards Hollywood, “the settler gaze was…tinged with a Hollywood pastiche”⁵⁹. *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) provides the most striking example of the latter, in terms of how the film represents the propensity of some Australian films to imitate Hollywood stylistics. While *Gallipoli* was one of a small cluster of films in the early 1980s to have briefly turned the tide back in favour of the local film industry in the historic struggle with Hollywood – providing a glimmer of hope while at the same time consolidating the importance of the Anzac legend as a ‘weapon’ in this heroic struggle – Weir’s film is also symptomatic of the increasing tendency by local films to stylistically resemble Hollywood.

The culminating point of his tendency was the world-wide box-office success of *Crocodile Dundee* in the mid-1980s. Neil Rattigan has argued about *Crocodile Dundee* that it is indicative of a desire by the film industry to win the approval of ‘Uncle Sam’⁶⁰:

*Crocodile Dundee* is also a film that demonstrates what seems to be a curious paradox: It is inescapably *Australian*, yet its construction cinematically speaking, is American. That is, it is a *Hollywood* film – aesthetically speaking.⁶¹

**Emerald City**

The shift in the sensibilities of Australian filmmakers is played out in another David Williamson film released towards the end of the same decade. *Emerald City* (1988) is an adaptation of an earlier Williamson stage play of the same name, and brings into sharper

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⁵⁸ McCarthy citation as above, 2001: pp.154-173.
⁵⁹ McCarthy citation as above, 2001: pp.154-173.
focus the metaphor of the pioneering filmmaker who does battle with the colossal forces that control the film industry. The metaphor has particular resonance at this historical juncture when we consider the film industry’s stylistic shift towards Hollywood. *Emerald City* is a useful case study because it is partly biographical, meaning that Williamson is able to be considered within the context of the heroic, impoverished filmmaker, an idea that was also alluded to in the earlier reference to Williamson in the review of *Gallipoli*. Brian Kiernan has written of *Emerald City*’s biographical credentials, observing that: “Williamson told the London Times on 9 May 1988 that while *Emerald City* was not completely autobiographical there was a certain amount of his own experience in it”\(^{62}\).

Williamson’s alter ego in this film is Colin Rogers, the main protagonist and a screenwriter whose heroic battle to have his films funded and screened mirrors that of Williamson and the film industry. Like Williamson, Rogers is a former university lecturer who becomes a successful screenwriter, moving from Melbourne to Sydney to further his career. While entirely an urban-based story, *Emerald City*’s mythic lineage is nevertheless derivative of the radical nationalist tradition when we consider how the story is formulated on the binary opposition of the ‘national’ (authentic values) versus the ‘international’ (the inauthentic). It is further argued that the film’s resolution is deeply imbricated in Anzac heroism.

The story fictionalises the main debate that dominated public discussions about the film industry in the 1970s and ‘80s – the ‘culture versus commerce’ argument\(^{63}\). This binary opposition – that is, of the ‘national versus international’ – is the crux of the narrative. The story is a fictional recreation of the problem of American hegemony in Australia’s cinema, with the key protagonists representing the opposing views in the debate. Dermody and Jacka remind us that this is how the film industry revival was organised, according to what they

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63 Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.45.
have termed as the discourses of ‘Industry 1’ and ‘Industry 2’\textsuperscript{64}, which represents the shifting notions of how the film industry was defined from the early stages of the revival through to the 1980s\textsuperscript{65}.

In the ‘Industry 1’ group – also referred to as the ‘AFC genre’ – there are films that are described as gentle, socially-concerned and humanistic, such as the period drama. The ‘Industry 2’ category is dominated by films that are typically associated with the screen trade and which are thought to be anti-intellectual, anti-art, and scornful of Australian nationalism\textsuperscript{66}. ‘Industry 2’ films are mostly aimed at achieving box office results, and are closely associated with the ‘10BA’ tax concessions implemented in the early 1980s which indirectly financed the boom. The clash between the two discourses suggests that

\begin{quote}
Circuits of money and circuits of meaning are deeply involved with each other in film production. Notions of money, business, and industry interplay with notions of art, quality, and the ‘genuinely Australian’\textsuperscript{67}.
\end{quote}

