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*Commemorative Events and National Identity:  
Commemorating Death and Disaster in Australia*

This is the Accepted version of the following publication

Frew, E and White, Leanne (2015) Commemorative Events and National Identity: Commemorating Death and Disaster in Australia. *Event Management*, 19 (4). 509 - 524. ISSN 1525-9951

The publisher's official version can be found at  
<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/cog/em/2015/00000019/00000004/art00007>  
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## COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: COMMEMORATING DEATH AND DISASTER IN AUSTRALIA

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Commemorative events are held to remember all types of occasions including disastrous and tragic incidents. Due to the passage of time, the commemoration and collective memory of the event may change its significance and relevance due to changes in the associated social, political, and cultural landscape. This article examines the commemorative events associated with three tragic incidents that occurred on Australian soil, namely, the 175th anniversary of the Myall Creek massacre held in 2013, the 70th anniversary of the Second World War bombing of Darwin held in 2012, and the 10th anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre held in 2006. National identity and commemorative events are strongly connected and the article examines these particular anniversaries and commemorative events in the context of Australian national identity, collective memory, and how the significance of these commemorations may change from generation to generation. The article finds each of the commemorative events have altered in their significance and are now remembered in a different light, with the Myall Creek massacre reflecting aspects of Aboriginal reconciliation; the bombing of Darwin reflecting Australia's role on the world's political stage; and the Port Arthur massacre highlighting Australia's strict gun laws.

Key words: Commemoration; Collective memory; Anniversary; Australian national identity

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### Introduction

National disastrous events such as murders, wars, catastrophes, assassinations, and massacres are experiences of shared grief that can knit generations together (Frow, 2000). Memorials commemorating such dark periods in a country's history can also reflect aspects of a nation's identity (Nanda,

2004) and reflect a "commitment to the values and goals of the nation" (Hogan, 2009, p. 205). Memorials are built to commemorate war, regimes of terror or violence, and reflect society's need to honor those who have died (Biran, Poria, & Oren, 2011). They also operate as a reminder of the experience of others and the importance of ongoing vigilance on behalf of the nation (Manderson, 2008).

Commemorative ceremonies marking anniversaries such as key moments during the Second World War (WWII) have proliferated in recent decades worldwide, and have awakened a rise in national consciousness in many countries (Brooks, 2013). On the anniversaries of tragic occurrences, commemorative events are often staged, allowing the families, survivors, and communities to remember and pay tribute to the individuals who have died (Hall, Basarin, & Lockstone-Binney, 2010).

Visitation to places such as murder sites, battlefields, and cemeteries, is often referred to as “dark tourism” (Lennon & Foley, 2000). Although dark tourism is not a new area of study, there has been a recent emerging scholarly interest in researching and analyzing the area (Cohen, 2011; Stone, 2012). It has been recognized as a growing phenomenon in the 21st century, from both a demand and supply perspective; namely, the motives of visitors to sites and the provision of on-site interpretation and visitor facilities (L. White & Frew, 2013). The swift transformation from tragic site to visitor destination is not unusual as places of death routinely transmute into places for people to visit (Urry, 2004). Indeed, with the passage of time, some sensitive sites (such as concentration camps or sites of atomic bomb explosions) have developed international importance and have been declared places of World Heritage significance (Uzzell, 1989).

Commemorative events staged physically close to memorial sites are designed to remember the associated tragic events (Rojek, 1993). Such events need to be appropriately managed to ensure they are respectful of the victims, while also providing friends and relatives with the opportunity to remember their loved ones in a peaceful setting (Frew, 2012). Indeed, recognizing and acknowledging feelings that may surface around the anniversary of the death of a loved one can be a crucial part of the recovery process. Bereaved individuals are often encouraged by health professionals to recognize anniversaries and to find a way to acknowledge their significance (Jordan, 2003; Nemeth et al., 2012). Arguably one of the best known anniversaries in contemporary times is the annual commemoration of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York. Each year at the time the disaster occurred, family and friends of the deceased gather at the site of the World Trade Center where each of

the 2,972 individuals who died or went missing are remembered (Dass-Brailsford, 2010). The events on September 11th reflect official publicly sanctioned ceremonies but also include informal commemorative rituals enacted by the general public (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011).

Doss (2012) suggests that for many Americans, memory is defined by generational recollections of traumatic historical moments such as: President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, the explosion of the *Challenger* space shuttle in 1986, and the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. Events in the US are also staged to commemorate the Oklahoma bombings and D-Day (Sturken, 2007). In Europe, events are staged annually to commemorate various significant occurrences such as the liberation of Paris in August 1944 and the freeing of prisoners in Auschwitz, Dachau, and other Nazi concentration camps in 1945 (Keith, 2012). In the UK, disasters such as the downing of flight Pam Am 103 on the Scottish town of Lockerbie and the Hillsborough Stadium disaster are also commemorated (Brennan, 2008; Eyre, 1999). Such anniversaries can help nations cultivate a sense of national identity via a shared consciousness of belonging to a nation based, in part, on a nation-state’s history (Johnston, 1991).

