



The

a competition for

Simpson

year 9 and 10 students

Prize

2008 runner-up
Australian Capital Territory

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

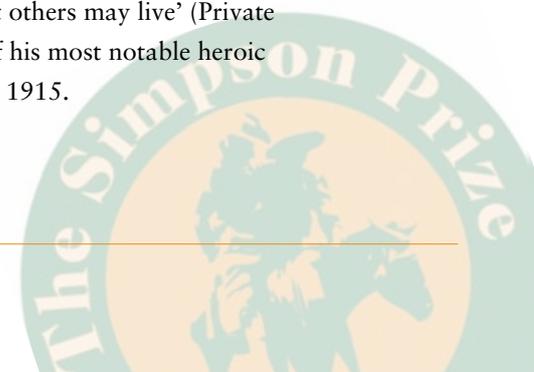
by Fiona Spitzkowsky, Radford College

Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick is one of Australia's most beloved heroes. Known affectionately as 'the Man with the Donkey', Simpson is a recognizable symbol of the ANZAC spirit and the heroic qualities that it entails such as selflessness, bravery, comradeship, ingenuity and larrikin behaviour. Despite the fact that Simpson was never officially recognized as a hero, he remains an influential heroic figure in Australian culture and many Australians have demonstrated his heroic qualities since 1915.

The New Oxford Dictionary of English defines a hero as someone who is 'admired or idealized for achievements...and noble qualities' (1998). Australians have a very strong sense of heroism that is quite different to that of other nations, particularly England. England is a very authoritarian society and this was upheld by Australians in early settlement. However, as Australia has become increasingly independent of England, Australians have become 'disrespectful of old methods, eager to try new ones' (Bean, 1986, p. 6) and Australia's own sense of heroism has evolved. From England's high regard for discipline, success, and sacrifice, stemmed the uniquely Australian sense of heroism and the praise of bravery, comradeship, larrikinism and self-sacrifice. These qualities are now considered both noble and heroic in Australian society.

Simpson landed at Gallipoli on the 25th of April 1915. He was a stretcher-bearer for the 3rd Field Ambulance but used donkeys to transport wounded men. Simpson epitomizes many of the heroic qualities that Australians regard so highly; self-sacrifice, bravery, comradeship, ingenuity, and larrikinism.

Fundamentally, Simpson has 'come to embody for Australians the spirit of self-sacrifice in war.' (Australian War Memorial, 2007). Despite 'being warned...of the suicidal nature of his work' (Curran, 2001, p. 41) Simpson continued rescuing wounded soldiers until he was killed in action on the 19th of May 1915; 'he gave his life that others may live' (Private Simpson's headstone, Anzac Cove). His selflessness was one of his most notable heroic qualities and has been mirrored by countless Australians since 1915.



Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, a Captain in the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps, is an obvious example of this. Captured by the Japanese in 1942, Dunlop often put himself in dangerous situations in order to protect his fellow prisoners of war. Many prisoners owe their lives to Dunlop, including an Englishman who, after being severely injured, was to be 'disposed of' (Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation, 2005). Dunlop prevented his death by telling the Japanese that to kill the Englishman 'you will need to put those bayonets through me first.' (Dunlop cited Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation, 2005)

Simpson was also revered for his outstanding bravery. Sir General John Monash respected Simpson for his courageous acts; 'Simpson knew no fear...and he frequently earned the applause of the personnel for his many fearless rescues.' (Monash cited Curran 2001, p. 51). The Indian soldiers at Gallipoli called Simpson 'Bahadur', meaning 'the bravest of the brave' (*John Simpson Kirkpatrick*, 2005). Billy Lowes, an Englishman who was rescued by Simpson, told Simpson's mother, 'if ever anybody was worthy of a VC it was Jack [Simpson]' (Curran, 2001, p. 48).

Since 1915, there have been countless displays of Australian bravery. The most celebrated are on the battlefield with Australian soldiers being renowned for their daring. One of the most outstanding examples of this is the defense of the Kokoda Trail in 1942 by a small group of poorly trained and equipped Australian men (Pyne et al, 2004). Australians have also shown bravery in everyday life. Bernard Banton demonstrated immense bravery when he campaigned against the multi-national corporation 'Hardie-BI'. Banton, who has been labeled a 'hero' for his contribution, helped to set up a four billion dollar compensation fund for the thousands of people who contracted asbestos related illnesses as a result of working for 'Hardie-BI'. Unfortunately, Banton passed away on the 27th of November 2007 (Trad, S 2007). This fighting for one's friends against overwhelming opposition is exactly the kind of bravery that Simpson and many other Australians have become known for.

Comradeship is a highly respected quality in Australian culture and was clearly demonstrated by Simpson; 'Simpson was genuinely concerned for the welfare of other people... to the point that he was willing to jeopardize his life to help them.' (Curran, 2001, back cover). Simpson often rescued men from dangerous areas such as the 'Valley of Death' where, according to historian C.E.W. Bean, 'it was a common occurrence for twenty or thirty men to be hit during the morning.' (Bean cited Curran 2001, p. 46). Simpson's undying loyalty to his fellow soldiers cemented his position as a hero at Gallipoli.

Many Australians have demonstrated such camaraderie since 1915, often allowing them to endure arduous situations. During the Great Depression many Australians rallied together in order to survive (Cameron, K et al, 2000). On the 10th of June, 1931, an article appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* reporting on a slum known as 'Happy Valley'; '...there the persons are bound together by a common misfortune and determined to make the best of things with a smile and a laugh' (cited Mason, KJ, 2002). The comradeship between the residents allowed them to live with dignity and good humour.



