



The

a competition for

Simpson

year 9 and 10 students

Prize

2009 winner
South Australia

Johanna Stott-Williams
Wilderness School

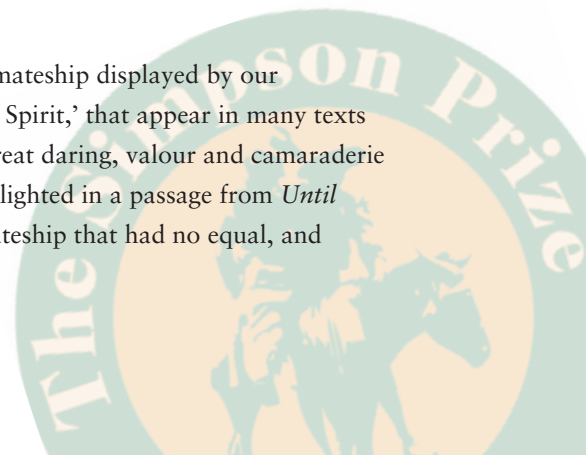
World War I had a devastating effect on Australian society. Why should we commemorate our participation in this conflict?

by Johanna Stott-Williams, Wilderness School

Even though World War 1 had a devastating impact on Australian society, we should commemorate those who not only sacrificed their lives but who also gallantly represented Australia and Australian beliefs. We should also acknowledge those who put their lives on hold to assist the war effort back home and the way in which our fledgling nation was united during this conflict. We hope that in remembering the despair, suffering and destruction of Australian families, the same mistake will never be repeated.

We should acknowledge the Australian lives that were lost and devastated during this confrontation. Many men left to go to the war with the promise of adventure and glory, only to discover death and destruction. Compared to other nationalities in the war, Australians had one of the highest proportion of casualties. Many men died where they stood, in the muddy trenches of Gallipoli and the Western Front (Appendix 1), others dying later of horrendous injuries from bombings, shootings, barbed wire and gas attacks. The shocking effects of gas attacks are vividly described by Bell (1981): “Soldiers often found it impossible to detect its existence in their area until they felt its effect...” (p.34) and by Crack (2000): “...eyes bandaged and skin blistered... Some of the men he saw stretched out there would probably never see again.” (p.139). A list of battle casualty admissions to field ambulances from AIF in France shows the percentage of men who suffered minor but still detrimental injuries from accidental injuries, infections, tuberculosis and fever (Appendix 2). This physical devastation can also be seen in a photograph of wounded men being collected from the battlefields (Appendix 3). It is also exemplified in the photograph of my great uncle Pte. William Byers who died on the battlefields of the Somme (Appendix 4). According to Lewis (2001), the soldiers of the time referred to the casualties as “the butcher’s bill.” We should acknowledge the deaths of so many Australians so that their efforts have not been in vain. The memory of their struggles should live on in Australian history as a bold reminder of what can be lost.

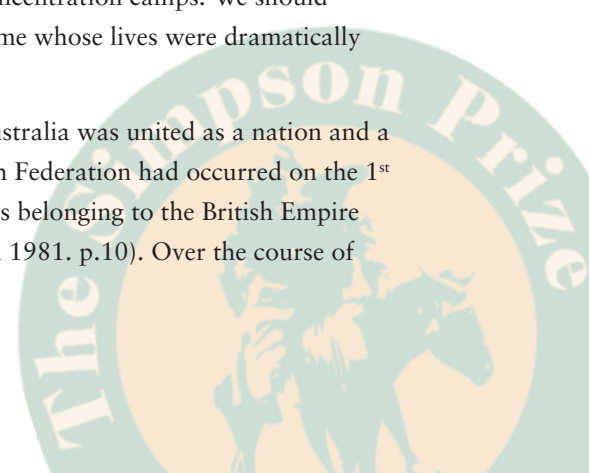
We should also commemorate the courage, bravery and mateship displayed by our soldiers, even in the face of death. The words ‘Australian Spirit,’ that appear in many texts originated during the Great War. They characterise the great daring, valour and camaraderie of the average Australian soldier. These qualities are highlighted in a passage from *Until a Dead Horse Kicks You*, “Alec had seen examples of mateship that had no equal, and



unsurpassed acts of courage. He had watched as men laid down their lives for the good of the many, disregarding the life of the one” (Crack . 2000. p.144-145). This passage, and the photograph of an Australian soldier carrying his wounded mate (Appendix 5), convey the Australians’ great respect for each other which could not be surpassed. Another renowned figure who exemplified the Australian Spirit was John Simpson Kirkpatrick (Appendix 6). Simpson lasted less than a month at Gallipoli, but during this time he managed to perform many memorable acts of heroism. With the help his donkey he rescued more than 100 wounded men. According to Benson, (1965) Simpson has become a symbol of the valour and resourcefulness of the ANZAC soldiers throughout the war. By commemorating the courage and determination shown by Australian soldiers; their story will inspire future generations to support others in the bleakest of times.