This article investigates three Australian events that commemorate significant tragic occurrences, namely: a historic massacre involving indigenous and nonindigenous Australians (the 175th anniversary of the Myall Creek massacre held in 2013); a wartime disaster involving both Australian civilians and the armed forces (the 70th anniversary of the WWII bombing of Darwin held in 2012); and a modern day massacre (the 10th anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre held in 2006). Each of these commemorative events are of importance from an Australian national identity perspective but their significance was found to have changed due to the passage of time and the associated change in the social, cultural, and political landscape of Australia.

## Background

### *Memorialization Theory and Discourse*

Much has been written about how societies remember their dead and the ways in which people

mourn in different cultures (e.g., Anderson, Maddrell, McLoughlin, & Vincent, 2010; Andrews & Bagot-Jewitt, 2011; Connerton, 1989). In many Commonwealth and European countries, Armistice Day or Remembrance Day (November 11) officially commemorates the end of the First World War (WWI) as the hostilities ended on the “eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.” In the US, the last Monday in May is the annual Memorial Day commemoration to remember deceased or former members of the US military, particularly those who died in battle (Smith, 2014). Over the past decade such commemorative events have been growing in significance and scale (Bodnar, 1993; Hall et al., 2010). However, the forms and practices of commemoration constantly change as society evolves (Olick, 2007). As such, there are now elements of informality in some remembrance activities, which would have been unthinkable to earlier generations, including more overt displays of private grief (Kiszely, 2011). For example, towards the end of the 20th century a tradition developed with the signing of public books of condolence following large-scale disasters and the deaths of celebrities and public figures (see, e.g., books signed following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997 and after the Hillsborough Stadium disaster in 1989) (Brennan, 2008). There has also been an increase in the erection of spontaneous shrines and roadside memorials (MacConville, 2010) with remembrances, unfortunately sometimes bordering on the kitsch (Potts, 2012). In addition, some countries stage extended events to commemorate disasters such as the annual 100-day commemoration and mourning period to remember the victims of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 (Friedrich & Johnston, 2013). Another example is the “Day of the Dead” event commencing on October 31st in Mexico and other parts of the Spanish-speaking world, which involves widespread public mourning. The event encourages people to openly mourn for the recently deceased and to recognize and honor more distant ancestors (Brandes, 1988, 2006; Cano & Mysyk, 2004). These informal and formal memorialized events are contributing to a new “culture of commemoration” that incorporate old traditions with new ones and challenge the distinction between “history, memory and practices of commemoration” (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011, p. 193).

Whole communities are often involved in various aspects of staging public commemorative events of national disasters because many people were simultaneously affected and the shared experience of mourning provides opportunities for increased understanding (Dass-Brailsford, 2014). Indeed, recognizing and acknowledging feelings that may surface around the anniversary of the tragic event and the death of a loved one is a crucial part of the recovery process (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Thus, survivors and families of lost loved ones may appreciate the efforts made by institutions, communities, and government authorities to stage the event in recognition of the significance of the anniversary and the part it can play in the healing process (Eyre, 1999). Such rituals are important as they may help individuals deal with their grief by providing structure and stability, and can add meaning to the experience of loss (Kropf & Jones, 2014). Additionally, such rituals create a sense of community and give bereaved individuals an opportunity to receive acknowledgement, support, and acceptance from others (Dass-Brailsford, 2014).

Commemorative events associated with national disasters do not necessarily happen immediately following the tragic event and may initially occur on the first anniversary of the occurrence. This is similar to the practice in the Jewish religion whereby after the first 30 days of mourning and before the first year of mourning has concluded, there is a ceremony for immediate family and close friends where the tombstone or memorial plaque is unveiled. The deceased is then commemorated annually on the anniversary of the person’s death (Grollman, 1974). Although the establishment of a memorial following a tragic incident is important, Hayslip (2014) suggests that in order “to retain the monument’s value in eliciting key important memories, it is important that we periodically engage with it” (p. 317). This reflects the importance of facilitating mourners to travel to the monument to engage in annual commemoration.

When considering the most appropriate anniversaries on which to stage a commemorative event, reference can be made to the concept of first, second, and third-generation memory (Hirsch, 2008), whereby first-generation memory refers to events, places, or people that are personally experienced either first hand or through the contemporary

live media coverage of the phenomenon. Second-generation memories are those of our parents and their generation, and are passed down to influence our understanding of the world. Third-generation memory (and later) is represented through historical narratives (Stone, 2012). Hirsch (2008) considered the response to trauma between generations in the context of the Holocaust and found that for the second generation the powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their births were transmitted to them so deeply that it seemed to constitute memories in their own right and he described this as “transgenerational transmission of trauma” (p. 103). Similarly, Jacobs (2014) found that through interaction with the landscapes and material objects of Nazi genocide, the descendants of the Holocaust victims connected to anxiety, fear, loss, and sorrow for their families. She suggests that this connection between generations results in the development of stronger empathic ties to the survivor generation (Jacobs, 2014). Therefore, when the experience of a tragic event is not first hand, it evolves into remembrance and as time passes the memory passes into memorialization and eventually into history (Hirsch, 2012).

