



The

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Simpson

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To what extent was Simpson a hero? How have his heroic qualities been demonstrated by other Australians since 1915?

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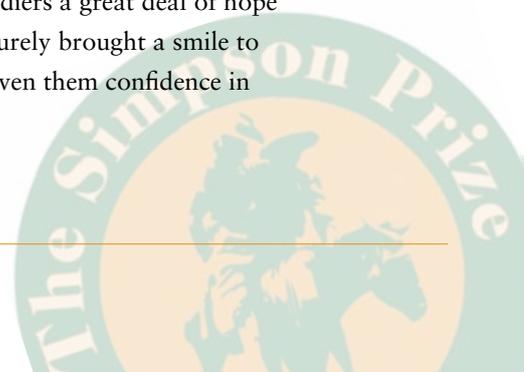
‘... the ultimate in selflessness must be to surrender one’s own life to save another, without inflicting harm on any third parties in the process. Thus it is fitting that John Simpson Kirkpatrick is the best known symbol of the Anzacs.’

(The Anzacs Songbook, Ted Egan, 1986)

In today’s society, the term ‘hero’ is often used casually and is frequently confused with ‘fame’. True heroes, however, are more than celebrities; they are the bringers of hope, the people who use their initiative to make the best of bad situations and the individuals who risk or even sacrifice their lives to save others. One such hero, John Simpson Kirkpatrick, has become a symbol of our nation and of the ANZAC spirit. With Simpson as our country’s icon, generations of Australians since 1915 have admired and sought to emulate his particular heroism and to keep the spirit of the Anzacs alive in our modern culture.

When Simpson arrived in Gallipoli on 25th April 1915, the situation was desperate. There were not enough stretchers, too many injured soldiers and the means of using two bearers per stretcher was a very inefficient method of transporting the wounded men to safety. Shortly after landing, Simpson found a stray donkey and used it to carry wounded soldiers to the beach; saving both stretchers and man power. Although this method meant that he was more exposed to gunfire than his fellow stretcher bearers, it was the more effective way of transporting the men to safety.

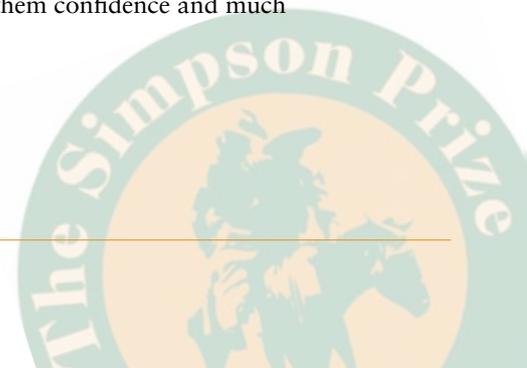
Over time, more soldiers noticed Simpson and his donkey and the cheery manner in which he set about his extremely dangerous job. It is said that Simpson would often joke, whistle or sing as he trudged up and down the gullies of Gallipoli, supporting a wounded soldier upon his donkey. Simpson’s inspiration must have given the soldiers a great deal of hope and confidence; his cheery and supportive nature would have surely brought a smile to many a man’s face and the regularity of his trips would have given them confidence in knowing that Simpson would be there for them if they fell.



However, the quality which is probably the most often associated with the heroics of Simpson's actions is his persistent bravery in knowingly risking his life every trip he made up and down the gullies. It is courageous enough to risk one's life to save another on the spur of the moment but Simpson repeatedly risked his life having had plenty of time to think about what he was doing. Simpson made the round trip from the beach to the battle fields several times every day and when told 'that he need not take such risk by going so often into the danger zones to collect wounded men, Simpson replied nonchalantly, 'That's my worry'.¹ It is thought that Simpson saved about 300 soldiers at Gallipoli in the 24 days that he marched through the gullies. He was shot dead on the job on the 19th of May 1915. Simpson's legend lives on and continues to inspire generations of Australians who respect Simpson and all of his fellow Anzacs who risked their lives at Gallipoli.