Tom O’Regan explains that financial support for the film industry was in the form of direct subsidy in the first instance (in the 1970s) before the (10BA) tax concessions were brought in:

\begin{quote}
Through state subsidy, investment and tax concessions (in the 1980s), private (non-film and television industry) and industry capital became involved in Australian film production\textsuperscript{68}.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{64} Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: pp.197-199.
\textsuperscript{65} Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.45.
\textsuperscript{66} Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: pp.197-199.
\textsuperscript{67} Dermody & Jacka citation as above, 1987: p.16.
These are the industry dynamics that form the basis of the action and character motivations in *Emerald City*. The story is based on how Rogers lurks from one colossal struggle to the other, with both producers and merchant bankers, as he first strives to have his films funded and then screened. In a similar way to how Williamson is identified with the cultural nationalist revival in both the film industry and the theatre\(^69\), Rogers in this story gives voice to the ‘culture discourse’ – the ‘national cinema’ debate. His arch nemesis in the story is Mike McCord, an industry ‘upstart’ who characterises the ‘commerce argument’ that was most synonymous with the early 1980s’ boom and the ‘10BA’ tax concessions\(^70\). However, there is an equally important and ‘invisible’ protagonist in this story – the Hollywood film industry – to whom metaphorical references are ubiquitous. Hollywood is portrayed in this film as a formidable obstacle to the ambitions of both Rogers and the youthful film industry that he represents.

This final point is crucial because Hollywood is, as it is in all the films that have been examined thus far in this thesis, the dominant cultural ‘Other’ against which the heroic depiction of the film industry in the image of the Anzac legend is based. The clearest and most effusive example of this tendency in *Emerald City* happens late in the narrative, in the penultimate scene. The action in this scene takes place in a hired limousine as Rogers drives his publisher wife home from the airport after she has returned to Sydney from the Booker literary prize awards in London. After a brief discussion about the awards the conversation turns to Rogers’ film funding problems as he ponders which path to take – the ‘national’

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\(^69\) For example, O’Regan refers to how the Australian vernacular is foregrounded in Williamson’s plays of the 1970s, which is pivotal to “our idea of a national cinema”. Citation as above, 1995: p.49.

\(^70\) A number of recent historical accounts cover this area, including the two-volume series by Dermody & Jacka, 1987 & 1988.
(culture) or the ‘international’ (commercial/Hollywood), the same fate that awaited the film industry at this historical juncture.\textsuperscript{71}

It is in the next few moments that the film industry is most lucidly depicted in the heroic image of the ‘digger’. When he realises that Rogers writes for the movies, the limousine driver interrupts the conversation and asks Rogers to name which films he has penned. Rogers responds with a number of fictional film titles, including one called \textit{Heroes of the Dardanelle}, a Gallipoli war epic and as it turns out one of the driver’s favourites. The name of the Rogers film is an obvious reference to Australia’s early film industry, in particular the first Gallipoli feature film released in 1915, \textit{The Hero of the Dardanelles}. The driver then quotes several lines of dialogue from the Rogers war film, dialogue that turns out to be almost identical to a scene that Williamson wrote in \textit{Gallipoli}.

The scene with Rogers and the driver unfolds as follows:

\textbf{Rogers} (to his wife): I’m on the second draft of a screenplay, no money in sight. I’m starting to think it’s useless. I mean, why not just jump on the bandwagon and work for the yanks. Who cares if we don’t make our own films, anymore?

\textbf{Driver}: You in films, mate?

\textbf{Rogers}: Yes, I write them.

\textbf{Driver}: Which ones you written?

\textbf{Rogers}: \textit{Long Road to Nowhere, Days of Wine and Whitlam, Heroes of the Dardanelle}…

\textsuperscript{71} I am suggesting here that \textit{Emerald City} was released at a time – in the late 1980s – that is now readily accepted as the moment when the process of the internationalisation of the film industry began.
**Driver:** Heroes of the Dardanelle? That’s my favourite film. I must have seen it twelve times. The kids keep making me get it out on video. Every time that major says – “Right oh men, we’ve got our orders, we’re goin’ – bayonets only. Remember who you are”. That’s great… You write that?