Remembrance, memorialization, and historical representation helps explain the sequencing and importance of commemoration anniversaries and suggests that when the closest family members remain alive, the anniversaries that require recognition of the event are generally the 1st, 5th, 10th, and 25th anniversaries. When immediate family members and those with first-generation and second-generation memory of the victims die, the incident can be commemorated at more distant milestones such as the 50-, 75-, and 100-year anniversaries (Keith, 2012). However, because grief and memory are processes that extend over several generations, there is a complex interplay between the need to remain silent and the need to tell the associated stories, particularly when influential groups in the community wish to forget or to impose their particular memory of an event (McAuley, 2013). Too little remembering can be devastating to the “political and moral health” of the nation (McAuley, 2013, p. 14) and may reflect a nation’s “collective forgetting” as identified by Haebich (2011, p. 1033). Instead, McAuley (2013) suggests that societies are strengthened, not weakened, by their

acknowledgement of wrongs done in the past and of the pain and suffering particular groups may be still being experiencing.

### *The Australian National Character*

The question of what may constitute the Australian national character has been explored in both the academic and popular literature since European settlement using historical, cultural, and sociological frameworks such as exploration, settlement, migration, and war service (Pearse, 2006) and via the people, traits, images, and experiences (Hogan, 2009). Purdie and Wilss (2007) suggest that the genesis of an Australian national identity dates back to the time of early white settlement where influences on the developing culture at the time were the British or Anglo-Saxon heritage and the harsh conditions due to terrain and climate. Thus, physical toughness, “mateship,” and the ability to withstand hardship were fundamental in the development of an Australian national identity. Furthermore, discussions of the national character frequently evoke Australia’s convict heritage when asserting that Australians today are antiauthoritarian, irreverent, and fiercely egalitarian (Hogan, 2009).

The popular account of the deeds of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), known as the “ANZAC Legend” or “ANZAC Tradition,” is perhaps Australia’s most prominent and central narrative. Although controversial, the tragic events at Gallipoli in Turkey, particularly the WWI Gallipoli landing on April 25, 1915, are generally considered both a watershed moment in the Australian national consciousness and a “coming of age” for the young nation (Seal, 2002; L. White, 2010). R. White (1981) observed that the continual questioning and search for an Australian identity within the country has become something of a “national obsession” (p. viii) but argued that national identity is an invention that is constantly being “fractured, questioned and redefined” (p. x). Australia has a tradition of using war memorials and commemorative events as vehicles for nation building (Manderson, 2008) with, for example, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra being one of Australia’s most visited public sites. Similarly, a recent event commemorating Australian soldiers departing for WWI held in Albany, Western

Australia, in March 2014 attracted 60,000 visitors and was presided over by the Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Governor-General Peter Cosgrove. The event involved a series of ceremonies including the laying of wreaths, speeches, and a reenactment watched by hundreds of people, some of whom had dressed as citizens from 1914. The commemorative event was described as having “a wonderful spirit of commemoration—not celebration—on a sparkling day, filled with pressing crowds, reflecting on what happened 100 years ago” (Fitzsimons, 2014, p. 10). Thus, commemorative events are regularly held at war memorials or other sites in Australia where tragedy has occurred, such as the annual events held in capital cities and other locations across Australia on ANZAC day (April 25th) or on Remembrance Day (November 11th). The three events examined in more detail below reflect various aspects of this collective memory and the associated commemoration.

### Methodology

This article investigates three events commemorating significant Australian tragic occurrences, namely: a historic massacre involving indigenous and nonindigenous Australians (the 175th anniversary of the Myall Creek massacre held in 2013); a wartime disaster involving both Australian civilians and the armed forces (the 70th anniversary of the WWII bombing of Darwin held in 2012); and a modern day massacre (the 10th anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre held in 2006). These three commemorative events were selected as they are commemorating three significant tragic events in the history of Australia (Blanch, 2000; Lockwood, 2005; Strange, 2000). These events fall under the Frost and Laing (2013) categorization of memorial services or concerts and significant anniversaries, which are either one-off commemorations or annual events. Four categories of death by injury were identified by the 2010 Global Burden of Diseases (GBD) Injuries and Risk Factors as (a) death related to transport injuries; (b) death due to unintentional injuries (such as falls, drowning, poisonings, adverse effects of medical treatment, animal contact); (c) self-harm; and finally (d) interpersonal violence (including assault by firearm, war, and legal intervention) (Lozano et al., 2013). The events selected for examination all reflect interpersonal

violence as categorized by the GBD with one due to war (the bombing of Darwin) and two due to firearms (the Myall Creek and Port Arthur massacres).

A descriptive case study approach was used (Yin, 2013) and a documentary method allowed the gathering of the data via public domain sources (including newspapers, web pages, and government reports) (Hodder, 1994). The case study approach was used to allow exploratory comparisons to be made between time and across the three sites in Australia. The secondary textual material regarding each site and associated commemorative event was gathered via documents (official reports on the tragic event), national print media reporting, archived records, and associated promotional materials such as brochures and web sites. To gather the textual material from the media, the database “Factiva” was accessed, which is a newspaper database created by Dow Jones and Reuters containing the full text of daily newspapers. The newspapers accessed were those based in Australia from the 1970s to the present day and were searched using the name of the site plus terms such as, “national identity,” “nationalism,” “commemoration,” and “memorial.” This generated 27 critical pieces in regards to the Myall Creek massacre, 83 for the bombing of Darwin, and 28 for the Port Arthur massacre. During October and November 2014, similar searches were conducted using the search engine Google to examine web pages associated with the sites and via the National Library of Australia’s online database “Trove” to source government reports. These data sets were saved as PDF and Word files and then examined using a close analysis to consider both the manifest and latent content of the specific texts, scrutinizing them for constructions of national identity and how Australia and its people are imagined and remembered via these commemorative events.

