



The

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Simpson

year 9 and 10 students

Prize

2008 winner
Tasmania

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The Friends School

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

by Emma Norton, The Friends School

In April 1915 thousands of men stood on the shores of Europe, half a world away from home, awaiting an inevitable fate. They emerged from the trenches of Gallipoli straight into Australian history. As young and naïve as the country they fought for, each soldier has left a profound mark on Australia's character and identity. But the actions of one man in particular have echoed throughout generations and inspired the qualities we now deem to be Australian. John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his donkey heroically ventured into the firing line to rescue casualties wounded in battle. He spent a mere twenty-four days in Gallipoli before being shot and killed, and in this time saved the lives of around three hundred men. This courageous act of selfless bravery and Anzac spirit has been remembered even after the tragic facts and events surrounding them have been forgotten.

The first and most significant quality that Simpson always showed was a sincere desire to help people, despite his own wellbeing. *'When you realize that he knew the extreme danger to which he so constantly exposed himself in his self-imposed errands of mercy you can only marvel at the cheerful way in which he carried out his duties... when I thanked him he smiled and said 'Glad to help you' (P.G. Menhennette, 1915).* He simply couldn't sit back and watch people suffer when he knew that he could do something about it.

In 1968 Frank Hardy, an author and passionate activist for Aboriginal rights, convinced the talented, well established ophthalmologist Dr Fred Hollows to travel to the Northern Territory and witness for himself the communities Hardy dubbed as *'The Unlucky Australians'* (Title of Frank Hardy's book, 1968). Hollows was appalled by the quality of health care in aboriginal communities, seeing that many indigenous Australians were losing their eyesight due to diseases that were very easily treated when found early enough. He made it his mission to improve these conditions and in the 1970's he launched a campaign to attack eye diseases in aboriginal communities. He was a very persuasive and inspirational speaker, and many other doctors' volunteered their time to the cause. He helped set up the first Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern N.S.W, there are now sixty all around Australia.

But he didn't stop there; he took his cause all over the world. He brought eyesight to thousands of people in many developing nations and trained hundreds of doctors. After



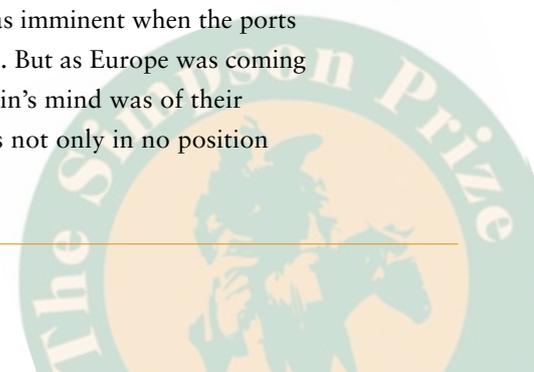
his death from cancer in 1993 his work was carried on by the Fred Hollows Foundation, which was set up by his wife Gabi Hollows and supported by doctors and volunteers all over Australia and the world. Fred Hollows was a passionate and motivated man. *'When I've seen an opportunity I haven't sat down and called a committee meeting... we've gone and done it.'* (Fred Hollows, date unknown). In an age when aboriginal Australians were undervalued citizens, it wasn't always easy to get people listening. But he was at all times persistent and it is predicted that over one million people can see today because of his efforts in bringing sight to the third world. Just like Simpson, Hollows knew he had the power to make change and did it despite all obstacles.

Simpson embodied one of Australia's most cherished values of diversity. He migrated from England and lived only four years on Australian soil before signing up as a stretcher-bearer. Despite this, he was often described by his peers as *'a typical digger; independent, witty, warm-hearted, happy to be indolent at times and careless of dress'* (as described in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*). Simpson proves that being an Australian has nothing to do with an address, but is the presence of the virtues he demonstrated in Anzac Cove.

As only two years old Khoa Do and his parents undertook the life-threatening journey from Vietnam to Australia on a fishing-boat. He grew up in Sydney, where he cultivated a love of film and theatre. In 2005 he won the Young Australian of the Year award for his volunteer work with 'at risk' youths in Sydney. He worked with them, making a short film and giving them a chance to work in writing, directing and acting. He shows, just like Simpson that great Australians come from all backgrounds. They each migrated from completely different nations and cultures and each embody true Australian spirit.

Simpson's superiors were frequently warning him of the dangers he was facing, and on more than one occasion he defied direct orders to save lives. In E.C Buleys' novel *Great Deeds of Australasians in the Great War* written from first hand experiences in Gallipoli he stated; *'When the enfilading fire down the valley was at its worst and orders were posted that the ambulance men must not go out, the Man and the Donkey continued placidly their work'* (E.C Buley, 1915). Simpson had an innate sense of what was right, and the integrity to go about it despite orders.

Almost three decades later another great Australian was echoing this heroic quality, though in an office rather than on the front line. In 1941, Prime Minister John Curtin made one of the most paramount decisions in the history of this nation. It was midway through World War Two and Australia was at a crossroad. Going into the war we dedicated our services to Britain, in the faith that they would come to our defence if we ever needed it. And after forty years of unwavering support, Britain finally got the chance to pay their diminutive allies back, when Japan attacked Australia by bombing Darwin, and sending three submarines into Sydney harbour. Curtin was sure that a land invasion was imminent when the ports protecting Australia in the north started to fall to the Japanese. But as Europe was coming dangerously close to German defeat the last thought on Britain's mind was of their daughter in the south. Prime Minister Winston Churchill was not only in no position



to send troops to defend Australia, but also told Curtin that he could not return the Australians fighting in Europe.

This was a turning point in Australian foreign policy, a decision that still affects Australian's lives today. In a major step of emancipation from our British roots, John Curtin defied the orders of Winston Churchill, and demanded the return of Australian soldiers. He worked in the best interests of his country despite tradition. He turned to the US for help, establishing a military bond that still greatly influences our government and society today. *'I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom'* (John Curtin, 1941). With this one decision, Curtin saved Australia during the greatest crisis we have ever faced. Like Simpson, John Curtin defied authority to do what he knew was right.

Simpson's actions in Gallipoli almost a century ago will never be forgotten. He was a true Australian hero, brave, selfless, kind and cheerful in the face of adversity. Simpson and his donkey is a tale that has become engraved into our national identity. Since 1915, his heroic qualities have been mirrored by Australians in all fields and from all walks of life.

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