**Rogers:** Yeah.

This is a highly symbolic moment for both Rogers and the film industry, the culminating point in his heroic struggle as a ‘national’ screenwriter, because this is where he commits to the national cinema. When we take into account the numerous financial problems that Rogers has endured throughout the story, his decision seems like a profoundly heroic one. When we also consider the dialogue that the driver quotes from the Rogers war film, this is an example of the film industry aligning its own identity with that of the heroic ‘digger’. The dialogue the driver quotes from the Rogers film, which is almost identical to a scene Williamson wrote for Gallipoli, underscores the close symbolic connection that exists between the heroic struggle of the Anzacs and that of the film industry. The film industry in scenes such as this one in Emerald City is allegorising itself, comparing its own heroic struggle to the ‘life and death’ struggle of the Anzacs, the dominant theme of Australian war films since the first Gallipoli-themed film was released in 1915. The reference to the Anzac heroes of Gallipoli in Emerald City, which is at a juncture when the film industry has a heroic choice to make, consolidates the theme of a ‘life and death’ struggle in terms of how the metaphor is inflected onto the struggle of the film industry.

The film’s climax that immediately follows the limousine scene is also of interest. This exchange is centred entirely on the Rogers/McCord relationship – or the binary opposition between the ‘cultural’ (the national) and the ‘commercial’ (the international) – and takes
place immediately after Rogers has made his heroic decision to commit to the Australian national cinema. In the extract included below, McCord has confronted Rogers about the modest box office performance of his latest Australian release, compared to McCord’s Hollywood-backed venture which has fared considerably better:

McCord: Be a bit hard for you to get a new film up now, I suppose?

Rogers: It’s always hard.

This is truth in the image for the film industry, just as it is in other Australian (war) films, in terms of how Rogers’ comment that “it’s always hard” implies an underlying heroism on the part of the impoverished Australian filmmaker. In this brief exchange the presence of the Hollywood film industry, although not directly stated, is understood as the dominant cultural power that filmmakers like Rogers are pitted against. We know this because this is the context to the story: the binary opposition of the ‘national’ (Rogers) versus the ‘international’ (McCord). Although the film industry in these final scenes is depicted in the heroic image of the Anzac legend, there is also an underlying sense of doom – or a ‘foolish optimism’ as it was described earlier in the context of Gallipoli – that the battle for the future of the film industry had already been won and lost. This is the subtext to Emerald City. In this film, there is a conflation of heroic toil and pessimism – a sense of tragedy – that surrounds the endeavour of independent film production in Australia, and which is symbiotic with the heroism that the legend stands for.

The increasing presence of Hollywood in Australia’s film industry is, in this film, characterised by the meteoric rise of McCord who, by the end of the story, is transformed from Rogers’ hapless co-writer to a ‘mover and shaker’ in industry circles. McCord is elevated to the status of film industry ‘operative’ who mediates effortlessly between the national and the international cinemas, clinching ‘big’ deals along the way, while Rogers
soldiers on making ‘small, but worthy’ Australian films. However, even as McCord’s epic rise confirms the ascendancy of Hollywood as the dominant cinematic discourse, the rhetorical debate surrounding ‘culture versus commerce’ remains unresolved. The schism that existed at the start of the story between the ‘cultural’ (national) and the ‘global’ is as wide as ever at the end, with the two key protagonists shown heading in divergent directions in the film’s closing image.

In an earlier scene, Rogers gives voice to this debate, providing a passionate defence of the national cinema after McCord has outlined plans to relocate locally-developed screenplays to the U.S. film industry:

> Those are our stories Mike. We have a right to them. We need to feel important enough to have fictions written about us otherwise we’ll always think that real life happens somewhere else, and is spoken in accents other than our own.

This is the underlying dilemma for the protagonists in this film, just as it is for the film industry at this juncture. At the core of this heated exchange is compromised ‘Australianness’: the confusion that is created by the relocating of Australian content overseas (think also here of *The Desert Rats*), along with the appearance of a film like *Crocodile Dundee*, which owes as much as to Hollywood stylistics as it does to the nationalist discourse of the Bush legend that the story is based on. The root cause of this ambiguous nationalism in films such as *Crocodile Dundee* and *Emerald City* is the realisation that, while these might be our stories, the film industry might in fact belong to somebody else.
In an interview that was conducted two decades after *Emerald City*’s release, Williamson explained that the film’s central message related to how it anticipated the growing marginalisation of independent film production:

> The prophecies made in the film that Australia would end up as a back lot for American films and nobody would care because it provides employment have come to pass. It’s now regarded as hugely wonderful by state governments, by film people when a big *Matrix* [film] or a big American film is made here because of the injection of funds into the economy and the employment of technicians. The point of, sort of keeping our own stories to be told seems to be of little importance.  

