



The

a competition for

Simpson

year 9 and 10 students

Prize

**2008 runner-up
South Australia**

**Truc Tran
Wilderness School**

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

by Truc Tran, Wilderness School

John Simpson Kirkpatrick is commonly recognised as one of the heroes of the Gallipoli campaign, his story as 'The Man with the Donkey' engrained in the Anzac legend. Simpson displayed many heroic characteristics while serving Australia, such as selflessness, versatility, bravery and everything the Anzac spirit represents. However there are reasons to believe he is not quite the hero created in the legend. Since his time, there have been many other Australians who have demonstrated these same attributes, including Edward Sheean and Daniel Adams.

In the twenty five days Simpson served in Gallipoli, he displayed many heroic qualities. His story is well known. Working on freighters, he jumped ship at Newcastle, NSW, and did so again before in 1914, he signed up for the Australian Imperial Force. As a 3rd Field Ambulance officer, he used stretchers or carried the wounded to safety at Anzac Cove. A few days after landing, whilst carrying a wounded man, he came across an abandoned donkey, which he used to carry the soldier to a dressing station. From then on, he worked independently, even moving his camp over with Indian troops who had fodder for the donkeys (Skelding, 2001). He was technically a deserter, never reporting back to base, but this was overlooked by his superior Colonel Sutton, who thought him '...a splendid fellow ...went up the gullies day and night bringing down the wounded on donkeys' (ANZAC House, 2005). Over the next few weeks, he undertook the perilous route through Shrapnel Gully to rescue men. He never hesitated to embark on these journeys, simply replying 'My troubles' when warned of dangers ahead, and was often seen whistling and singing as he headed off (ANZAC House, 2005). In one day, he would make up to fifteen trips up and back, and saved over 300 men. He became well known in the trenches, with Colonel John Monash writing that 'Private Simpson and his little beast... frequently earned the applause of the personnel for his many fearless rescues of wounded men from areas subject to rifle and shrapnel fire' (ANZAC, 2007). While his achievements have been recommended for awards including the Victoria Cross, he was never decorated for his bravery. Simpson is by no means undeserving of his hero status. He possessed selflessness and disregard for his own safety where others' wellbeing was concerned, and versatility in response



to his circumstances. John Simpson was essentially the embodiment of the Anzac spirit. Within him was a sense of mateship, bravery, and a happy disposition, all of which are quintessential to Australian culture.

Despite the many courageous acts Simpson performed throughout his time on Anzac Cove, he was not the glorified hero that legend has created. One reason why Simpson is not quite a hero is that his motives for joining the AIF were not quite admirable. Although he did want to fight for his country, he wrote to his mother that: 'I would not have joined this contingent if I had known that they were not going to England' (Australian War Memorial, 2007), implying that his primary objective in signing up was to gain a free trip back home. As mentioned before, Simpson had twice jumped ship, and was technically a deserter at Gallipoli. Though many believe his actions were heroic, it could also be viewed that he was defying authority to do as he wished, merely going about doing whatever he wanted. His lack of discipline has often been overshadowed by the courage he showed. Whilst Simpson may have saved many lives, he was not the only one to do so. He was singled out among the thousands of other Anzacs who risked their lives during the Gallipoli campaign. There were many other ambulance officers who went out to rescue the wounded, but as Simpson was the only who used donkeys, he has been recognised and glorified. Since then, his story has been transformed into the iconic myth that Australians hear of today.

Since 1915, heroism like Simpson's has been displayed by countless Australians. One such person is Ordinary Seaman Edward 'Teddy' Sheean. He signed up to the Royal Australian Navy at age seventeen in April 1941 and in June of 1942, posted as an Oerlikon anti-aircraft gunner on the HMAS Armidale (Australian War Memorial, 2007). The Armidale was sent to Timor to support the Allied forces fighting in the area. On December 1, at Betano, the ship was hit by two torpedoes from Japanese aircrafts. Lieutenant Commander David Richards, the Armidale's captain, gave the order to abandon ship. Many men jumped into the sea, where they were subsequently machine gunned. Sheean however, remained at his post and began to fire at the attacking planes. Despite being wounded twice, he shot down two planes. It is said that 'Even when there was nothing left... above water, tracer bullets from Sheean's gun kept shooting... It was an act of...selfless heroism' (Walker 1990). 'Teddy' fired as he was dragged down to his untimely death, at just eighteen years old. Many of the forty-nine men who survived owe their lives to him. On this day, Ordinary Seaman Sheean displayed many heroic qualities, such as selflessness, courage and mateship. Like Simpson, he disobeyed orders to save lives, but he was not a deserter, rather a very loyal member of the navy. Whilst he has never been formally decorated, his actions have been recognised with a submarine being named after him, the first to be named after an ordinary seaman, thus appreciating his heroic qualities.

Another Australian who has displayed admirable qualities is Daniel Adams. At just 17, after witnessing the poverty in Papua New Guinea, Adams joined the Oaktree Foundation, a youth run aid organisation (Oaktree Foundation, 2006). As he became more aware of the Make Poverty History campaign, he was struck with the thought that this generation



could halve extreme poverty by 2015. It was then that he conceived the idea of the Generation2015 concert to raise awareness of the impact that could be made. In January 2006, with the concert in planning phase, Adams went to Samoa for a surfing trip. While surfing, he hit a coral reef and developed a blood infection. The hospital there had no doctors or medicine, but luckily Adams was flown back to Australia where he recovered. Aware that this would have been very different had he not been from a developed country, this strengthened Adams' resolution for social justice. The concert, held on November 2006, would go on to inspire thousands of Australians to make a difference. Since then, Adams has continued advocating for social justice, including establishing the Schools4Schools program between Australia and South Africa (Oaktree Foundation, 2006). His actions have not gone unnoticed, being nominated for Young Australian of the Year. Daniel Adams is not a conventional hero, but like Simpson, his selflessness and desire to help others is most evident, as is his versatility in achieving his goal.

John Simpson Kirkpatrick was a hero to a moderate extent, displaying many heroic characteristics during his time at Gallipoli, such as courage, mateship, selflessness and versatility. However, he also possessed flawed qualities overlooked in the legend, revealing him to be a human being, rather than a myth. Since 1915, Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean and Daniel Adams are two Australians who have displayed the same heroic qualities as Simpson, but they are by no means the only ones.

References

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