

## **RUNNER-UP — QUEENSLAND**

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### **The Anzac Way – The Aussie Way**

Australia. The little country of misfits and social rejects down the bottom of the globe. The ex-penal colony of a dying Empire. This was the world's view of Australia. Indeed, for many, this was Australia's view of Australia. A land with no identity, no nationhood. But, in the murky glow of dawn, on the desolate shores of a strange land, the world's view of Australia was about to be turned upside down. Going into World War I, the Anzacs were just one of Britain's quick-call armies. But coming out of it, they were battle-hardened soldiers, scarred by hardship and revered for their courage, for their individuality, and for their strength of spirit.

Rallied by the call to defend the Motherland, fortified by the romanticised images of courageous infantry advances and dashing cavalry charges, the thousands of young men of the Australian Imperial Forces set off for duty, glory and honour. The Turkish artillery soon convinced them that this war was going to be very different from the glorious attacks of colonial history, and so the Anzacs settled in to cope with their living hell the best way they knew how.

On the shores of Gallipoli, and later at the Western Front, many commented on the individuality of the Australian troops. They did not conform to accepted standards of behaviour, but rather created original dress styles, informal salutes, and passwords. They were quickly distinguished by their ingenuity, with inventions such as the periscope rifle, by Lance Corporal Beech, and the time delay self-firing mechanism by W.C Scurry, which eased the evacuation of over 80 000 men. Their sense of humour was typically depreciative, and soldiers of other nationalities were occasionally offended by the offhand insult that constitutes Aussie wit. Also frequently provoking exasperation in the Allied camp was the Anzacs' laidback attitude to discipline, hygiene and the chain of command. One enraged British scout reported back to his superiors that the Anzacs

under Captain Lalor were sitting down “*smoking and eating as if on a picnic*” (Harris, T. 2005). Let’s face it; Australians are by nature laconic. Although the Anzacs were always able to dig deep and perform admirably when the heat was on, in the routine of warfare the Aussie troops were for the most part very lazy in their observance of structure.

These characteristics of individuality persist in Australian culture today. To be sure, our society has definitely been influenced by American customs, but in essence, we are still classically Aussie – particularly in our country’s rural areas. The lopsided grin, the underhand put down, the ‘she’ll be right’ attitude to just about everything – these are the unique quirks of Aussie persona. We retain the Anzac characteristics especially, because they are the building-blocks of our nation. Before World War I, Australia had no identity of its own. But, as Sydney’s Freeman’s Journal stated in 1916, because of the Anzacs, “*We are at last a nation, with one heart, one soul and one thrilling aspiration*” (Hoepper, B. et al. (ed) 1996, pg 57). And so today, Aussies are a breed of their own. We are lax, rude and rough – a point in case is that we’re more interested in the AFL finals than the state elections. We can be regular ratbags – just look at the satirisation of Prime Minister Howard and President George W Bush in our political cartoons. Yet we also reflect the same ingenuity as the Anzacs - it was Australian of the Year Professor Ian Frazer who developed the world’s most effective cervical cancer vaccine, and (on an admittedly smaller scale) it was the Aussies who came up with the esky, the stubby cooler, the Ute and Vegemite. Australian society today is still influenced by and reflects the characteristics of individuality that the Australian soldiers in World War I displayed.

Another characteristic typical of Australian troops in World War I that has persevered in today’s society is that of mateship. Perhaps the most famous of the Anzac qualities, mateship displayed itself in the likes of Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who risked (and ultimately lost) his life to rescue hundreds of wounded soldiers on the battlefield, and Victoria Cross holder Lieutenant Frederick Tubb, who stuck by his men, shouting encouragement and inspiring them to hold out until reinforcements arrived. Historian C.E.W. Bean wrote “*The typical Australian ... held a prevailing creed ... of which the chief article was that a man should at all times and at any cost stand by his mate. That*

*was and is the one law which the good Australian must never break.*" (C.E.W. Bean, *The Story of ANZAC*, 1921). Likewise, today our community values mateship as a requirement in a 'true blue' Aussie. The country was on tenterhooks throughout the Beaconsfield mining disaster, and has extolled the values of the survivors, Todd Russell and Brant Webb, in their support and care of each other throughout their ordeal. Another example of our country's mateship mentality was the overwhelming public response to the Boxing Day Tsunami. In a touching gesture of care and concern, Australia provided more aid, labour and money than any other nation to our stricken northern neighbours. The compassion displayed by the entire nation showed us that we have been strongly influenced by the Anzac code of standing by their mates no matter what.

One more characteristic displayed by the Anzacs was extreme bravery in the face of grave danger. To be sure, the Australian Imperial Forces, like any military force, had their share of cowards and deserters. But as a unit of men, they displayed extraordinary courage. The bravery of the troops at Gallipoli is personified by the likes of James L Ellison, killed in 1915 during the landing whilst trying to capture a Turkish machine gun. Another hero of outstanding courage was Albert Jacka. Already a recipient of a Victoria Cross for his service at Gallipoli, Jacka won a Military Cross for his actions to save forty Australians captured near Pozières. And this bravery lives on through our society today, particularly in our Defence Forces. In Iraq, several Air Squadrons were cited for awards for gallantry for their conduct in conflict conditions. Said Senator Robert Hill, *"Australian Special Forces soldiers have earned a deserved reputation for their effectiveness on the battlefield. This award today reflects not only their ability to conduct successful combat operations, but also their resourcefulness, composure and compassion shown in achieving their mission."* (Hill, R. 2004, Media Room). The many examples of individual bravery exhibited by Australian Defence Force personnel in Iraq, East Timor and the Middle East prove that the qualities displayed by the Anzacs at Gallipoli, and later at the Western Front, play a large part in the psyche of today's soldier.

And so, the Australia of today cherishes and champions the characteristics and values that were demonstrated by the Anzacs. The Pride of Australia Awards scheme, dedicated to

rewarding community spirit, mateship, bravery, and fair go and true-blue qualities, expresses our continued reverence for any who emulate these Anzac characteristics.

The Anzac legend has shaped who we as Australians are today, reflected in both the psyche of today's soldiers, and in the lives of everyday Aussies. The standard, set in the blood-soaked shores of Gallipoli is high, but, embracing the qualities of individuality, mateship and courage, we may walk in the footsteps of those gone before us and show the world the Anzac spirit - the true Aussie spirit.

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