

Australia's Heroes of War

GALLIPOLI

When Australians think about war, the first battle that they think about is Gallipoli. Unlike the European armies at that time, the Australian Imperial Force was formed from volunteers who came heeding the call of duty. The main force for Gallipoli was made up of Australians and New Zealanders and became known as the ANZACs.

Every young Australian who jumped ashore at dawn in that little cove near the Dardanelles on 25 April, 1915 was a hero. Instead of being landed on a flat beach with easy access to cover, as was the plan, they were landed in the wrong place and faced steep cliffs and constant barrages of enemy fire. Many young men were cut down as they left their boats and tried to run to the safety of the cliffs and thousands of men died in the hours and days that followed. Those who remained spent the next eight months literally digging in – digging kilometres of trenches from where they could fire at and shell the Turks, day by day trying to make more ground. It was here the phrase “Australian ‘diggers’” was coined. The fighting became a stalemate and the ANZACs eventually had to retreat on 20 December, 1915. By that time 18,000 soldiers had been wounded and over 8,000 soldiers killed.

The ANZAC legend is seen, not as a great victory, but as courage, endurance and dogged determination despite poor leadership and bad strategies. The Australians were an independent lot who did not take kindly to orders from above but they were bold, fierce and relentless in battle and used ingenious methods to stay alive against the odds. They also forged a bond of ‘mateship’, looking after each other in dire circumstances.

The best known story of courage that comes from Gallipoli is the story of **Simpson and his donkey**. John (Jack) Simpson Kirkpatrick was born in the United Kingdom and had only lived in Australia four years when war broke out. He joined the Australian Army Medical Corps under the name “John Simpson” as a stretcher bearer hoping it would be his passage back to the UK; however, their unit stopped in Egypt to train for Gallipoli. When they landed at Gallipoli, Kirkpatrick was the only member of his bearer section of four to reach the beach unscathed. During his time stretchering the wounded to safety he noticed donkeys near the beach and decided to use them to carry soldiers out of No-Man’s Land. He was known to lead his donkey with the wounded, seemingly quite nonchalantly, despite continuing firing from the enemy. Three weeks after he landed at Gallipoli, Kirkpatrick, or ‘Simpson’ was taking two wounded soldiers down Monash Valley when they came under machine gun fire and all three were killed. Kirkpatrick is buried in Beach Cemetery at Anzac Cove and was mentioned in Despatches for “gallant and distinguished service in the field”.

The Gallipoli campaign was seen as a defining moment in Australia’s history where Australians went to war as a group of independent rebels and through their baptism of fire returned home with a new sense of national identity.

SIR EDWARD “WEARY” DUNLOP (1907-1993)

Respected and loved by all who knew him, Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop was a giant among men not only for his height of 6’4” but for his great courage and the love and compassion he showed to people of all races.

Edward Dunlop grew up in country Victoria and following school accepted an apprenticeship with the local pharmacist. Edward won many awards after graduating top of his class in Pharmacy and then began studying medicine where he excelled in his studies and in sport, playing for ‘The Wallabies’, Australia’s national rugby team. He joined the Citizen Military Forces and then enrolled into the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps where he was commissioned as a Captain. It was here he was given the nickname “Weary”. Due to his height he had to lean over to operate and he looked “weary” although he was quite the opposite. Edward continued post-graduate training in England and at the outbreak of World War II saw action with an Australian Unit, first in Palestine, then in Crete and the Middle East.

In 1942 ‘Weary’ Dunlop was sent to Java, Indonesia to help treat allied and Australian troops who were there to thwart the Japanese threat. Very soon the Japanese captured his hospital. He could have escaped but refused to leave his patients and became a prisoner of war (POW) and was taken by the Japanese to Singapore and from there to Thailand. The Japanese wanted to build a four hundred kilometre long railway from western Thailand into Burma (now Myanmar) and so they used POW’s and native labour to complete it; a project which became known as ‘The Railway of Death’ because it cost around one hundred thousand lives.

‘Weary’ Dunlop was Commanding Officer and Surgeon in the camp with responsibility and care for over one thousand men. As Commander, he had the daunting task of deciding who was fit enough to work and as a surgeon he often had to work on them after their hours of heavy labour. His medical skills, dedication and compassion were legend in that place and he was extraordinarily courageous in trying to ease the harsh living and working conditions in the camp. There were very few medical supplies and no correct instruments for surgery so they had to improvise to help the men survive. The prisoners had just rice to eat with weak tea and ‘Weary’ said, “I’d see these fellas off at the crack of dawn, just carrying their rice for the day, and then they would drag in any time until midnight, some of them on their hands and knees”.

He would stand up to the Japanese officers and was often beaten and tortured for his efforts to protect his men. More than once he stood between them and Japanese bayonets until their life was spared. His courage and kindness was well respected by everyone, including the Japanese. After the war ‘Weary’ Dunlop returned to work as a surgeon and was later knighted in recognition for his contribution to medicine. His compassionate nature enabled him to forgive and even meet, some of his former enemies. He died in 1993 just short of his 86th birthday.

One of his most famous sayings is, "I have a conviction that it's only when you are put at full stretch that you can realise your full potential".