



# THE Simpson PRIZE

A COMPETITION FOR  
YEAR 9 AND 10 STUDENTS

**2014 Winner**  
***Northern Territory***

**Hayley Lye**  
*Katherine High School*



The First World War was a tragic and horrific time for many. Husbands, sons, brothers and fathers lost to the gunfire, however as the old saying goes, 'every cloud has a silver lining'. On the shores of Gallipoli on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 1915, the Anzac Legend was born – The tale of loyalty, courage, incredible bravery and mateship shown by the Australian and New Zealand soldiers. Although there is doubt that the Anzac Legend truly tells the story of individual Australian soldiers during World War One. World War One was the first chance Australians had to prove themselves and show their strength and pride as a young nation. Whilst it was a time of incredible bravery and courage it left out the truth of war, as even war correspondent Charles Beans said "I threw a cloak over the horror and beastliness, cowardice and treachery of war"<sup>1</sup>. The Anzac Legend does tell the story of individual Australian soldiers, although it doesn't tell the whole story. It leaves out the unpleasant truths and acted as a cover for what the nation wanted to hear. Through looking at the elements of war in the horrible conditions, questionable reporting, terror of war and recruiting declines, it is evident that the Anzac legend does not truly tell the story of individual Australian soldiers.

The word 'ANZAC' is boasted by Australians and we express it with much pride and thankfulness, yet the pride of the Anzac legend puts a veil over the harsh realities and horrors of war and covers up the traumas in the real stories of individual Australian soldiers. War offered for many Australian men, the chance of adventure and the opportunity to show their courage and bravery to the rest of the world. Unfortunately the fairy tale ended soon after the soldiers landed in Gallipoli. As one soldier describes "We are lousy, stinking, ragged, unshaven, sleepless. Even when we're back a bit we can't sleep for our own guns...My tunic is rotten with other men's blood and partly splattered with a comrades brains. It is horrible."<sup>2</sup> This is very different from the romantic notion of Lieutenant D.G. Armstrong who stated before heading to war "I think this is the greatest opportunity for a chap to make a man of himself, those that come back from this war will be the right sort that anybody would be proud of."<sup>3</sup>

The Anzac legend is the story of Anzac soldiers that we tell our children, not the story that actually happened. Australia's official war correspondent Charles Bean admitted he believed his role was to present "the details as to the life, scenes, bearing of men, scenes that will swell Australia pride...which is what the nation I represent wants to hear."<sup>4</sup> Bean encouraged public pride back in Australia to help keep Australia's morale and confidence up thus boosting enlistments.

Bravery and courage was shown by many Australians throughout the First World War as the legend describes, however the legend fails to mention that numerous soldiers wanted nothing more than to run away from the wretched trenches and hide. As one soldier describes "Poor wounded devils you

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<sup>1</sup> Thomson, Allister "ANZAC Memories" Oxford University Press Australia, 1994

<sup>2</sup> Source 2 – Australian War Memorial Website < <http://www.awm.gov.au/simpson-prize-question-2014>

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant D.G. Armstrong, Australian Government "Gallipoli and the ANZACs", DVA, 2010

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Allister "ANZAC Memories"

meet on the stretches are laughing with glee. One cannot blame them. They are getting out of this.”<sup>5</sup> Even the bravest of our Australian heroes would have had extreme difficulty keeping their courage and not going mad throughout the great horrors of Gallipoli. “I have had much luck and kept my nerve so far. The difficulty is to keep it. The bravest often lose it.”<sup>6</sup> The rotten conditions at Gallipoli were easily enough to get ones morale down and death often seemed to be the preferred option as one soldier wrote in a letter “sometimes one thinks when one is dead and weary that he wouldn’t mind if a bullet came his way.”<sup>7</sup>

During mid-1915 to early 1916 enlistments of Australian soldier’s sky rocketed. The Australian public supported Australia’s involvement in the war and as Helen Simmelhaig stated “most Australians were excited by the prospect of war though few understood the realities.”<sup>8</sup> Keen young men were racing to sign up and show the enemy what they were made of. Nevertheless, as the war went on, enlistment numbers understandably began to dwindle.<sup>9</sup> Was the cruel reality beginning to hit Australian men when their brothers and fathers were not returning to home? When 1.5% of the Australian population wasn’t returning home?<sup>10</sup> Private Roy Kyle stated before he himself enlisted “...few, if any, envisaged the vastness and horror of it until the casualty list began to appear in the papers a few days later. They grew from columns to sheets as the days passed, the joy of victory subsided as the terrible cost became evident.”<sup>11</sup> Not even Charles Bean’s encouraging accounts could keep the Australian public completely oblivious to the sufferings that were occurring in Gallipoli. Australian men were beginning to question their allegiance to the mother country and whether there walking to their deaths would really benefit the nation. In many ways, the men who signed up in the later years of war were the most courageous, as they knew what they had coming for them.

A key part of the stories of individual Australian soldiers is that many were confused as to what they were actually fighting for underneath their excitement for participating in war, this however is not mentioned in Anzac legend. To many it seemed a case of fighting other people’s’ wars as Private Roy Kyle said about facing the Turks, “he was continuously trying to kill us and we were trying to kill him, yet it was remarkable what little hard feeling there was against him.”<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the Anzac Legend was born in a war where little heart lay for the Australian soldiers and therefore there is much doubt that it accurately tells the tale of individual Australian soldiers.

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<sup>5</sup> Source 2 – Australian War Memorial Website

<sup>6</sup> Source 2 – Australian War Memorial Website

<sup>7</sup> Source 4 – Australian War Memorial Website <<http://www.awm.gov.au/simpson-prize-question-2014>

<sup>8</sup> Simmelhaig, H & Spencer, GFR, “For Australia’s Sake: A history of Australia’s involvement in nine wars”, Thomas Nelson, Australia, 1984

<sup>9</sup> Source 5 Enlistment and Embarkations, Appendix No. 4– Australian War Memorial Website

<sup>10</sup> Australian War Memorial, “Their Spirit, Our History” 2007

<sup>11</sup> Private Roy Kyle A.I.F. 1897 -1996, “An ANZAC’s Story” Penguin Group, Australia, 2003

<sup>12</sup> Private Roy Kyle A.I.F

It is now clear that the Anzac legend does not truly tell the story of individual Australian soldiers during World War One. The legend highlights the incredible bravery and courage shown by the Australian soldiers during World War One which helped them get through the traumas of Gallipoli. This is an important aspect of the stories of Australian soldiers however it is very much not the whole story. It ignores unpleasant truths, which is evident looking at soldier's descriptions of the horrible conditions during war. The reporting from Charles Bean during the First World War is also questionable and the legend hides the facts about the real terrors of war. Also, looking at recruiting statistics of 1915-1918, we can see that as the reality of war started to sink in to Australian men they began to question their courage which does not at all support the Anzac Legend.

## **References:**

### **Primary Sources**

Source 2 – Australian War Memorial Website < <http://www.awm.gov.au/simpson-prize-question-2014>

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