Since 1915, Australia has seen many heroes who have demonstrated similar qualities to those of Simpson. For years, Australian gastroenterologist Barry Marshall had suspected that the bacteria *Helicobacter Pylori* were the cause of stomach ulcers rather than stress (as was believed by doctors at the time). He had failed to prove his theory on already ill people because although he had found *H. pylori* in his patients, it had been dismissed as bacteria that was present but did not effect the development of the illness. To prove his theory, Marshall performed a self-experiment in 1982; because he didn't have the virus to start with, it would stand to reason that if after drinking the bacteria he developed the illness, then *H. pylori* must have caused it. Consequently, Marshall *did* develop gastritis and this proved his theory correct. Marshall's self-experiment demonstrated a similar heroic initiative to that of Simpson. Both men devised two options; a safer but inefficient method and a more dangerous but effective scheme. Both chose the more unusual options; whether it were using a self-experiment or donkey, Simpson and Marshall both took the risks to better humanity.

Just as Simpson's cheerful demeanour gave hope to the fighting diggers, Chris Wilkinson and Paul Featherstone's encouragement gave Stuart Diver the hope and confidence he needed to survive. After a landslide in Thredbo, 1997, paramedics were sceptical about finding any survivors. Even when they did find Stuart Diver, there was still reasonable doubt that he would live as he was suffering from hypothermia and a rescue was still hours away. Nevertheless, Wilkinson and Featherstone stayed by Diver and talked with him so he was not alone. Despite their friendly conversation, the two paramedics must have known of the dangers that they themselves were facing; the tunnel in which they lay was unstable and the concrete ice slabs posed a threat of collapsing on them. The encouragement that Wilkinson and Featherstone offered Diver for over ten hours could be seen as very similar to Simpson's joking and whistling; all three men were putting themselves at a very high risk of losing their lives, yet they still managed to light the way for others, giving them confidence and much needed hope.



Just as Simpson had risked his life to save his mates in Gallipoli, twelve-year-old Peta-Lynn Mann risked her life in Darwin, 1981, to save a friend who was attacked by a crocodile. When the attack occurred, Mann left the safety of the bank and ran to Hilton Graham's aid, grabbing his arm and trying to pull him free. Mann fought the crocodile until it let go. As she and Graham struggled out of the water, the beast struck again, biting Graham's thigh. Although Mann could have run to safety, she resumed the 'tug-of-war'. Mann pulled Graham free a second time and raced on ahead to get his car. The twelve-year-old then drove Graham to a nearby camp where she administered first aid and called for help. Just like Simpson, Mann had had time to think about what she was doing; she was already safe when Graham was attacked and after she had freed him once, she risked her life a second time to rescue him.

John Simpson Kirkpatrick is no doubt one of Australia's greatest heroes. During the twenty-four days of marching through the gullies with his donkey, Simpson transported hundreds of wounded soldiers to safety. Every risk he took in those gullies was amplified by the use of his donkey, but he kept going because it was the best way to do the job. Every trip he made meant his putting his life on the line to save his mates. Despite all of this, his cheerful ways prevailed, bringing hope to the soldiers. 'Militarists and pacifists, imperial patriots and socialists alike could appreciate his deeds, agreeing that he was a selfless hero.'² But Simpson is not our *only* great hero; since 1915, Australia has seen many brilliant men and women who have demonstrated similar qualities to those displayed by Simpson in Gallipoli. Heroes such as Barry Marshall, Chris Wilkinson, Paul Featherstone and Peta-Lynn Mann continue to thrive in Australia. Our true heroes are not our celebrities or sporting greats; they are the men and women who inspire, bring hope and risk their lives to save others. These people are the true heroes of Australia.

Endnotes

1. Egan, T. (1986) *The Anzacs Songbook*
2. Cochrane, P (1992) *Simpson and The Donkey; The Making of a Legend*

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