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Megghann Thomas
Mt St Michael’s College
Every year, on the anniversary of the Gallipoli landing, many come together as one nation to mark that momentous occasion of one hundred years ago that is embedded in Australian history. The Gallipoli campaign commenced on the 25th of April, 1915 along the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey. Anzac soldiers are honoured on the anniversary of the landing each year, and remembered for their bravery at Gallipoli. The enormous odds against them and the stories of endurance, comradeship and incredible bravery have all become part of the enduring Anzac story. Australian women were also present throughout 1915 on hospital ships and Greek islands such as Lemnos, caring for our Anzac soldiers. However, recognition of the Australian nurses who volunteered does not seem adequate in comparison to their courageous efforts and the harsh conditions they endured throughout the war. These honourable women are deserving of more attention for the sacrifices they made for our country when we remember the events of Gallipoli.

A century ago, 20 000 Australian and New Zealand soldiers landed at Anzac Cove (The AIF Project and DVA and Bostes NSW. 2014, October. The ‘first to fall’, 25 April 1915, 2014). The campaign was targeted towards capturing the Ottoman Empire from Turkey to provide access through the Mediterranean for the Allied Forces (Carrodus, Delaney, Howitt, Smith, 2012). Within five days of the landing, 860 Australians had died from wounds and disease, with 643 men dying in battle (Source 3, Statistics of Australian death at Gallipoli. 1919, 26 January). Overall, there were 8000 casualties throughout the landing, with 2300 of these brave men dying at the landing alone (Gallipoli and the Anzacs, n.d.). The landing at Gallipoli was reported by Ellis Ashmead Bartlett (1915), a British war correspondent, who spoke highly of the Australian soldiers, stating “The Australians rose to the occasion…but sprang into the sea.” The heroism of our Australian soldiers was broadcast to the public, as well as their courageous actions of scaling the steep cliffs (Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, 1915). In addition to this, Bartlett also mentioned the Turkish soldiers, declaring in his account that they were “subjected to violent counter-attacks from a brave enemy, skilfully led”, referring to the Turkish soldiers (Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, 1915). Australian soldiers were honoured early into the campaign, with two locations at Gallipoli, “McLaurin’s Hill” and “Bridges Road”, paying tribute to two Australians who had died at Gallipoli (Source 1, Film, Ashmead-Bartlett) Bartlett also reported on the soldiers positioned at Cape Helles and Suvla Bay. The impression left by the Anzacs has not differed one hundred years later. Australia’s Prime Minister Tony Abbott recently presented a speech on behalf of Australia at Anzac Cove,
Gallipoli. He spoke proudly about how the Australian soldiers “rallied to serve our country” and that they were the “founding heroes of modern Australia” (2015). It was said that our armed forces were faithful to their country, and that they demonstrated perseverance and mateship. Australia’s previous Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, stated in her commemorative address for the National Ceremony in 2009, “we come to pay our respects...we contemplate their courage...recorded in our history and identity”. This relates to the qualities shown by the Anzacs as recorded in Tony Abbott’s and Bartlett’s address. The image of the Anzac soldier has helped form Australia’s identity. Whilst the Anzacs fought bravely through the months at Gallipoli, and, in the words of Tony Abbott were “ordinary men doing extraordinary things”, the attempts to gain ground for both armies led to a stalemate, which continued through 1915 (First World War 1914-18. Australian War Memorial). War was harsh for all soldiers and great sacrifices were made by Anzac soldiers, and this is explicitly stated through accounts such as Prime Minister Abott’s, Quentin Bryce’s and Ellis Ashmaed Bartlett’s. These three core accounts of the Gallipoli landing also show the prominence that was given to the landing, a significant event in Australian history.