**Conclusion**

The compromised Australianness that is implied here for both film industry and nation as a result of ‘globalisation’ is the context to how the film industry has sought to depict itself in the heroic image of the Anzac legend. In *Gallipoli*, Weir and Williamson’s heroic tale about the ‘first Anzacs’ and the natural successor to the 1915 silent film about the same battle, the film industry’s struggle is mirrored in the heroic images of the Anzacs on the screen. *Gallipoli*’s tendency to mirror the ‘foolish optimism’ of the gallant lads also results in a muddled expression of Australian nationalism, a similar outcome that is achieved in *Breaker Morant*. This idea of ‘ambiguous nationalism’ is at the core of how the earlier films of the

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72 This quotation was taken from a David Williamson interview for the *Emerald City* DVD in 2007: Limelight Productions Pty Ltd.
New Australian Cinema are written about as searching for a unique Australian identity within the context of the nation’s colonial, mostly British origins.

What tends to unite the 1970s and ‘80s’ Australian films examined in this chapter is that the ‘impoverished’ film industry is implored to emulate the exploits of the Anzacs in the field of battle in its own heroic struggle against the dominant Hollywood cinema. The two Anzac-themed films were the catalyst for the film industry’s resurgence that led to the boom of the early 1980s. Rather than representing a reversal of the flow of Hollywood hegemony this period is perhaps best remembered as a brief respite, much like what the success of *Forty Thousand Horsemen* said about the film industry in the early 1940s. In the 1980s, the film industry’s historic struggle with Hollywood was most powerfully characterised by the heroic figure of Colin Rogers in *Emerald City*. 
CONCLUSION:

THE ‘BIG’ AUSTRALIAN PICTURE

This thesis has argued that the film industry has frequently sought to exploit the Anzac legend at pivotal moments – usually at times of crisis for Australian cinema production – to culturally construct an image for itself that is as heroic as the Anzac legend. The ideal of the ‘heroic film industry’ was typically invoked in the context of the Hollywood cinema’s dominance over Australia’s film industry. The metaphorical comparison between the ‘digger’ doing battle on the overseas war field and the film industry was asserted in both the war films and in public debate about the national cinema. The central argument of the thesis has been that the film industry could see its own struggle in the heroic images of the Australian soldiers on the screen, a formulation that is also consistent with the radical nationalist tradition – or the Bush Legend – from which the Anzac myth originates. Neil Rattigan has remarked about these mythical qualities of the Legend of the Bushman:

Although the ideal of the bushman is drawn from the “facts” of the bush worker in Australia in the early nineteenth century, the bushman is largely a mythical creature who needs to be considered not as the average Australian but as the typical one – and typical in this mythic sense has taken on some of the connotations of the ideal.¹

¹ Images of Australia, 100 Films of the New Australian Cinema (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1991): p.27.
More than any other film this thesis has focussed on Charles Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940) as the ‘ideal’ of Bush-Anzac films, with the picture figuring in the discussion of each of the chapters, including Chapter Two which examined the films of documentary filmmaker Frank Hurley who contributed camera work on Chauvel’s film. It has been argued that the Chauvel film represents the most accomplished example of how the film industry has sought to equate its own heroic struggle with the image of the ‘Anzac’, in terms of how both are portrayed as engaged in a fierce contest. Public discourse on the film typically equated Hurley’s re-enactment of the historic advance by the Light Horse on Beersheba with a corresponding advance by the film industry on overseas markets, culminating in this film being promoted as a heroic new chapter in Australian cinema production – that like the diggers, Australian cinema had created history with this one film. The film, therefore, has been presented as the clearest example of how Anzac heroism stands for the plight of the film industry.