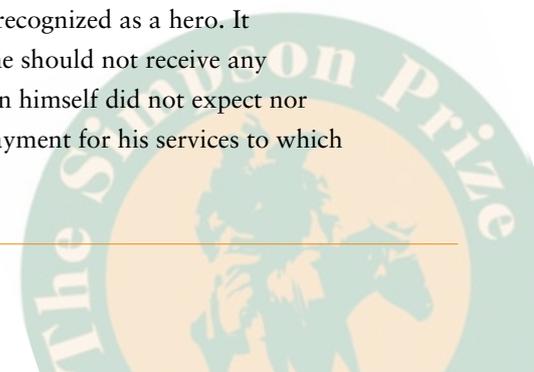
A similar situation occurred during the Second World War when Australians found themselves struggling to survive whilst imprisoned by the Japanese. The Australian Prisoners of War relied on the support of their friends in order to endure the terrible experience. Doctor Rowley Richards was captured during the Malayan Campaign and said that during captivity he ‘never saw an Australian who did not have someone to care for him when ill, in times of hardship or to simply raise his spirits.’ (Richards, R 2006, p. 113). This camaraderie has earned Australians global respect; ‘There is no doubt about it. [Australians] don’t die alone.’ (English POW, cited *The Second World War*, Australian War Memorial)

The rugged terrain of Anzac Cove made the work of Simpson and other stretcher-bearers very difficult (Bean, 1986). However, Simpson managed to utilize the few resources that were available to him and, using donkeys as makeshift ambulances, was able to save hundreds of lives. There have been many similar acts of Australian ingenuity and resourcefulness since 1915, such as that of Reverend John Flynn who founded the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 1933 (Pyne et al, 2004). The Royal Flying Doctor Service provides emergency medical assistance to Australians who are otherwise unable to access medical services, saving thousands of lives. This is very similar to the missions undertaken by Simpson and his donkeys.

Simpson was admired not only for his selflessness and camaraderie but also for his ‘rough and often larrikin behaviour’ (Curran, 2001, back cover). Simpson was very likeable to the ordinary Australian soldiers. Lance-Corporal Davison, Simpson’s close friend, said that Simpson was ‘too human to be a parade soldier, and strongly disliked discipline.’ (Davidson cited Curran, 2001, p. 16). Simpson was also known for his ‘highly-developed sense of humour and devilment’ (Curran, 2001, p. 16). When one of his donkeys was being stubborn, Simpson asked a nearby priest to ‘move along the beach a little way, as I’ll have to speak to him in Hindustani and ...I wouldn’t like you to think I was swearing at him.’ (Simpson cited Curran 2001, p. 40).

Larrikinism here refers to the modest, friendly, informality that Simpson demonstrated and the breaking down of social barriers that divide society. Larrikinism has become embedded in Australian culture and Australians are known to show larrikin behaviour and anti-authoritarianism in all walks of life. Satirists such as ‘The Chaser’, Bryan Dawe, and John Clarke are celebrated for their clever and outrageous political jokes, which humble people in positions of power, making them seem more human. Bernard Banton also displayed larrikinism. Whilst successfully campaigning against, ‘Hardie-BI’, Banton dubbed Chairwoman Meredith Hellicar, ‘Mary-death’ (Brunero, 2007). This destabilized much of the authority and power that Hellicar had over other people and showed that Banton was willing to challenge her power for what he thought was right. Simpson’s admired larrikinism has become a tradition that Australians like Bernie Banton have embraced whole-heartedly.

Despite his many courageous acts, Simpson was not officially recognized as a hero. It is believed by some that as Simpson was only doing his duty, he should not receive any outstanding award (*John Simpson Kirkpatrick*, 2005). Simpson himself did not expect nor accept any reward for his work; an officer once offered him payment for his services to which



Simpson replied, 'Keep yer bloody quid. I'm not doing this for money' (Simpson cited in Curran 2001, p. 42). However, perhaps this makes him even more of a hero as it highlights his modesty and the depth of his compassion. It also makes him more ordinary and therefore his deeds seem even more heroic.

Simpson, this 'man who was flawed as any, but whose bravery is not disputed' (*Who's who in Australian Military*, 2007) has 'become one of the most enduring icons of the Gallipoli Campaign' (Anderson, M 2006, p. 7) and Australians honour him as a true hero. Hundreds of paintings, statues, and sculptures feature Simpson, including a bronze statue that stands outside the Australian War Memorial. Simpson is also depicted on the 1967 medallion commemorating the 50th anniversary of ANZAC day and his grave is 'one of the most visited sites on the Gallipoli Peninsula' (Anderson, M 2006, p. 7), which shows the importance of Simpson to Australians. Furthermore, a poster displaying the 'Nine Values for Australian Schooling' uses an image of Simpson as the watermark (*Nine Values for Australian Schooling*, 2005). Clearly, Australians value Simpson's heroic characteristics and strive to emulate them.

Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick was a hero to his peers and remains a hero to the Australian people to this day, despite the fact that he is not officially recognized for his heroism. Australians strive to embody Simpson's heroic characteristics and since 1915, there have been many outstanding displays of Australian selflessness, bravery, comradeship, ingenuity, and larrikinism. 'The Man with the Donkey' has become a recognizable symbol of heroism and it seems as though the legend of Simpson will survive for many years to come.

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