

## WINNER — QUEENSLAND

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### Simpson Prize Essay

*And others will ask ... what quality makes them so different?*

*They didn't win every fight*

*They were rough and not as respectful*

*Or as well equipped as they might.*

*We'll never satisfy their questions*

*Because the answer only we'll understand.*

*They never left home for the battle*

*With an intention ... or a desire ... to hate*

*They went to war with the mind of a soldier*

*But the heart and soul of a mate.*

*So when they ask from over the ocean*

*By what writing ... high tribute ... or honour*

*Should we mark the graves of your dead.*

*Know what I'd tell 'em ... I'd tell 'em*

*If you just mark 'em ... Australian.*

*No greater tribute ... no higher honour ... could ever be*

*Thought of ... written ... or said*

*Because to those who know ... who have stood at the wall*

*To those who know ... one word ... one word says it all.*

*(To the Sunburnt Ear, Tony Gunter, 2006)*

The generally accepted definition of 'war' is a '*state of open, armed, often prolonged conflict carried on between nations, states, or parties.*'<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, because of its

isolated location, Australia has had limited contact with direct military aggression.

Notwithstanding this, our nation has been engaged in many wars in overseas locations,

as well as peacekeeping missions all over the world. However, it is the conflicts

experienced in daily life that, whilst not military in nature, allow us to exemplify the

fighting spirit so reminiscent of the ANZACs. Whilst these conflicts are not 'wars' in a

traditional sense, they give everyday Australians the opportunity to reflect upon the

ANZAC spirit that we have subconsciously inherited from the ANZACs of Gallipoli. The

spirit needed to overcome wars against droughts and other environmental disasters, such

as salinity and soil erosion, wars against poverty and wars against racial and sexual

discrimination is inspired by the awareness instilled in us all from our knowledge of

ostensibly insurmountable challenges overcome by the ANZACs at ANZAC Cove in 1915.

It is this spirit and the characteristics associated with it that give us the collective courage to fight these wars, a courage that is born from our natural consciousness and pride in our Australian heritage.

The legend of the ANZACs typifies the great bravery, eagerness, endurance, ingenuity and mateship that Australians possess, and demonstrate every day. The Gallipoli Campaign was Australia's first major conflict as an independent nation. It has been referred to as our '*baptism of fire*'<sup>2</sup>. Although not the first military engagement<sup>3</sup>, many Australians and New Zealanders took it as an opportunity to prove that we knew our duty, and that Australia was not just a former convict colony. They succeeded and created a legend so special that it still burns brightly today, a beacon that lights the way for Australians of all ages. The campaign itself, which was devised by the First Lord of Admiralty and future British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill<sup>4</sup>, was a complete and utter military disaster, but this fact was overshadowed by the courageous actions of the ANZACs when facing the almost insurmountable ordeals of terrible battles, horrible living conditions and loss of comrades.

From their enthusiastic charge onto the Turkish shore to their resourceful evacuation, Australians showed great courage, stamina and friendship, irrespective of what the war threw at them. They suffered through horrendous conditions in the trenches, enduring scorching heat and freezing cold, succumbing to illnesses and having insufficient food and water. Tom Usher, a Private of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion described his experience of the trenches in vivid terms:

*It was an awful life they'd had in the trenches, getting wet every night when it was raining ... We had a terrible time sometimes, and we lost a lot of Lemnos with pneumonia, getting wet at night with no covers or tents ... and you're all scarred and they turn septic ... You can't imagine what it was like, the filthy conditions and especially those latrines with all those papers blowing all over the shop. And flies! Look, you'd open the tin and there'd be millions of them, Crikey, filthy, filthy conditions.*<sup>5</sup>

Two of their most famous battles, the Battles of Lone Pine and the Nek, were terrifying and caused the death of many men. The Battle of Lone Pine lasted for four days and caused the loss of more than 2000 Australian lives<sup>6</sup>. Out of nine Victoria Cross Medals, awarded for acts of the highest bravery, awarded at Gallipoli, seven were awarded at Lone Pine. The Battle of the Nek was even more horrible. Four waves of light-horsemen were sent over the top of their trenches in an attempt to distract the Turks from the arrival of the British. It can only be described as a suicide mission<sup>7</sup>. It lasted long enough for the British troops to land, but 234 light-horsemen were killed. These men knew they would most likely die but still they sacrificed themselves.