There is a further claim to be made about this film that has implications for the interrelationship between the national identity and the film industry in the decades since Chauvel’s film was released into picture theatres: that this was Australian cinema’s first true epic, in terms of both ambition and box office receipts. Shirley and Adams have argued about the film that Chauvel’s re-staging of the famous Light Horse advance meant that *Forty Thousand Horsemen* was the “first Australian film of genuine international stature”\(^2\), with the film going on to play on every continent\(^3\). The symbolic connection that is established here between cinema and myth is pivotal to the argument that Australia’s film industry has exploited the Anzac legend to revitalise its fortunes.

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\(^3\) Shirley & Adams citation as above, 1989: p.163.
There were earlier films which had similarly succeeded in combining nationalist sentiment with outdoor settings. Longford’s silent cinema classic, *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), also enjoyed international acclaim, although this was mostly in the British market\(^4\). The filmmakers of the 1930s similarly had success at turning the populist appeal of bush nationalism into a commercial form of cinema, an important aspect of how the Bush-Anzac legend was used to entice audiences back after the introduction of sound. Prolific director Ken G. Hall was one who emphasised the bush landscape in many of the box office-friendly films that he directed for Cinesound\(^5\), although Cinesound’s success was based as much on the guaranteed distribution that it had with Union Theatres (GUO), which wholly owned the production studio\(^6\). In other words no other Australian filmmaker had succeeded in exporting a distinctive Australian outlook to the world market until Chauvel happened upon *Forty Thousand Horsemen*. Daniel Reynaud has argued about the film:

> It embodied so many of the typical themes and attitudes of its period,

> achieving the kind of international success that many Australian producers had dreamed of, and demonstrating that Anzac films could attract mass audiences not only locally, but also around the world.\(^7\)

The significance of the film’s box office appeal in the context of this study is that it came to stand for the heroic image of the film industry launching its own counter-offensive on foreign film markets, an image that the film industry had long sought to cultivate even in the decades before Chauvel’s film was released into cinemas, as was highlighted in Chapter Three. This is

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\(^5\) Bruce Molloy argues that “the bush provides the setting and background for majority of the seventeen feature films produced by Cinesound between 1932 and 1940”; in *Before the Interval: Australian mythology and feature films, 1930-1960* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990: p.48.

\(^6\) The fact that GUO, which was operated by Stuart Doyle, owned and distributed Cinesound’s films is covered in numerous histories of this phase of the film industry.

an image in which Australian cinema is, at the level of metaphor, depicted as matching the
heroism of the Anzacs in an attempt to reverse the flow of hegemony in the contest with
Hollywood. Chauvel’s war epic represents the moment in which the nationalist ideal of the
‘big Australian film’ was realised, particularly in terms of how this ideal is symbolically
related to the heroic figure of the ‘digger’.

This line of thematic development in public debate about Anzac-themed films continued
through to subsequent phases of the film industry. For example, in Chapters Four and Five
we heard from O’Regan and Cunningham who argued that the location films of the 1940s
and ‘50s were inspired by the British-made The Overlanders, in terms of what that film
reveals about the film industry’s tendency towards landscape exploitationism and
documentary realism, both of which were pivotal to the ‘imagining’ of the nation as
distinctive and the concomitant depiction of the film industry as stylistically distant from
Hollywood. The suggestion here that Forty Thousand Horsemen preceded The Overlanders
builds on these arguments, in terms of how the Chauvel film’s blending of Bush-Anzac
nationalism with an emphasis on realism was a precursor to The Overlanders.

Geoff Mayer has acknowledged the influence of Chauvel’s films to the planning and
production of The Overlanders, in particular The Rats of Tobruk (1944), which he explains
was influential in the early decisions that Ealing made about its own epic. The director of The
Overlanders, Harry Watt, decided not to make a film about a combat-styled story because
Chauvel’s film had already dealt with the subject matter. However, Watt still adopted war-
related themes as central to The Overlanders’ representation of ‘Australianness’. Mayer goes
on to explain about Watt: “His aim was to project Australia as a ‘huge, exciting, hard
country’”.

