

WINNER — VICTORIA

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This essay considers what values and characteristics demonstrated by the ANZACs at Gallipoli and later reinforced at the Western Front, continue to influence Australians today.

An Australian born many years after Gallipoli might well ask “What do the ANZACs mean to me?” The official WW1 historian, C.E.W. Bean, and many surviving personal letters, poems and anecdotes, provide countless examples of courage, initiative, determination, mateship and humour displayed by the troops during their gruelling battles against the Turks. Even their nickname “Diggers” reflects how we perceive those brave soldiers, as resourceful survivors of all the privations of trench-warfare and close combat. Since Gallipoli in 1915, the ANZACs’ qualities have been inspirational for many young Australians who have followed them at the Western Front and in subsequent wars.

C.E.W. Bean described every “digger’s” courage and determination to continue fighting, even when the dead lay three deep in the rifle pits and half the battalion was gone. One shining example of heroic determination and selflessness which stood out at Gallipoli was John Simpson Kirkpatrick, “the man with the donkey”. During his brief survival at Gallipoli, Simpson and his donkey made countless trips up and down the hazardous Monash gully from front line to the beach, rescuing wounded diggers, even under sniper-fire. Carrying wounded men to the Aid Post on his donkey, he saved many lives during the 24 days before he was tragically killed on May 19th, 1915. His persistence and light-hearted banter was legendary, and his selfless example is remembered on \$100 notes, stamps, and a bronze sculpture at the Australian War Memorial.

Laconic humour was a distinctive feature displayed by the ANZACs during WW1, both at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. Humour was a way of both acknowledging and expressing emotions and disguising them safely. Once again, John Simpson Kirkpatrick demonstrated great humour in his tragically short life. An army chaplain was waiting to accompany Simpson, but Simpson’s donkey was being extremely stubborn. Eventually Simpson said to the chaplain “Padre, this old donkey has been tied up with some mules and has acquired some of their bad habits. Would you move along the beach a little way, as I’ll have to speak to him in Hindustani, and, Padre, I wouldn’t like you to think I was swearing at him”. This quote gives a glimpse of Simpson’s character, approach to life and sense of humour, and this dry humour is still found in the Australian community today, particularly in tough situations.

The remoteness of early Australian settlers from their European roots encouraged resourcefulness and innovation and these characteristics later were well displayed by the ANZACs at Gallipoli. There, to survive, troops used their ingenuity to find ways to improvise and make useful items from the few, simple resources available. One example is the periscope rifle invented by L/Corporal Beech. Paired mirrors in a box-tube allowed ANZAC soldiers to see the Turkish sniper's rifles while remaining completely hidden below the trench parapet. Finally, the successful withdrawal from Gallipoli was accomplished through meticulous planning and execution, using imaginative tricks and ruses to persuade the Turkish soldiers that the diggers were still there. The development and wide use of self-firing rifles with water-tins dripping to provide variable delays, gave the Turks an impression that the empty front-line trenches were still occupied, allowing ANZAC withdrawal without casualties.

Neither innovation nor bravery died on the beaches or slopes of Gallipoli, and the "diggers' qualities" were still alive and well later on the Western front. Lawrence Wackett, who was an Australian pilot in Mesopotamia, devised a ring mounting for a Lewis gun so observation planes could defend themselves. He was then seconded to the Royal Navy Aircraft Design establishment in Britain, and later posted to an Australian squadron in France. Asked by General John Monash, he designed and implemented a method of dropping ammunition from the aircraft to re-supply ground troops. This was used with incredible success at the battle of Hamel, where the Australian Divisions, commanded by Monash, advanced miles into enemy territory and then successfully held the captured ground largely because of aerial ammunition re-supply.

Australians, particularly soldiers, have always regarded true mateship as a paramount quality. During WW1 and WW2, soldiers would rely on their comrades to help them through the toughest times of hardship, pain, anger and loss. This created a very strong and unique bond between the mates. When examining today's society, this bonding is still very evident. The following example demonstrates that mateship and mutual support still is a major part of today's Australian society. When Troy Broadbridge, a member of the Melbourne Football Club, died in the horrific tsunami in Indonesia, the whole community joined together to offer condolence, support, relief and welfare to his wife, family and close friends.

Service, bravery and heroism was shown by many ANZAC troops and the 65 recipients of the Victoria Cross, awarded during WW1, but most recently, by the awards of civilian medals for individual or group bravery. The citations for such awards capture the imagination of historians and public alike. For the past 31 years Australian Bravery Awards have been presented to individuals displaying immense courage in all types of situations, ranging from fires, bombings and road accidents, to hazards, sea attacks and armed offenders. These awards give emphatic and tangible proof that the "ANZAC qualities" of these recipients continue to show in the Australian community today. Two fine examples should suffice.

In April 1996, Mr Chea, an employee at Kew Cottages, which is a residential facility for intellectually handicapped persons, risked his own life repeatedly by entering the burning buildings to alert residents to the fire, and to lead many to safety. Finally the smoke and flames overcame him and he was removed by Fire Service personnel for medical treatment. This is selfless heroism reminiscent of Simpson in the truest ANZAC tradition and was recognised by the Australian Star of Courage Citation to Mr Chea.

The September 1998 Esso Longford refinery explosion and fires imperilled Victoria's gas supplies for several weeks and several technicians risked their lives to save their comrades from the fires which followed the explosions. They were awarded a Star of Courage in recognition of their heroic efforts.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given their heritage of resilience and resourcefulness, in adversity like the 2002 Bali Bombings in which 89 Australians died, today's Australian youth have evolved and transformed the ANZAC ethos to a new level. They demonstrate multinational tolerance and compassion, with a blurring of ethnic boundaries and a more truly community spirit in various adverse situations. Young Australians visit Gallipoli and the Kokoda track in increasing numbers, not just as "sightseers". They seem to feel and re-live the history, and when many queued to join relief efforts for the Aceh tsunami, they showed great perception of the areas of real need in the communities around them. We have seen recently floods of young volunteers to help in many small and great natural disasters and major areas of community need such as the Sydney Olympic Games or the 2006 Commonwealth Games. These are optimistic portents for our future battles with the many social and environmental difficulties ahead, and suggest that the "ANZAC Qualities" are still strongly evident and totally relevant to Australians today.

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