Comparisons were made between exploratory data regarding the three events to identify differences and similarities. Themes were generated by comparison between data and inferences were made. The events in question were examined within the framework of collective memory (Gillis, 1996). This suggests that memories and identities are not fixed but are being constantly revised to suit our current identities and that memory and associated commemoration changes from generation

to generation (Schuman & Corning, 2012) as the sociocultural and political landscape changes and the collective memory moves from first to third generation memory. Based on this methodology and the associated findings, each commemorative event is now discussed in turn.

### The Myall Creek Massacre

On June, 10, 1838, 50 years after European settlement in Australia, 12 stockmen rounded up and brutally murdered and burned the bodies of 28 Aboriginal men, women, and children of the Wirrayaraay people at Myall Creek, near the town of Inverell in northern New South Wales (NSW). The men were taken to Sydney for court proceedings and a jury found the men innocent. The Attorney General ordered a subsequent trial and 7 of the 12 men were eventually found guilty of murder and hanged later that year (Batten, 2009). The Myall Creek massacre is considered particularly significant because very rarely did the colony of Australia (or states within it) prosecute white killers. Indeed, it was the only time that white men were arrested, charged, and hanged for killing Aborigines (Tatz, 2013). The trial and the executions caused a huge uproar in Sydney (Milliss, 1992; Reece, 1974) and led to the then Attorney General commencing proceedings against two Sydney publicans for publicly threatening some jurors (Connors, 2011). The incident was significant in Australia's history because, although there have been many events of this type in the nation's history, it was the first time that white men were tried for the murder of Aboriginal Australians, so it marked a transformation in the way the justice system was perceived (Tatz, 2013). The controversy that surrounded the trial also reflected underlying tensions about the rights and status of Australia's indigenous people, who were eventually given the right to vote in 1967.

The Myall Creek Memorial was an initiative of the Myall Creek Memorial Committee, led by Gamilaroi Elder Lyall Munro Senior and Reverend Dr. John Brown of the Uniting Church. The NSW Government Heritage Assistance program and the Local Symbols of Reconciliation project of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation funded the memorial. Committee members and the Uniting Church raised additional funds, and the Bingara Shire Council also contributed (Parliament of New

South Wales, 2000). A 14-ton memorial granite boulder with a plaque was eventually unveiled at the site of the massacre in 2000—162 years after the massacre occurred (Stubbins & Smith, 2001). In June 2001, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) broadcast a program as part of the television documentary *Australian Story* series entitled “Bridge Over Myall Creek,” which focused on the development of the Myall Creek memorial and highlighted the meeting between a descendant of a Myall Creek victim (Sue Blacklock) and the descendants of two perpetrators (Beulah Adams and Des Blake). In the program Des Blake said, “The day of the memorial opening was a marvellous day. It was a beautiful day. Everybody that was there was looking for reconciliation” (ABC, 2001).

Reverend Dr. John Brown presided over the 2000 memorial opening ceremony and said,

It was an extraordinarily powerful moment for everyone there, and it was also an extraordinarily releasing moment. People said afterwards, it seemed as if a great load had been lifted between us and we were set free. . . . To actually have descendants of those who carried out the murder and descendants of those who were killed come together in an act of personal reconciliation as part of the process of dedicating this memorial was just marvellous. It was something we couldn't have planned, but it was a great gift to us. And a great gift, I think, to the people of Australia. (ABC, 2001)

Tatz (2013) suggests that the “emotional responses to the seven executions are still evident” (p. 61), with the vandalizing of the commemorative boulder and plaque in 2005. The memorial site was included on the Australian National Heritage List in 2008. Since 2000, a memorial service has been held each year on site, on the anniversary of the massacre, and the 175th anniversary of the Myall Creek massacre was held on June 10, 2013, with more than 300 indigenous and nonindigenous Australians gathering for that ceremony (Batten, 2009). One of the particularly moving aspects of the event occurred when descendants of those who were killed stood alongside, forgave, and embraced the descendants of those who murdered the indigenous people (Moerman, 2013). The cochair of the Myall Creek Memorial Committee claimed that the yearly memorial service was an important event for ongoing efforts towards reconciliation. He declared,

Myall Creek is representative of what happened right across the frontier and is best known because the people who perpetrated the massacre were brought to trial. The local settlers, two people in particular, took the trouble to ride from Myall Creek down to Sydney in order to report this. The second thing was the courts decided it was an act of murder, perpetrated by white people against Aboriginal people. (Thomas, 2013)

The visitors to the 2013 anniversary event were from the local area, from further afield in NSW, and included local school children. A memorial service was held in the local hall, and then the group walked along a memorial path flanked on either side with seven pieces of Aboriginal art by indigenous artist Colin Isaacs, to the site of the memorial (“The Works of Celebrated,” 2013). Speeches, a traditional smoking ceremony, and singing by the local school children were also features of the commemorative event (Batten, 2009). The site is listed on both the state and national heritage registries and there are also plans to build a Centre for Reconciliation at Myall Creek. Along with organizing the annual memorial event for the site, the proposed \$17.5 million reconciliation center will run workshops, exhibitions, displays, and tours of the area (Croxon, 2013).