This asserting of an image for the nation – in a cinematographic sense – as ‘huge and
exciting’ is a mythic heritage that is traceable, in the first instance, to *Forty Thousand
Horsemen*, and later to *The Rats of Tobruk*. In Chapter Five it was argued that Chauvel
decided to make his film about the Tobruk siege as a tribute to the World War Two exploits
of the ‘bushman-soldier’ of desert warfare, a feat that he had previously accomplished in
relation to the Great War-Anzac with *Forty Thousand Horsemen*. The significance of the
Australian films that followed over the ensuing two decades, including *The Overlanders* but
also *Smithy* (1946) and *On the Beach* (1959) is that the overseas film studios made them,
consolidating the idea that the often derided ‘location films’ of the 1940s and 1950s share a
substantial mythic heritage with Chauvel’s Great War classic.

Chapter Five also argued that *Waltzing Matilda*, a national folk song that was popularised in
*Forty Thousand Horsemen*, substitutes for cinematic notions of ‘Anzac-Australianness’ in
both *On the Beach* and *The Desert Rats* (1953), the latter of which is a studio-made version
of the Tobruk siege that was not even filmed in Australia. It was further argued that the
seamless integration of the song into the musical score of each film, particularly over the
opening and closing credits, alludes to the imposing presence of the dominant Hollywood
cinema in the film industry at this historical juncture. Paradoxically in these films, the song
while signifying the ‘Hollywoodisation’ of Australia’s film industry also stands for Anzac
heroism, imploring the film industry to ‘fight back’ against its own marginalisation.

The location films of the 1950s, in turn, were influential in establishing the national cinema
of the 1970s and ‘80s. Tom O’Regan explains:

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For Australian and European cinema alike the ‘shape’ of the national cinema was partly defined by the impact of and competition provided by the North American film production and distribution industry and a subsidiary component of ‘runaway’ and ‘off-shore’ productions of that industry – like Stanley Kramer’s On the Beach in 1959 or Steve Gordon’s 1993 Fortress.  

In other words, Anzac heroism is equally transformative for the ‘New Australian Cinema’, a period in which the re-exploration of 1890s bush nationalism was used to assert ‘Australianness’ as a counterpoint to the nation’s British-colonial origins. It was further argued in Chapter Six that the Anzac films, Breaker Morant (1980) and Gallipoli (1981), were instrumental in the cultural nationalist-boom of the early 1980s, during which a small cluster of local feature films outpointed their big-budget American rivals at the box office, a ‘heroic’ achievement by the impoverished film industry in the historic struggle with Hollywood, and one that further consolidates the metaphorical connection between the ‘digger’ and the film industry. Furthermore, Gallipoli and Breaker Morant have been described as among the most “spectacular productions” of this phase of the revival, consolidating the twin ideals of Bush-Anzac nationalism and the Australian epic.

The metaphorical connection between myth (or ‘digger’) and cinema has extended into the contemporary film industry, suggesting that the film industry still sees itself – at various moments – in the heroic image of the Anzac legend particularly when confronted with Hollywood’s dominance in the domestic cinema market. The ideal of the sweeping bush melodrama is perhaps no better characterised than by Baz Luhrmann’s recent epic, Australia (2008). If anything, Australia is even grander in its imagining of both nation and film

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industry as immersed in a heroic struggle against imposing forces. Similar to Ealing’s *The Overlanders* in story, Luhrmann’s film is centred on a group of British-Australian characters who set out on a cattle drove across the continent during the Second World War. As such, *Australia* resembles previous films in terms of how the film centralises the concept of ‘landscape-as-character’ as emblematic of the struggle towards national maturity. Catherine Simpson has argued about the Luhrmann film that the landscape is more than just a backdrop – “it is the [my emphasis] central character”\(^\text{11}\).

Because of its war-time setting, the heroic struggle in *Australia* takes place within the familiar context of ‘invasion’. At the level of metaphor, ‘invasion’ implies the struggle of both nation and film industry. But unlike *The Overlanders*, ‘invasion’ in *Australia* is not merely threatened, it is realised, with the Japanese bombing of Darwin re-enacted late in the story. The implications of ‘invasion’ relate to how the heroic cattle drove stands for the struggle of the film industry, which is also reflected in the numerous moments of self-reflexiveness for the cinema. The presence of the dominant cultural power in the film industry is apparent, for example, in the film’s repeated references to the Hollywood musical, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), at the same time providing an insight into *Australia*’s shared mythic heritage with the earlier war films made by Chauvel, particularly *The Rats of Tobruk*, which makes similar use of the same Hollywood soundtrack as a way of implying American hegemony.

