

SIMPSON PRIZE ESSAY ENTRY

*Courage, mateship, determination, resourcefulness and a sense of humour are identified as characteristics of the ANZAC tradition and spirit.*

The ANZAC spirit was born on the banks of the Turkish peninsula of Gallipoli. Today that same spirit, shaped by years of blood and self sacrifice, lives on in our military forces and in the Australian persona. The soldiers who gave their lives at Gallipoli forged the Australian identity, and the doctrines of the ANZAC soldier have been inherited generation after generation.

*"Until the last only one doubt obsessed the regimental officers – whether the men, sick with diarrhoea and strained with lack of sleep and heavy work, could sustain prolonged fighting or marching. But, as the battalions marched to the starting point and settled themselves to wait for the signal, their officers...watched with intense interest the evidence of qualities which, till the end of the war, never ceased to surprise even those who knew the Australian soldier best."<sup>1</sup> (Bean 1924, p 502)*

The above encapsulates the ANZAC spirit in its entirety. The ANZAC soldier, ignoring disease, malnourishment and sleep deprivation, always stepped up with a positive attitude when called upon. Here, the story of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade at the Battle of Lone Pine on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1915, is described. Throughout Bean's narration of ANZAC involvement in the First World War, the "ANZAC spirit" is constantly recounted.

The "ANZAC spirit" is often debated in coalition with the ANZAC myth. Some believe the allied attack on Gallipoli was no more than a military and tactical disaster. Others believe it was a pivotal apex in shaping the Australian identity. Certainly, when reading Bean's account, it is almost impossible to quarrel with the fact that the ANZAC spirit was the ever positive attitude the soldiers held towards the adversities they faced.

*"The men chaffed each other drily, after the manner of spectators waiting to see a football match."<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Bean, C.E.W, 1924 *The Story of ANZAC*, vol. 2, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, p 502

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p 502

At the time of the Battle of Lone Pine in August 1915, many of the soldiers involved had already spent up to four months on the Gallipoli peninsula. The soldiers were weakened considerably by the disease and malnourishment which they had suffered, yet Bean describes the manner of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion similar to that of a crowd before a football match. The fact a tired, disease ridden soldier can be so optimistic before imminent death shows the courage and commitment to the cause for which he is fighting. Such spirit was exhibited at the Battle of Lone Pine in August, 1915.

The ANZAC spirit and tradition is also displayed by non-combatants. The Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps was founded in 1898 in Sydney, consisting of 25 nurses. Their first actual service with Australian troops was in the Boer War (1898-1903). Since that time, Australian nurses have served in almost every battle zone where Australian soldiers have been dispatched.

*"She raced back to the tent and was shortly joined by the badly shaken Padre, who went off to get help (after urging her to take cover). She ignored the advice and again tried to get into the tent. Grabbing hold of a handle under the fly she tried to drag a stretcher free. The patient was dead, and the splintered handle came away in her hand, throwing her backwards into the crater again."<sup>3</sup>*

The nurse described here had almost been the victim of a shell explosion. The field hospital she was working in had nearly been blown away, and the patient she was fighting to keep alive was in imminent danger. The nurse, instead of ensuring her own safety, hastened back to the tent to free the patient. A great sense of mateship is evident here, and the nurse's actions were of complete selflessness. Her actions show the spirit apparent at Gallipoli.

Many of the qualities of the ANZAC's may be found later in history. A primary example is the Kokoda Track, whereby Australian soldiers fought off the Japanese forces attempting to take Port Moresby (and thus gaining the ability to invade Australia) via the Kokoda Track.

*"By the end of July the Militia were carrying out a fighting retreat and it was not until late in August that reinforcements from the 7th Division A.I.F. began to reach them. The A.I.F. men, trained for desert warfare, found the country more frightening than they found the Japanese. Confusion was created by Japanese advances through the trackless jungle on the flanks of positions the Australians were prepared to defend."<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/overview/nurses.html> [17 Nov. 2005]

<sup>4</sup> Darlington, Robert. 1987 Sudan to Vietnam. Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney

These few examples demonstrate the seeds of tradition planted on the shores of Gallipoli. These traditions have been passed from generation to generation. The 39<sup>th</sup> Militia Battalion dug in after retreating to Isurava on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 1942. Here the ANZACS used their steel helmets and bayonets to dig trenches: a small example to show a continuation of the resourcefulness that started with the retreat from Gallipoli.

Another example is the 7<sup>th</sup> Division A.I.F in the Second World War. They had been trained for desert warfare, yet adapted to the harsh jungle environment of New Guinea. The soldiers had to rely on their resourcefulness for survival at Kokoda.

Tradition and spirit describe attributes which are sometimes hard to grasp. However, a visit today to the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Officers Mess in Darwin or the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion lines at Lavarack Barracks Townsville will reveal evidence of a proud history dating back to Gallipoli, including regimental colours emblazoned with battle honours.

The spirit of ANZAC is passed with each deployment like a baton between runners in a relay. Consider the kangaroo painted on the side of the ASLAV vehicles of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment in Iraq. They also played Aussie Rules in the deserts, juxtaposed to the ANZAC's in Egypt in 1915.

One could argue the tradition and spirit of ANZAC has transcended the Military and become part of our Australian way of life. In more recent times, Australia has dealt with the Pakistan earthquake, the Boxing Day Tsunami, the Bali Bombings and the Canberra Bushfires. Not only did the military play a prominent role in each of these disasters, but the population have donated support, money and aid liberally.

The military seem to take the lead. Consider the almost pop star like status of General Peter Cosgrove when named Australian of the Year. How many countries would such a choice be so well embraced?

The most obvious place where the ANZAC spirit may be found is in every day Australian life. The Australian War Memorial constantly wins major tourism awards, visited by millions each year. Watch the visitors leave the memorial, and see the respect on their faces. Every year more people are attending Dawn Services. Australians are embracing their past and remembering the sacrifices made by Australian soldiers.

The ANZAC spirit and tradition of courage, mateship, determination and resourcefulness are key ingredients in the shaping of the Australian identity. Our unique country would not be the same had the great "tragedy" of Gallipoli not occurred.

The ANZAC perception worldwide was created through courageous and indomitable attitudes of Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought at Gallipoli in World War One. Throughout our military history, such values have lived true in our soldiers and civilian population through every bloody and humanitarian endeavour.

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