Why it took until 2000 (some 162 years after the event) for the site of the Myall Creek massacre to be respectfully commemorated may reflect the public mood of the Australian nation at the turn of the millennium, when Aboriginal issues and events finally came to the forefront of Australian national and international awareness (L. White, 2008). Australia’s year-long Bicentenary celebrations in 1988 and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games were arguably the two biggest national identifying events ever staged in Australia (Day, 2001). However, Australia’s Bicentenary, celebrating the day the British landed on the shores of what became Sydney Cove, has never sat comfortably with indigenous Australians as it is viewed as an insensitive commemoration of the anniversary of their being invaded (Allam, 2001). However, some sections of the Australian community saw Australia’s Bicentenary, the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, and Australia’s Centenary of Federation in 2001 as times of hope for reconciliation on key Aboriginal concerns, and attempts were made to solve some of these issues despite problems existing in terms

of land rights, sacred sites, black deaths in custody, the “stolen generation,” housing, unemployment, and health (Pomeroy & White, 2011). Thus, the series of public events and political developments that occurred in Australia between 1998 and 2000 reflected the growing importance of indigenous issues in the nation (L. White, 2006). The 1988 Bicentenary, the 2000 Walk for Reconciliation across Sydney’s Harbour Bridge (involving 250,000 people) (Day, 2001), and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, alongside several other successful projects involving black and white Australians, would have seemed improbable 10 years previously (Knock, 2001). These events arguably helped create some reconciliation-related momentum and provided the background for the establishment of the plaque to commemorate the Myall Creek massacre (Johnson, 2002). In June 2000, the NSW Parliament discussed and ultimately passed a motion that the house commended the Myall Creek Memorial Committee and the Aboriginal and other Australians who “worked together in the spirit of reconciliation to acknowledge the shared truth of our history” (Parliament of NSW, 2000). Six of the seven members of the NSW Parliament who spoke to the motion mentioned the significance of the May 2000 Walk for Reconciliation across Sydney’s Harbour Bridge, which reinforced the reconciliation momentum felt across Australia at the time.

Despite there being no commemorative events for the first- and second-generation people associated with the Myall Creek Massacre, the third generation were involved in the 175th anniversary commemoration and the ongoing efforts of reconciliation has ensured the commemorative event will continue to be recognized for the third generation of people associated with the event. The 180th anniversary in 2018 is likely to have some significance as the reconciliation center may be opened by then to give further insights into the massacre and to place the event in a more identifiable historic context (Croxon, 2013).

### The Bombing of Darwin

During the late 1930s and early 1940s the city of Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia had become a strategic staging base for the defense forces, with hospitals, an increased naval presence,



and the base for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) squadrons. The Japanese war-time air raids on Darwin in 1942 were part of Japan's strategic plan to ensure the allied forces had a weakened ability to interfere with their plans to invade nearby Timor and Java. The Japanese had no firm plans to invade Australia, but this was unknown at the time (Lockwood, 2005). Thus, the air raids on Darwin, the first time mainland Australia had come under attack by a foreign force, came as a shock to Australians and it was quickly erroneously concluded that a full-scale invasion of Australia was imminent (Grose, 2009). The initial bombings on February 19, 1942 resulted in 292 fatalities. In addition, eight ships were sunk in Darwin harbor, many buildings were damaged, 23 aircraft were destroyed, communications were cut, and the township was badly damaged (Rechniewski, 2010). The Darwin Post Office was the first building hit in the initial raid and nine of the civilian staff were killed as they sheltered in a trench. Today, a small plaque marks the site where the first bombs were dropped. The Japanese raids continued across the Top End of the Northern Territory for a further 20 months and represented 64 air raids. It was not until late February, 1946 that civilians were allowed to return to Darwin. However, many who had been evacuated chose not to return (Grose, 2009; Powell, 2009).

The war-time bombing air attack on Darwin by the Japanese remains the largest attack on the Australian continent by a foreign power since the British invasion in 1788 (Brooks, 2013). Grose (2009) suggests that there was much to be proud of in Darwin, particularly on February, 19, 1942, when the worst of the bombing took place, because of the demonstration of local courage, mateship, determination, and improvisation. However, the other side of the bombings in Darwin involved looting, desertion, and poor leadership (Grose, 2009; Roberts & Young, 2008). Following the initial raid, there was immediately a Commission of Inquiry convened but its final report was not made public for 3.5 years. When it was tabled the report took a "lessons to be learned" approach, and mentioned failures of leadership following the raid, which led to poor behavior by the civilian and service personnel (Brooks, 2013). Following the 1942 bombings there was a recognition that Australia's survival as an independent nation required a much larger population,

which resulted in a postwar immigration policy to double Australia's population (Hugo, 2014).