This intrusion into the narrative of the binary opposition of the ‘national versus international’ reminds us of *Australia*’s radical nationalist underpinnings – that in this film the film industry is depicted in the heroic image of the Bush-Anzac legend. This is best characterised in one scene in which the character of ‘Drover’ sees a convoy of U.S. army jeeps travelling through the Northern Territory outback. He remarks to another stockman: “…they’re not diggers

mate, they’re Yanks. What the bloody hell are they doing here?” This scene is highly reminiscent of a scene from *The Overlanders* which is also set in the outback – the heart of the national mythology. However, the scene in *Australia* represents a reversal of *The Overlanders*, in which it is an Australian army convoy that meets up with the droving party in the centre of the continent.

The contrast between the scenes from each film has implications for how the film industry sees its own heroic struggle in *Australia*, in terms of how the invasion is ‘realised’ in Luhrmann’s film and not simply threatened or implied as it is in *The Overlanders*. For example, this British review of *Australia* published in *The Guardian* newspaper suggests that the Luhrmann film’s reliance on Hollywood clichés had undermined its credibility as a means of exporting the national distinctiveness:

> The zappy, hyperactive cuts and zooms that are so much a part of [director Baz] Luhrmann’s style melt away as the solemnity of the film sets like concrete. We are left with slow-moving insincerity and conceit, summoned up in the flatulence of that title: *Australia*, a country reborn in terms of facetious Hollywood clichés. The film seems to mark the moment when the white man’s burden of colonial condescension passed from Britain to the United States. All this Australia offers is a cringe, but not a very cultural one.

In this article, the shift in allegiance from Britain to the United States that was characteristic of debate about earlier phases of the film industry now has a sense of finality: the threat of invasion that was previously only implied has, in this film, been realised. This is what the reviewer argues when writing of the filmmaker’s over-reliance on ‘Hollywood clichés’, the

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12 Molloy uses this description of the scene from *The Overlanders*. Citation as above, 1990: p.170.
13 *The Guardian*, 22nd December 2008
outcome of which in this film marks the ‘moment when the white man's burden of colonial condescension passed from Britain to the United States’. This is the underlying dilemma for both nation and film industry in this film and which, on the basis of discourse such as this review, has become more pronounced in the decades since the cultural nationalist revival of the 1970s and ‘80s. Simpson has alluded to the same dilemma when stating about Luhrmann’s film: “This is Australia’s Crocodile Dundee of the 2000s, telling a ‘post-apology’ story to the world”\textsuperscript{14}. The comparison to Crocodile Dundee is revealing in terms of Australia’s similar reliance on Hollywood convention, a serious misgiving that is at the core of The Guardian’s reservations about the film, and the culmination of which is a muddled expression of nationalism.

Brian McFarlane has argued about the Luhrmann film that even the title, Australia, evokes largesse – that is, “the continent at large”\textsuperscript{15}. This is a pointed reference to the epic nature of the production and in particular how the nationalist ideal of the ‘big’ Australian picture is directly relatable to the concept of landscape, which McFarlane adds is “perhaps peculiarly amenable to epic treatment”\textsuperscript{16}. Furthermore, the emphasis on landscape in this and earlier Australian narratives reminds us that the struggle of both nation and film industry is interlinked. This blending of Bush-Anzac themes with an epic treatment of subject is a mythic lineage that can be traced back to Forty Thousand Horsemen, a film that John Baxter has described as conceived “on the grand scale”\textsuperscript{17}. Baxter explains about Chauvel: “He saw immediately that the Palestine campaign could be the basis of an epic”\textsuperscript{18}. If we consider McFarlane’s and Baxter’s arguments in conjunction there is the same yearning for the ‘epic’ and ‘Australianness’, and which in both films is underscored by bush-Anzac nationalism. In

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14 Simpson citation as above, 2010: pp.88-93.
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other words, there is a strong case to be made for Chauvel’s Anzac classic to be re-considered as arguably the most important film in Australian cinema history.
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*The films included in this list were either case studied in detail or formed part of the analysis of a specific phase of the film industry. All films were viewed at least in part, depending on when they were made and their availability.