

## **RUNNER-UP — WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

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In 1915 young men from around Australia were called to assist in the Great War. These fit, eager men were prepared for an adventure of a lifetime, ready to fight a war few of them could have imagined. However, the men “probably did not see themselves as future killers, maimed or dead, but as returning heroes.”<sup>1</sup> This was to be Australia’s first participation in war, only fourteen years after becoming a nation. Australia would unite, forming a national identity through this ‘baptism of fire’<sup>2</sup> at Gallipoli and later at the Western Front. The characteristics and values displayed by the ANZACs were those of mateship, humour, sacrifice, courage and endurance. These admirable qualities have become engrained in the hearts of Australians and continue to influence our everyday lives.

The ANZACs showed the spirit of mateship at Gallipoli and at the Western Front. In the face of extreme danger and death, they were able to work together, sharing a common bond and forming strong friendships. This mateship was shown in the first battle of Fromelles, when the ANZACs were ordered by the High British Command to not rescue the injured soldiers as they were trying to make their way back to the Australian line. However, they refused to comply. C.E.W. Bean, Australia’s official war historian at the time, observed that “life was not worth living unless they could be true to the idea of Australian manhood.”<sup>3</sup> The spirit of mateship was formed through the men’s sense of humour, as their frequent jokes and laughter enabled them to keep their spirits high.

Today, the quality of mateship and humour can often be observed in sporting teams around the country. Dawn Fraser, “Australia’s most recognised and best-loved sportswoman,”<sup>4</sup> refused to wear the official swimsuit during the heats for the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, claiming that it was uncomfortable. Fraser showed her mischievous personality when she was caught stealing the Olympic Flag from the

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<sup>1</sup> *Gallipoli the Fatal Shore*, Harvey Broadbent, Chapter One – Dogs of War, p.5

<sup>2</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* dated 6/8/1914

<sup>3</sup> C. E. W. Bean, *Official History*, Volume. 1, p606, 607

<sup>4</sup> *Dawn – One Hell of a Life*, Dawn Fraser

avenue leading to the Japanese Emperor's Palace.<sup>5</sup> This attitude in the sporting culture of Australia reflects the characteristic of a larrikin sense of humour that was displayed by the ANZAC soldiers.

The ANZACs were volunteers, who made the ultimate sacrifice, giving up their lives for their country. On the first day of landing at Gallipoli, 2000 ANZACs were killed.<sup>6</sup> At the Western Front, explosive artillery shells rained down every few seconds for days at a time and many were buried alive. Over 228,500 ANZACs were killed or wounded at the Western Front, in the battles of Ypres, Fromelles, the Somme and the village of Pozieres.<sup>7</sup> One road became so filled with corpses that it was known as 'Dead Man's Road.'<sup>8</sup>

The quality of sacrifice first displayed in the Great War is still exemplified today. On the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2005, the Beaconsfield mine collapsed, trapping three miners. Immediately rescue teams focussed on freeing them, but it was difficult, as there was risk of another rock fall. The rescue effort was slow and very dangerous. Finally after fourteen nights they reached the two surviving men. The rescuers freely risked their lives to save those of others. The needs of those in danger were their first and foremost obligation, and they truly reflected the qualities shown by the ANZACs in serving their country.

The ANZACs demonstrated tremendous courage by facing danger and death even though they were terrified by the situation of war. They continued in combat, knowing that anyone, at any moment could be killed. Even though the Gallipoli campaign was a military defeat, the ANZACs showed incredible bravery and courage. This was demonstrated at the battle of Lone Pine, when the ANZACs 'fought their way through the logs and mud into the Turkish trenches and battled the Turks with their bare hands.'<sup>9</sup> During the First World War the ANZAC's were awarded sixty-six Victoria Crosses, the highest honour for war time bravery.<sup>10</sup> In July this year, Kerry Stokes bought a Victoria Cross, as well as other medals, for a record \$1.2 million. He

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<sup>5</sup> *Dawn – One Hell of a Life*, Dawn Fraser, p. 193