The commemorative events for the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin represented 2 weeks of activities culminating in events held on the anniversary of February 19, 2012. Ninety war veterans who survived the bombing were invited to the events alongside civilian survivors. The events were organized by the Darwin City Council with a budget allocation from the Federal government. Many of the media reports incorporated direct quotes from veterans and civilian survivors who had experienced the event first hand, which provided insights from first-generation attendees (see, e.g., La Canna, 2012; Townsville Bulletin, 2012). It was particularly important to record these oral memories because for many elderly veterans this may have been their last anniversary of the bombing ("Flowers for Fallen," 2012). Other activities to mark the day included: a commemorative service attended by the Prime Minister Julia Gillard and the Governor-General Quentin Bryce; the laying of wreaths; the ringing of an air raid siren at 9:58 am (the moment when the Japanese aircraft dropped the first bombs and commenced their attack on the city and harbor); a display of an honor roll in the library alongside photographs and stories; a fly over of WWII era Tiger Moth planes; a veterans' ball; a lunch at Darwin's Parliament House; a visit to Adelaide Station where some of the veterans were stationed during the war; and the performance of war-time tunes by the Australian Army Band (ABC, 2012). In addition, there was a reenactment of the battle exhibition, which may have been uncomfortable for some of those who remembered the bombing first hand. A major interpretation center known as "The Defence of Darwin Experience" was also officially opened (Coorey, 2012).

Almost 5,000 people attended the 70th anniversary commemorative service, including survivors and their families (Murphy, 2012). At the ceremony, Prime Minister Julia Gillard described the 1942 attack as "Australia's Pearl Harbor" in terms of the impact on the nation, and due to the hundreds who died at the scene. Australians had not believed they would be attacked and were complacent and unprepared and Prime Minister Gillard lamented the forgotten place of the Darwin bombing in Australian history. She said Australia had learned the lessons

of the past and the attack still informed the country's military preparations (Murphy, 2012). She said, "Nineteen forty-two was the darkest year in Australia's history. And if that darkest year had a darkest day, it was February 19" (La Canna, 2012).

There was also an address by the Governor-General of Australia, Quentin Bryce, who said,

It was a day that changed Australia . . . a day that ranks as one of the most important dates in our history. . . . The bombs that fell on Darwin forced us to redefine ourselves as a nation independent of Britain. The situation hastened a new national maturity and a completion of the process of nation building. That is why all Australians need to know what happened here 70 years ago—and what those events meant for our country. (Australian Government News, 2012, para. 2)

The Governor-General also congratulated the Northern Territory government and people on their sustained efforts to ensure that the day takes its " 'rightful' place in Australia's 'national story' [and] . . . its rightful place in Australian imaginations" (Australia Government News, 2012). She also noted that because Britain was unable to help counter this direct attack, Australia turned to America for help. As a result, the Australian defense strategy was reshaped and the country formally aligned itself with the US while building an independent defense capability (Beeson, 2003). The bombing of Darwin and its associated origin for Australia's strong military alliance with the US was referred to by President Barack Obama during his brief visit to Darwin in November 2011. His reflections may have also been prompted by the recent decision by the Australian government to allow American troops a training facility in Darwin and a greater number of US troops to be on rotation in Darwin (National Business Review, 2012.) Thus, the 70th anniversary commemorative event was a reminder that Australia was once attacked along its northern coastline, reflecting its ongoing vulnerability and continued military alliance with the US.

The 1942 bombing of Darwin during WWII has similarities with Australia's involvement with the 1915 Gallipoli landing during WWI, because on both occasions the enemy was bigger and stronger than expected. An exhibit at the Darwin Aviation Heritage Centre reinforces the extent and force

of the Japanese bombing raids on Darwin (Frew, 2013) whereby Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese leader of the air raids on both Darwin and Pearl Harbor (which occurred 10 weeks prior), is quoted as saying of Darwin, "It seemed hardly worthy of us. If ever a sledgehammer was used to crack an egg it was then" ("The Day War," 2012). However, as suggested by the Prime Minister and the Governor-General at the 2012 commemorative service, the bombing of Darwin currently has a lower level of national consciousness in Australia compared to Gallipoli, which annually receives thousands of Australians attending the commemorative events staged there on ANZAC Day (Lockstone-Binney, Hall, & Atay, 2013). One of the reasons for this lower level of contemporary acknowledgment of the bombing of Darwin was that the "awkward memory" of Darwin was difficult to integrate into a national narrative (Brooks, 2013, p. 61) and is reinforced by Australian children generally not learning about the bombing in the school curriculum. Indeed, at the time of the bombing of Darwin, there was an effort by the Australian government and the associated wartime censorship to downplay the event to protect national morale with only 17 casualties being reported rather than the hundreds who died ("Darwin Bombing," 2012). However, the continued suppression of information in post-war years has served to diminish public memory of the event, and as a result the episode was largely unknown in Australia's history until fairly recently (Brooks, 2013).

The neglect of the story of the bombing of Darwin continued until there was gradual resurgence of interest throughout the 1980s and 1990s and this reflects a similar pattern of neglect found in general Australian histories and specific military histories (Brooks, 2013). The recent interest in the bombing supports the proposition by Lake, Reynolds, McKenna, and Damousi (2010) that in recent years Australia's national memory has been increasingly colonized by past military events and that for several years now Australia has seen the "relentless militarisation of our history" (p. 3). Rechniewski (2010) noted that across the nation there was a gradual forgetting of the less glorious aspects of Darwin's response to the bombing raids, and a focus developed instead on the "lived experience" of the inhabitants and on the historical and military

significance of the event. She suggested that the event had to be forgotten in order to be remembered in a way that contributes to a sense of national pride (Rechniewski, 2010). Thus, the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin in 2012 attracted heightened public interest in the same way that ANZAC Day and Gallipoli have become more significant in recent years, due to the growing interest in military history (Lake et al., 2010) and the associated support given by both sides of the Australian Federal government that February 19th should be declared a “National Day of Observance” (ABC, 2012).

