

WINNER — NORTHERN TERRITORY

Stacey Carvolth

Palmerston High School

The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, more widely known as the ANZACS, fought in aid of the British Empire in conflicts at Gallipoli and the Western Front. The spirit shown by the ANZACS during these battles has inspired many Australians and earned the respect of their allies and their opponents. The courage, determination, mateship and sense of humour shown by the ANZACS set them apart from all others and set the standard for us to follow.

Courage was a characteristic displayed by the ANZACS at Gallipoli and the Western Front and became what is now well known as the “ANZAC Spirit”. The courage that took the ANZACS forward cannot be praised enough as many of the Australian soldiers who fought in Gallipoli were volunteers, bravely risking their lives for Australia and its future. Whilst the ANZAC soldiers were not overly successful in battle, they displayed courage against all odds which won the hearts of Australians. The ANZACS lived in some of the roughest conditions you could imagine, yet they carried on courageously. The first ever Australian to receive the Victoria Cross in WWI was a soldier who displayed extreme courage, Lance-Corporal Albert Jacka. Jacka was 32 years old when he leapt alone into a section trench that had been taken by the Turks, shot five of them, bayoneted two more, and forced the rest to abandon the trench. Although the Victoria Cross is said to recognise the bravest of the brave, there were hundreds of individual acts of courage that went unnoticed and unrewarded during the Gallipoli and Western Front campaigns [Denton, (K) 1986].

Today this characteristic is evident throughout Australian society whenever we find ourselves facing impossible odds. Janine Sheppard is such a person. She was a world champion skier who, whilst on a training run, was hit by a truck and received major injuries. Although doctors told her she would never walk again Janine, with her fighting spirit, refused to believe them. Courage and determination drove her to success. She not only walked again but she is now a licensed flight instructor, with a degree in physical

education, despite being a paraplegic [Christine Mahar Group, 2000]. Janine Sheppard is an amazing and inspiring person and a perfect example of how courageous Australians are when they are faced with seemingly hopeless situations.

Determination gave the ANZACS the will to stay alive, to keep fighting till the end. It kept the men from giving up and dying then and there. Dyson, an Australian war artist, described the battle weary troops as “dead but that their hearts would not let them lie down and die” [Laffin, (J) 1987]. This was a description of soldiers fighting on the Western Front, explaining how although they were dying or badly injured, the ANZACS had the determination to keep going, to fight till the end.

Australian athlete Kate Smythe showed the same dogged determination when she ran her first marathon for Australia at the Commonwealth Games in 2006. Although suffering from dehydration and severe cramping Smythe finished the marathon almost at walking pace. The last 300 metres of her race was the slowest and most difficult but her determination to finish took her over the line to finish seventh [Melbourne, 2006]. This shows that with determination you can conquer anything.

Mateship amongst the ANZACS helped them survive the atrocious conditions and battles at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. Trust and mateship amongst the men meant that they knew that someone was always looking out for them, like John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his Donkey. As a defence child I have heard first hand the effect mateship has on soldiers serving overseas, whether fighting or peace keeping. There was not much my father talked about when he returned home from serving in East Timor but he always spoke proudly of his mates. The strength of the mateship between the Australian soldiers serving in East Timor was admired by other United Nations Forces, and by the East Timorese themselves. Dad told me that the East Timorese people preferred hanging around with Australian soldiers because they felt safe around the circle of mates.

Today mateship has shown the same results. During the recent collapse at the Beaconsfield Mine in Tasmania two miners were buried alive. In the two weeks they were trapped together the men became mates, and came to rely on this mateship to keep

them going. The men had to trust each other and the rescuers, like mates do. The bonds of mateship that are formed under difficult situations like these last forever.

Perhaps the greatest of all of the ANZAC characteristics and values and one which sets us apart from other nations is our sense of humour. Whenever Australians find themselves in difficult situations they laugh and make the best out of what is happening to help them accept the situation. “The ANZAC Book” was an example of this. In mid November in 1915 the ANZACS started writing a collection of poems, paintings, cartoons, articles and stories to include in the book using whatever materials they could find [Denton, K 1986]. This book lifted the soldier’s morale because it gave the ANZACS a chance to escape from the reality of their situation.

In recent times Australia has had to face many disasters, including the Canberra bushfires. After the fires had been extinguished a journalist walked over to a man who was sitting on the only remaining structure of his house and asked if he could interview him. The man replied, “I’d offer you a cup of tea but we’re out of milk” [Papps, 2006]. By adding humour to the situation the homeowner was better able to cope with the devastation.

When the ANZACS displayed courage, determination, mateship, and sense of humour during the Gallipoli and the Western Front conflicts, they probably didn’t realise that the spirit shown by them would be so highly regarded this many years on. The “ANZAC Spirit” is what makes us as Australians unique. This spirit is alive in all of us, not just those affected by major disasters, or our sporting heroes. It is the average Australian like myself who will carry the spirit through the generations, whether it be by me showing courage in facing my fear of heights; or my determination to make the NT swimming squad; by being the best mate I can and not letting my friends down; or looking on the bright side of things when I’m having a bad day. I am proud to be Australian, and even prouder to think that on some level I am the same as those courageous soldiers, the ANZACS.

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