Since World War I, Australia has fought in many wars: World War II, the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan<sup>8</sup>. The ANZAC spirit carried them through these wars by instilling them with the bravery, endurance, determination and mateship they needed to survive. In World War II, the first land defeat of the Japanese was inflicted by a highly unexpected army – the Australians on the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea. Nicknamed the ‘chocos’, short for ‘chocolate soldiers’ because everyone thought they would melt in the sun, a mere 77 Australians survived in attack of over 1500 Japanese. These men had not slept in three days, had never fired a gun and were only 17 or 18 years old. Patrick Lindsey expressed his belief in the *Spirit of Kokoda*<sup>9</sup> that if Gallipoli symbolised the ANZAC spirit of World War I then Kokoda did the same for World War II. One Australian soldier who fought in Kokoda wrote:

*I had my mates. When you have good friends, good mates you don't leave them. It was a brotherhood ... We got a message from Port Moresby that we had to stay there and fight to the death. That was horrifying. I thought, 'Well, I won't see my family again, I won't see Australia again.' But I was prepared, like the rest of us, to stay there and fight to the finish.*<sup>10</sup>

In the late twentieth and twenty-first century, Australians have proved many times over that the ANZAC spirit cannot be confined merely to the bravery of military combat. One

example of this is the landslide at Thredbo, which occurred on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1997. It caused the death of 18 people when two alpine lodges collapsed. One man however survived. Stuart Diver survived for 65 hours buried in freezing debris after witnessing the death of his wife Sally. He said:

*In my heart I know it was Sally's will, her resilience of spirit that gave me the strength I needed to hold out, to hold on, when all logic told me hope had vanished.<sup>11</sup>*

This man demonstrated great endurance and bravery against so much adversity, a witness to all that he collectively, as an Australian, and subconsciously, as an individual, inherited these admirable traits from the ANZACs. Another hero of this tragic event is Paul Featherstone. This brave man sat with Stuart for 12 hours and kept him calm, having never met him before. Even when the site was evacuated because the rubble shifted, he remained underground to distract Stuart from the dire situation, and kept his medical condition from becoming worse<sup>12</sup>. This man's will to stand by this stranger bears silent witness to the true ANZAC spirit of mateship, so evident in the trenches so long ago.

Another story of bravery, endurance and mateship so typical of the ANZAC legend is the Beaconsfield mining disaster. Brant Webb and Todd Russell were trapped for two weeks almost one kilometre underground when the Beaconsfield mine collapsed. The two survivors had little air and no food or water for the first five days; they survived only on hope and courage, just as their ANZAC counterparts did when suffering an existence that was besieged by a dreadful cold, scorching heat and a lack of available clean water and food. Even after discovery, it took a further nine days for rescue workers to free them. These workers did not give up, despite almost insurmountable odds<sup>13</sup>. Then the indomitable spirit and resourcefulness of those ANZACs who were physically and emotionally unable to leave their mates seemed to be blowing a bugle as the rescue workers doggedly continued their task, day after day. The resourcefulness that prompted

the ANZACs to wear sandbags over their shoes when evacuating from ANZAC Cove was emulated by those rescue workers, as they tried everything they could to reach their comrades.

Australians still demonstrate their ANZAC spirit on a daily basis, whether it be whilst fighting a battle against the current drought<sup>14</sup>, or against gender<sup>15</sup> and racial discrimination. Even in this great country, a land of prosperous opportunity, we have to battle poverty<sup>16</sup>. The ANZAC spirit gives us the courage, strength and determination to fight these wars. In our everyday lives, we demonstrate our great sense of humour, friendship, determination and disregard for authority. When times are tough, we can see the silver lining, an ability epitomised by the saying '*She'll be right mate*'. *Those men who charged into the shores of Gallipoli nearly 100 years ago made Australia what it is today and even though those men have passed on, the ANZAC spirit lives on in the heart of every Australian alive today.*

*Lest We Forget*

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