### The Port Arthur Massacre

On Sunday, April 28, 1996, a resident of the Tasmanian town of Hobart traveled to the nearby Port Arthur Historic Site and, in the most horrific and unprecedented killing spree in Australia, shot and killed a total of 35 people and injured dozens more. To commemorate the victims, the Port Arthur Memorial Garden was opened on April 28, 2000, on the fourth anniversary of the shooting. It was officially unveiled by the then Governor-General of Australia, Sir William Deane. The shell of the Broad Arrow Café, where most of the victims died, still remains at the Historic Site and is the focus of the memorial area (Frew, 2012). Since 1996, a Reflective Pool has been built and this is the dominant feature of the Memorial Garden. Submerged in the water of the Reflective Pool is a circular plate on which 35 gold leaves are randomly strewn. The poignant leaves represent the individuals who were killed and are different sizes, representing the various ages of the victims. At the rear of the Memorial Garden, on slightly raised ground, stands a cross. A marker in the garden explains when the garden was dedicated, by whom, and lists the names of the victims (Frew, 2012). Because the gunman had used a gun that he had easily obtained, the Port Arthur massacre became the catalyst for uniform national gun laws in Australia prohibiting private ownership of automatic weapons (Lennon, 2002). Subsequently, both the Federal and State governments united to remove semiautomatic and pump-action shotguns and rifles from civilian possession (Chapman, Alpers, Agho, & Jones, 2006).

At the 10th anniversary, on April 28, 2006, the commemorative event was attended by 700 people

and the following activities occurred: the Prime Minister John Howard placed a wreath at the cross; an opera singer (who witnessed the massacre) sang *Ave Maria*; there were scripture readings and hymns sung; attendees placed 35 lit candles in the reflective pool; a speech was delivered by the chair of the site management authority; and a sermon was given by a pastor whose grandchildren were killed in the shooting. The organizers of the commemorative event placed an emphasis on music and the theme was “Looking Forward/Looking Back” (Jeanes, 2006). Organizers also wanted to keep the service simple but took pains to present a positive yet respectful tone in the proceedings. It was appropriate that Prime Minister Howard delivered the keynote address as he was also in office 10 years prior when the massacre occurred and he was instrumental in supporting the changes to gun ownership laws. In his keynote address, he said,

Out of the darkness of that time . . . we have learnt our strengths, we have learnt our capacity to work together to try and prevent such things happening again. But above all, we have learnt how resilient the human spirit is and how determined the Australian nation can be to confront and overcome evil. (Jeanes, 2006)

The 10th anniversary sparked a fresh debate about gun laws in Australia. A key component legacy of the Port Arthur massacre is that gun laws in Australia remain some of the strictest in the world (Chapman, 2013; Chapman & Alpers, 2013). Research has suggested that removing large numbers of rapid-firing weapons from the population may be an effective way of reducing mass shootings, firearm homicides, and firearm suicides (Chapman et al., 2006). The gun law reforms of 1996 in Australia were followed by more than a decade free of fatal mass shootings, and accelerated declines in firearm deaths, particularly suicides. Total homicide rates followed the same pattern (Chapman et al., 2006). The incident and the subsequent change in the gun laws made Port Arthur a “poignant contemporary political symbol” and a symbol of grief for locals and others directly associated with the tragedy (Mason, Myers, & de la Torre, 2005, p. 134). Indeed, the anniversary also generated an influx of grief calls for counseling services (ABC, 2006), which reflects that this

was a first-generation memory event that still had resonance in contemporary Australia.

In 2015, the Port Arthur Historic Site won gold medals for the categories of “Major Tourist Attraction” and “Heritage and Cultural Tourism” at the national tourism awards (Owers, 2015, p. 13). This reflects that the site has returned to its pre-massacre role as primarily a historic tourist attraction, with the memorial subtly incorporated into the site (Frew, 2012). This allows visitors to predominantly focus on the settlement’s extensive convict history, but the memorial and associated commemorative events are also available for the families and friends of the victims and other interested tourists.

### Discussion

The three commemorative dark events considered here—the 175th anniversary of the Myall Creek massacre in 2013; the 70th anniversary of the WWII bombing of Darwin in 2012; and the 10th anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre in 2006—were important for Australian contemporary society as they reflected key issues in Australian history. The 175th anniversary of the Myall Creek massacre represented a third-generation memory historical event involving indigenous and nonindigenous Australians. However, the event continues to have resonance today as the reconciliation process between black and white Australians is an ongoing journey, particularly regarding the elimination of “gaps” in health care; the importance of educating white Australia about indigenous history and culture; and addressing social disadvantage (Balvin & Kashima, 2012). In contrast, as a first-generation memory event some of the attendees at the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin experienced the event first hand as either civilians or members of the military, while others personally knew people who died in the bombings. Therefore, the Darwin bombings remain important in contemporary Australia and provide a reminder of Australia’s coming of age and recognition of the need to become independent of Britain (Lockwood, 2005). However, the less attractive aspects of the event such as looting and poor leadership as described by Brooks (2013) were “strategically forgotten” postwar, and now “remembered” (p. 60) in a different light. Since the Port Arthur massacre occurred

relatively recently in 1996 it is very much a first-generation memory and as such holds a strong association for the local community. Indeed, some of the staff who were working on site at the time of the massacre may remain employees, or local residents. Close family members of the victims are still alive and the gunman is currently serving 35 life sentences at the nearby Risdon Prison Complex (Jeanes, 2006). As discussed, the massacre has contemporary significance in Australia due to the significant gun law reforms that took place following the tragedy. During 2014 and 2015, following various gun massacres in the US, debate has reignited about the impact of the tighter gun laws in Australia following the Port Arthur massacre, with commentators reflecting on the significantly fewer mass shootings in Australia compared to the US (McPhedran, 2015).

