

'The Roses of No Man's Land'

What was it that carried each man on?
It was not love of a fight, nor was it hatred of a Turk,
nor was it purely patriotism.
Life was not worth living unless they could be true
to their idea of Australian manhood.
Standing upon that alone,
when the end loomed clear in front of them,
when the whole world seemed to crumble and the heavens to fall in,
they faced its ruin undismayed.
(Bean 1961, p. 181)

Bean's statement epitomises the courage that each digger, in every trench throughout the wars and bloodshed, has admirably displayed in the true Anzac spirit and tradition. It is the same spirit that is integral to our nation today and is entrenched in our nation's collective consciousness. However, it was not only our courageous and committed diggers who exemplified this notion of spirit and tradition; it was also the wives, daughters and aunts of our young nation who became nurses and contributed as courageously as the men to the war effort. The nurses today who aid people in countries such as war torn Iraq, or splintered Bali, have instilled in them the Anzac spirit and tradition that was forged in the theatres of war in Gallipoli and the slaughter house of the Somme. The Australian nurses who served in World War 1 and subsequent conflicts epitomised the Anzac spirit and tradition by displaying the ideals of courage, commitment and endurance. 'The Roses of No Man's Land', held special significance to the Anzacs at Gallipoli and have helped to shape characteristics that we value in contemporary Australian society.

The women of the Australian Army Nursing Service epitomised the Anzac spirit and tradition throughout World War One and following conflicts; and especially exemplified the characteristics of courage, commitment and endurance. One of the first Australian nurses to depart for Gallipoli on the 19 October 1914; was 41 year old

Sister Alice Elizabeth Kitchen. As one of the first nurses to arrive at Anzac Cove, she organised many of the injured soldiers who first boarded the hospital ship. As soon as her hospital ship, *Gascon*, reached Anzac Cove, the nurses found themselves overwhelmed with injured diggers. Kitchen and other nurses courageously endured the horrors of war and the wounded found solace in these women who unexpectedly demonstrated the ideals of courage and endurance that were usually associated with the male diggers while fighting in the battlefields. So inspired by the nurses were the soldiers that they confided in them and viewed them as their protectors. 'Another poor abdominal begged me not to leave him as he was dying (De Vries 2004, p.137).' Even though the nurses put on a calm and efficient façade; the constant deaths of injured soldiers took its toll on the nurses. '...it seems that the heartbreak was for nothing (Burke 2005, p. 56).'

In contemporary society, the Anzac spirit and the characteristics of courage, commitment and endurance kept both those injured in the 2002 Bali bombings and their rescuers from giving up. Kim Patra witnessed the horror that resulted from the bombings, and was one of a team of volunteer doctors and nurses who cared for Australians before they were evacuated. She identified the amazing courage as the significant characteristic that helped all the people affected by the bombings to endure the devastation that arose from the bombings. 'It's not unusual at the moment...Everyone is doing something ('The Courage of the Helpers' 2002, p. 2).' It was not only in World War One that Australian nurses exhibited characteristics of the Anzac spirit and tradition.

The nurses who served in World War Two were as deeply patriotic as previous serving nurses and they exemplified characteristics associated with the Anzac tradition and spirit such as endurance. In 1942, following the invasion by the Japanese of Singapore, many nurses tried to escape the island with their patients. However, numerous Australian nurses were captured and kept in Muntok jail in Banka, where they would

endure three years of harsh treatment, sickness and torture at the hands of the Japanese. It was in these dire times that the courage and endurance of these women was really significant for the survival of all. Displaying ideals of courage, endurance and commitment, a group of Australian nurses formed a choir to boost moral within the camp. The Palembang Camp Choral Society provided a new activity for the nurses to participate in and the endurance of the few original members held significance for the bedridden nurses as 'hearing the choir perform meant for many of the captives that the camp, with its dilapidated shacks, seemed to fade into the background. They felt that singing in the choir set them free (De Vries 2004, p. 232)'. The nurses realized that although the Japanese may starve them to death, they could never conquer their spirit; the Anzac spirit. The endurance of the nurses, even though some were bedridden with disease, stunned their Japanese captors, 'the Jap guards couldn't understand how we could still sing after everything that had happened to us (De Vries 2004, p. 232).'

More recently the war in Iraq has become the theatre of war where Australian nurses demonstrate the characteristic of endurance, one of the ideals of the Anzac spirit and tradition. The nurses provide critical care within a hazardous combat zone, where the security environment remains extremely dangerous. Even though they place themselves in jeopardy to care for others, they feel such a devotion to their fellow Australians that they must help in any way possible. This sentiment is expressed in the following quote from an Australian nurse, 'These people are our neighbours, friends and family. In saving them we save our community and our nation ('Iraq – Time of Terror' 2004, p. 10)'. The nurses must endure the turmoil that comes from being in a war zone, and also the injuries sustained by their patients. 'It takes immense amounts of courage and endurance to do the traumatic job that these people do ('Iraq – Time of Terror' 2004, p. 10)'. The Australian nurses also exemplified the Anzac spirit and tradition through the characteristic of commitment when they returned to Australia.

The nurses displayed an unwavering commitment to their beloved nation to return to a decimated country and resume their lives after the carnage they had witnessed while at war. 'Nothing will induce any of our staff to tell of the horrors they have seen and dealt with. And no one who has not seen it, in its awful reality, could imagine a portion of the saddest part of the war ('100 years – The Australian Story' 2001)'. The mundane tasks that before the war had seemed numerous yet important; now appeared menial when compared to the courage and endurance that the nurses exhibited every day in the war. It was their commitment to their families and Australia that brought them home to become the building blocks of the country, having families and passing on the importance and Anzac spirit to future generations. The war, in which the nurses forged a whole new set of attitudes, values and beliefs, was instrumental in women becoming empowered in the Australian community. Those attitudes, values and beliefs represented the Anzac spirit in all the nurses and became the common thread that bound all Australians. They showed commitment when they participated in the community, taking on vital roles in World War Two as well as coming to have equal opportunities to men in contemporary society. The significance and repercussions of this commitment can be seen in the generations of Australians that still understand the importance of the Anzac spirit and tradition. The evidence is in each and every grandchild and great grandchild of the courageous women of war, who will lead Australia into the future, but still remember the great importance of events in the past.

Their experience was both horrible and wonderful.
Horrible because of the destruction of human lives...
Wonderful because of expansion of their heretofore limited world.
They learned at a very young age, of the frailty of human life,
and the... strength of the human spirit...
This knowledge has helped future generations throughout life.
(Goodman 1988, p. 30)

Throughout the history of Australians at war, Australian nurses seem to be bound by a common element that is born from loyalty and devotion to fellow Australians. That

common element is the Anzac spirit and it was through the nurses' exhibition of the qualities of courage and endurance that they held special significance to the soldiers in war and also fellow nurses. The Australian nurses who served in World War One and subsequent conflicts epitomised the Anzac tradition and spirit by displaying the ideals of courage and endurance. 'The Roses of No-Man's Land', held special significance to the Anzacs at Gallipoli, and have helped to shape characteristics that we value in contemporary Australian society. Australian nurses' courage and endurance in the face of adversity; their refusal to allow 'the heavens to fall in (Bean 1961, p. 181)', constituted what Australians today view as the Anzac spirit and tradition. It was their courageous and enduring actions in the Anzac spirit and tradition that have imprinted Australian nurses onto the consciousness of Australians today; where they will remain forever, 'The Roses of No Man's Land'.