<sup>6</sup> [www.rslwahq.org.au/anzacspirit.html](http://www.rslwahq.org.au/anzacspirit.html) - The Anzac Spirit

<sup>7</sup> <http://web.westernfrontassociation.com/thegreatwar/articles/research/anzac.htm> - Anzacs on the Western Front in the Great War

<sup>8</sup> *1914 – 1918 The World at War*, Carolyn O'Brien, p.126

<sup>9</sup> [www.rslwahq.org.au/anzacspirit.html](http://www.rslwahq.org.au/anzacspirit.html) - The Anzac Spirit

<sup>10</sup> [www.rslwahq.org.au/anzacspirit.html](http://www.rslwahq.org.au/anzacspirit.html) - The Anzac Spirit

then donated his purchase to the Australian War Memorial.<sup>11</sup> This highlights the selflessness, and the value and respect that Australians hold today for the acts of bravery that occurred in World War One.

The quality of courage shown by the ANZACs lives on today. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is a charitable organisation that provides aeromedical emergency assistance to remote and regional areas of Australia.<sup>12</sup> This service flies in almost all weather conditions to help those in life threatening situations. They demonstrate egalitarianism and bravery in serving those in need. In another example, Major Scott Watkins, an Australian army officer has recently been awarded Britain's Distinguished Flying Cross, for his acts of courage when his helicopter came under attack in Iraq and his co-pilot was critically injured. Watkins has shown the ANZAC spirit of courage, and is the first Australian since the Vietnam War to receive this prestigious award.<sup>13</sup>

The ANZACs also showed amazing endurance. In Gallipoli the men landed at the wrong site and were faced with a harsh landscape of cliffs and jagged mountains. Life in the trenches at the Western Front was equally terrible; the battle was not only fighting the enemy, but also the mud, diseases, lice, rats, freezing temperatures and psychological trauma. The ANZACs suffered from frostbite and a disease known as 'trench foot' which was a deadening of the foot that would have to be amputated.<sup>14</sup> The ANZACs endured these tough conditions and fought honourably.

The ANZAC spirit of endurance was also demonstrated at Kokoda in 1942, when Australia's security was directly threatened by the Japanese. The young, under equipped and barely trained troops were faced with dreadful conditions. The terrain was extremely difficult; the climate was unbearably humid during the day and tremendously cold at night. Heavy rainfall caused the soil to turn to foul smelling mud and many of the soldiers contracted diseases such as malaria. Despite the terrible conditions, the Australians were able to stop the Japanese advance. Like the ANZACs, they showed endurance when the conditions became particularly difficult.

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<sup>11</sup> "Tasmanian hero's VC auctioned for \$480,00" The West Australian, November 29, 2006

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.flyingdoctor.net/who.htm> - Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia

<sup>13</sup> "Bravery award for Australian" The West Australian, November 25, 2006

Volunteer fire fighters today continue to demonstrate the characteristic of endurance. On the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1983, Victoria and South Australia were faced with devastating bushfires. Approximately 2500 houses were burnt down and 75 people were killed. 16,000 fire fighters, which included the Country Fire Authority volunteers, fought the blazes.<sup>15</sup> These firemen had to endure harsh conditions to save the lives of others, and therefore demonstrated the trait of endurance as shown by the ANZACs.

The significance of the ANZAC tradition and spirit is relevant in my own life. A recent school trip to Canberra, when we visited the Australian War Memorial, further developed my understanding of the ANZACs. I will never forget being moved to tears by reading the countless names on the Wall of Remembrance. They were the names of sons, husbands, brothers and fathers who sacrificed their lives with courage and honour. For me, and many other young Australians, the ANZAC spirit and tradition will carry on through the decades and continue to burn brightly in the hearts of all Australians. We shall remember them.

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<sup>14</sup> 1914 – 1918 *The World at War*, Carolyn O'Brien, p.127

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/nrenfoe.nsf/childdocs/-D79E4FB0C437E1B6CA256DA60008B9EF-7157D5E68CDC2002CA256DAB0027ECA3?open> – Ash Wednesday 1983

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