Because the three commemorative events reflect different aspects of Australian society, the activities held at each were varied. The commemorative event staged at Myall Creek recognized that 162 years had passed before any formal recognition had been given and now this had been overcome. In Darwin, the minute’s silence, the laying of the wreaths, the fly over, and reenactments are traditional types of commemoration activities used in military-related events. These activities also reflected that both civilians and retired veterans who attended had first-hand experience of the event and so care was taken to involve these people via staging a ball, hosting a lunch, organizing a site visit to a key location, and creating an honor roll with associated original photographs. Alternatively, the Port Arthur commemorative event activities were much more personal with the sailing of 35 lit candles on the reflective pool in the Memorial Garden at Port Arthur by relatives or friends of the victims. This highlighted the ongoing remembrance and grief still present for each person who died and also reflected the raw emotion associated with the deaths—since only 10 years had passed since the tragedy. Each of the activities staged to commemorate and remember the events were appropriate and reflected several aspects of Australian national identity, namely the importance of reconciliation between white and black Australians (Myall Creek massacre); the exposure of the continent of Australia to northern attack; the associated

strategic development of Darwin as a frontier city; the strategic military alliance with the US (bombing of Darwin); and the prevalence of guns in Australian society, which led to the introduction of tighter gun control (Port Arthur massacre). Each commemorative event allowed the attendees to quietly reflect on their losses, which reinforces the need to incorporate ritual into the memorialization and to recognize anniversaries and their role in the healing process (Dass-Brailsford, 2014; Eyre, 1999; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). The events also reflected aspects of collective memory whereby they represent important components of the Australian national consciousness (R. White, 1981; Seal, 2004).

The above discussion reflects that there are several ways to commemorate a significant tragic event, which can differ depending on whether the event occurred in relation to warfare (such as the bombing of Darwin), a massacre, (such as the Myall Creek massacre), or reflects certain political issues such as gun control (such as the Port Arthur massacre). The activities chosen to be included in the event also reflect whether the event attendees represent first-, second-, or third-generation memory holders. If a commemorative event represents first-generation memory (such as the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin and the 10th anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre) then the activities may be staged in a large space to hold the expected number of people attending and may be presided over by a national figure such as a Prime Minister. If the event is of a historic nature and represents third-generation memory (such as the 175th anniversary of the Myall Creek massacre), then a lesser known local dignitary would be appropriate to attend, such as the local councilor or a local member of parliament. The activities staged at the commemorative anniversary also reflect the type of event being remembered (such as war related, national disaster, or interpersonal violence), the age of the victims, the current politics, and/or the time distance from the event.

This article has applied the concept of collective memory and national identity to commemorative events and found that each of the events in question can be seen to have changed in significance over the years. However, these events continue to play a vital role in the grieving process of first-generation

attendees and to help second and third-generation attendees to reflect on the event and its associated meaning and importance.

### Conclusion

Commemorative events are important as they provide a focus for loved ones to deal with their grief but they can also help develop and reinforce the national identity of the country. The nonsensationalist aspect of such staged events allow visitors to attend and experience quiet reflectiveness and contemplation, which in turn encourages respectfulness and can help in the healing process. Commemorative events at sites of disaster generate media coverage of a destination and this may encourage more people to visit the memorial site (Podoshen, 2013; Williams, 2007). Government departments, veterans' affairs groups, planners, site operators, and destination managers need to better understand the most appropriate way to commemorate (or memorialize) events associated with incidents of accidental or violent death. Collective memories of past events define who we are, so the relationship between commemorative events, memorialization, and national identity is complex. However, the manner in which commemorations are held tells us much about how a nation remembers difficult periods of its history and allows citizens to grieve and then subsequently move on. In addition, such events may be "useful" for politicians and organizations to highlight topical issues such as the continued importance of strict gun laws.

The article examined three different Australian commemorative events: a massacre involving indigenous Australians, a wartime disaster involving Australian civilians and the armed forces, and a modern massacre. The commemoration of all three events allows the reexamination of the evolving Australian national identity. As evidenced in the media coverage investigated, the commemoration of the Myall Creek massacre allowed participants and the nation to focus on the question of reconciliation and equality; the anniversary of the Darwin bombing allows a focus on Australia's important military relationship with the US and the role Australia plays on the world's political stage; while remembering the events of the Port Arthur massacre reinforces the freedoms sometimes taken for granted and how strict gun laws

help to provide a stronger sense of safety and security for all citizens. Future research in this area could extend this study to consider the changes in other commemorative events over time, using appropriate methodologies, to demonstrate the influence of first, second, and third-generation collective memory at such occasions.

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