

Our Anzac Heroes are Today's Inspiration

Dripstone Middle School

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"Heroes lead, inspire, and entertain the masses. This is why heroes, with all their mistakes and shortcomings, are vital to humanity. It is argued that heroic stereotypes are unrealistic and outdated, but heroes show how vital they are to society when they inspire younger generations to do great things, truly help other people, and when heroes influence movements toward the improvement of humanity" – Denzel W

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Through the annual Anzac Day ceremonies, the youth of the 21st Century are able to learn about, take courage, find hope and be inspired through the heroes in the Anzac legend.

The story of the Gallipoli landing gave birth to the legend of the Anzac, which since then has been developed, expanded, embellished, confirmed and sometimes challenged¹. Despite the modifications, the legend of the Anzac is based on truth.

Like any story, the legend of the Anzac has heroes with major problems to overcome. The Anzac legend began in World War I, on 25 April 1915 when the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps first arrived on the western side of the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, now Anzac Cove. The carefully laid out plan went wrong from the start. They landed further north than planned (possibly due to tidal currents and navigational error) and, worse still, the Turks had some knowledge of a forthcoming land attack. In complete darkness, troops landed across a narrow strip of beach and found themselves facing steep, rocky cliffs which protected the enemy in waiting. The Anzacs showed their courage right from the start as their ships were attacked by constant artillery fire. Many did not even make it to shore. This was only the first complication in the Anzac legend yet already the characteristics of the Anzacs were revealed – great courage, endurance, initiative, discipline, and mateship¹. There were many more complications in the plot during the following eight months until the order to evacuate was finally given.

Not all stories have a happy ending. The Anzac legend ends with a military defeat and devastating loss of life. More than 10 000 Anzacs were killed and 33 500 injured, and the thousands of other soldiers from the British Empire and their opponents who died must also be acknowledged².

There are numerous heroes who have, through their heroic actions, created the legend of the Anzacs, some widely known through public memorials such as John Simpson (who inspires us with his great courage and display of mateship as he worked tirelessly with a donkey to bring the wounded back from the battlefield), and Lance Corporal Albert Jacka (who was highly awarded for his determination, initiative and bravery in counter-attacks against the Turks).³

¹ Unknown author. *Australian War Memorial*. Available: <http://www.awm.gov.au>. Last accessed 30 Jul 2012.

² Red Apple Education Ltd. (2012). *The Gallipoli Campaign, Gallipoli and the Anzacs, Australia and World War, The Anzac legend, Gallipoli and the Anzacs*. Available: <http://www.skwirk.com.au>. Last accessed 29 Jul 2012.

³ Unknown author. (2012). *Lance Corporal Albert Jacka our most famous Anzac of his time*. Available: <http://takebackaustralia.aussieblogs.com.au/2012/04/07lance-corporal-albert-jacka-our-most-famous-anzac-of-his-time>. Last accessed 30 Jul 2012.

Others are remembered through their local communities. Walter Styles, a third generation Northern Territorian and Darwin school boy, was the first Territory-born soldier to lose his life in Gallipoli. He died on 18 July, 1914 while he was trench digging. Without warning, a machine gun opened fire and he was hit near his spinal cord. *"He was most heroic in the manner he bore great pain"*, D.K. Chapman wrote to Styles' father. "He was an example to many a hardened soldier". ⁴Style Street in Alawa honours Walter's Anzac Spirit.

Patrick Holmes showed determination, courage and commitment to his country when he became the first Territory volunteer. Holmes could not bear waiting to be called upon for service. Sadly he was killed at the top of Walter's Ridge on the afternoon of 25 April 1914.⁵

In addition to national and community recognised heroes, many other heroes from the Anzac legend continue to quietly inspire the lives of individuals through their selfless actions. One such hero is Agnes Beryl Corfield, a young nurse, from Maryborough whose letters show that she left Australia with a sense of adventure and pride. Her later letters describe the horrors of war as her hospital ship receives casualties not far from the Gaba Tepe (Anzac Cove). She describes the eleven days of hell. *"Sometimes for 24 hours the constant boom boom would never stop – I used to feel that I would go mad if they didn't stop – What our boys have gone through on the peninsula God only knows."* She goes on to say, *"If I were a soldier, I would pray day and night to be killed right out, but to see men come into your ward with legs off, arms off, mouth and tongue or lower jaw blown off, I would wonder what it is all for and with whom the great reckoning will be." ... "After ten days of torture we set sail with our mangled heap of humanity"*. She had worked 15 hours a day for 11 days in the hold of the ship. Whilst returning to Malta with 80 seriously wounded in her ward, there were eight deaths in her ward alone, her medical officer had come down with positive typhoid, the night orderly died at 5pm with dysentery and she herself was suffering from trauma, exhaustion and seasickness. She writes *"I went to bed at 11pm that night and prayed to be delivered from hell."* (Corfield, 29 August). Her strength of character to keep going, her compassion for humanity and her selflessness is unquestionably an inspiration for everyone.⁶

Most importantly, like all stories, there is a message for the audience – the youth of the 21st Century. From these tragic events, the Anzac spirit still lives in Australians today. Anzac heroes had carried the hopes of a young nation to prove itself to the world. And they did just that. The Anzac legend has become an important part of the Australian identity, has contributed to the development of our cultural values and brought us international recognition. Our Anzac legend has given all Australians, young and old, a proud history to look back on. It has given us heroes to learn from as we look forward. It is these heroes of the Anzac legend who inspire us with qualities to guide us in the values we choose, the actions we take and the choices we make.

⁴ Northern Territory Government. *Walter Styles*. Available: <http://www.territorystories.nt.gov.au/handle/10070/214542>. Last accessed 30 Jul 2012.

⁵ Northern Territory Government. *Patrick Holmes*. Available: <http://www.territorystories.nt.gov.au/handle/10070/214542>. Last accessed 30 Jul 2012.

⁶ Corfield, Agnes Beryl, 29 August 1915

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Note: Agnes Beryl Corfield was the best friend of my grandmother's aunt. The letters she wrote have been kept in the family and have just been handed down to my mother. I feel connected to this woman and wanted to write about her.