Throughout the 8 months the Anzacs were fighting at Gallipoli, Australian nurses were positioned in various hospital ships, along with No. 3 Australian General Hospital (No. 3 AGH) at Lemnos, a Greek island which was situated only 100 kilometres from Gallipoli’s firing line (Waldon, 2005). Whilst the nurses were an imperative part in the Gallipoli campaign and the war as a whole, the recognition that is received is scarce and does not account for the immense effort put in by the nurses, along with the compassion, bravery and determination shown by these women. Australian Nurse Florence Elizabeth Macmillan recounted in a letter home in August 1915 that, “We could hear our guns booming at the Dardanelles.” This reveals the short distance that was placed between the nurses and the front line. One of the hospital ships titled “The Gascon”, was one of the hospital ships at hand for incoming casualties on April 25th, 1915. Sister Ella Tucker was aboard, and by the evening 557 wounded soldiers had arrived on the ship (DVA and Bostes NSW, Nurses at Gallipoli, 2015). She documented in her diary the day of the landing that “Red Letter Day. Shells bursting all around, we are off Gaba Tepe. The soldiers have commenced to land.” as cited in Basset, 1992. Sister Tucker cared for 76 patients that were assigned to her ward that first night, then throughout the following 8 months, she remained on “The Gascon” and transported casualties to Greek islands and England (DVA and Bostes NSW, Nurses at Gallipoli, 2015). Aboard the “Sicilia”, Sister Lydia King had only a single orderly, along with an Indian sweeper on the night of the Gallipoli landing (DVA and Bostes NSW, Nurses at Gallipoli, 2015), but due to a miscalculation of the amount of expected casualties King cared for 250 patients, divided among three wards (Waldon, 2005). No female nurses were present on the shores of Gallipoli throughout the campaign, therefore the nurses stationed on the hospital ships were the nearest to the front. However, nurses were not safe from the danger present. Sister Daisy Richmond experienced this first hand. She wrote “I was speaking to one boy, moved away to another when a bullet hit him and lodged in his thigh” (DVA and Bostes NSW, Nurses at Gallipoli, 2015). The nurses stationed at No. 3 Australian General Hospital, were led by Matron Grace Wilson, who at the conclusion of the war was commended with the Royal Red Cross, and later became a leader of the ‘Order of the British Empire’ (A Great Career, 1919). Whilst at Lemnos, Matron Wilson was responsible for the 96 nurses. As shown in Source 5, Matron Wilson led the nurses into the Lemnos camp following a piper, and accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel J A Dick, who was second in command of the No. 3 Australian General Hospital. The conditions at Lemnos were exceptionally poor, with restrictions on clean clothing for nurses, due to water constraints. Food was limited at Lemnos, and restrained to items such as bully beef and ration biscuits (Barlass, 2015). Upon arriving with the No. 3 Australian General Hospital on August 9th, Matron Wilson wrote of “150 patients lying on the ground – no equipment whatsoever – did the best we could – have tents but no beds, no water to drink or wash” (Waldon, 2005). Sister Macmillan recorded her thoughts through various letters home, in one stating “But how glorious to be able and allowed to help our brave men.”, as cited in State Library of NSW, 1915. However, the harsh conditions began to effect the nurses stationed at Lemnos. Many positioned at the hospital became ill with disease such as
typhoid, dysentery and frostbite (Bassett, J., 1992). A number of the women mentioned in diary entries and letters home how poorly they were treated by medical officers. Sister Young said the “medical officers were so neglectful. They have their smoke and recreation tent up where we did not even have a bath tent, much less a recreation.” as cited in Basset, 1992. It was also noted by Lieutenant General Fetherston that Colonel Fiaschi treated the nurses with no respect or sympathy. Lieutenant Fetherston revered the nurses for working to their full potential, because “the Hospital would have collapsed without the nurses” (Basset, 1992). Major Harris, a Sydney doctor that travelled to Lemnos also noted in the Maitland Daily Mercury, 1916, that they were “equal to any in the world”, proving their significance to the cause. The nurses endured through severe struggles, but overcame them to continue their duty for their country, and the soldiers whose lives relied on them. Without these brave Australian women, the Anzacs would have lost a much greater number of soldiers throughout the campaign.

The Gallipoli Campaign has been commemorated with honour and pride, in memory of the soldiers that fought at Anzac Cove through the year of 1915. However, the representation and how Australians recall the event predominantly excludes the experiences of the nurses. Ellis Ashmaed Bartlett excluded in his account of the landing the efforts put in by the nurses. This report was then published in numerous newspapers such as the Hobart Mercury, and was read by the public. From the initial months of the Gallipoli Campaign, the nurses were not regarded and given the recognition that was earned. This has improved over time, with Prime Minister Abbott giving recognition to the Australian nurses in his speech at Gallipoli (2015), acknowledging “the compassion of nurses who tended to thousands of wounded.” Abbot mentioned that “Without the nurses, there would have been a significantly greater loss for Australia and the Allied Forces.”, with the amount of casualties throughout Gallipoli standing at 17 260 injured soldiers, along with 664 officers (Source 3, Statistics of Australian Death at Gallipoli. 1919, 26 January) The conditions in which the nurses carried themselves through have been silenced, rarely mentioned. Nurses were shocked at the conditions that they had to work through, with restrictions to food, water and medical equipment (Macmillan, 1915) and (Waldon, 2005, 23 April), yet they pursued their duty. The nurses showed extraordinary courage, spirit and faith alongside the soldiers (Bryce, 2009).

Our Australian nurses worked tirelessly throughout the Gallipoli Campaign. Through courage, bravery and determination, they persevered through the harsh conditions endured on the hospital ships and Lemnos Island. They have wholeheartedly earned the recognition of Australia and its people, past, present and future.