We should also recognize those back home who altered their lives to adamantly assist the war effort and who struggled to make ends meet in the economically devastating circumstances. Anxious family members, friends and loved ones back home participated by sending food packages, knitting socks and providing outside news to maintain the soldiers’ welfare, even with a 50% rise in the cost of living (Weston, 2003). Some women assumed male jobs in banks and insurance offices and many others joined support groups who collected funds and supplied greatly appreciated bandages, cigarettes and chocolate to the men at the front. Farrall & Rowney (2004) describe how pupils from the school I attend (Wilderness,) packed very well received comfort parcels for members of the 3rd Australian tunnelling company during World War One (Appendix 7). Other than parcels, letters from home helped remind the men that there were more than just trenches, guns, warfare and miserable conditions; letters were not just outside news, but a break from reality and even a reward for their endeavours, as indicated in King (2003) when he describes how: “Towards the end of November Alec received his own reward- a pile of letters from home, including several from his brothers and sister.” (p.77) Other than those back home, there was also major support from volunteer groups such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and the Church Army; these groups managed to provide a good meal even when goods were scarce. “Wherever there were no estaminets there’d usually be something run by the Salvation Army, the Church Army or the Red Cross, where the soldiers could go for something to eat and drink. Yes, the Salvos did a great job.” (Crack 2000. p.125) Amidst the hardships and tragedy, Australians struggled to make ends meet as the government increased taxes and introduced new ones (the Estate Probate Tax and the Entertainment Tax) in an attempt to fund the war effort. Even with the advantage of price fixing many worker’s wages lagged behind prices, leading to industrial turmoil. Australians on the home front were also devastated by politically divisive issues such as conscription and German Australians endured racism and the horror of being imprisoned in concentration camps. We should remember the sacrifice and suffering of all those back home whose lives were dramatically altered due to the course of the War.

We should acknowledge how through terrible conflict Australia was united as a nation and a national identity forged through the tragedy. Even though Federation had occurred on the 1st of January 1901, many Australians still saw themselves as belonging to the British Empire and “... believed it was right to fight for the Empire”(Bell 1981. p.10). Over the course of



the war, however, peoples' minds changed and they saw that "It was also an opportunity to prove the nation had come of age" (Bell 1981. p 10). Australians were regularly noted for their courage and began to see themselves as Australians, not just a part of the British forces. The war had exposed their distinctiveness and Australia was born. "...Gallipoli and the Anzacs changed Australia forever: there could be no going back." (Bell.1981. p.17)

The Great War had a horrendous effect on Australian society; however we should commemorate our participation and acknowledge those who laid down their lives to fight for the cause and those who displayed endless amounts of courage in the worst of times. Without us remembering them, their deaths and the anguish of their families will be in vain. We must remember all that has happened in our past and not ignore death but embrace it; without our acceptance we can't move forward. World War One might have helped Australia progress as a nation, but we still have a long way to go.

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Appendix 1: Dead in the Trenches

Andrews, E.M., 1993, 'The First ANZAC Day', in *The ANZAC Illusion*, Australia, Brown Prior Anderson. pp. 90.



The reality: trench at Lone Pine, 8 August 1915. (AWM Official Photo No. A4029).

Appendix 2: Battle Casualty Admissions

Bell, A.D. 1981, 'The Physical Effects of War in *An ANZAC'S War Diary*, Adelaide, Australia, Rigby Publishers Limited. pp. 57.

	Number	Percentage of Total
High velocity bullets (rifle and machine gun fire)	48 309	33.93
Shell fragments and shrapnel pellets	72 513	50.93
Bombs and grenades	2 714	1.91
Bayonets	396	0.28
Gassing	16 822	11.82
"Shell shock"	1 624	1.13
	142 378	100.00
Accidental injuries	15 648	7.30
Non-battle casualties:		
Gastro-intestinal infections	1 558	0.74
Faucial and respiratory tract infections	41 300	19.49
The neurotomic ectodermoses	354	0.17
Rheumatic fever	239	0.11
Tuberculosis	602	0.28
Infections of eye, ear, nose	2 671	1.26
Septic pyogenic infections	11 888	5.61
The venereal infections	13 105	6.19
Transmitted through insect	4 244	2.01
Skin infestations	20 533	9.69
Special wound infections	21	0.01
Fever	24 593	11.61
Worms	43	0.02

Appendix 3: Stretcher Bearers

Bell, A.D. 1981, 'The Routine of the Trenches' in *An ANZAC'S War Diary*, Adelaide, Australia, Rigby Publishers Limited. pp. 51.



Collecting the wounded

BATTALION

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| NASON E.I. | ABOLIN M. | AMMOND F.W. |
| MATTHEWS W.M. | ACKROYD C.W. | HANRETTY R.H. |
| MILLS S.E.C. | ADAM J. | HARTKE F.R. |
| MITCHELL A.J. | A'HEARN E. | HARDMAN J.C. |
| NEVILLE W. | AINLEY A.E. | HARRISON J.H. |
| NEWMAN A.C. | ANDERSON A.C. | HARVEY C.C. |
| NICHOLSON G.M. | ANDERSON F. | HAUCHEY C.S. |
| NILSEN O. | ANDERSON J. | HAWKINS E.S. |
| DATES C.N. | ANDREWS E.J. | HENRY A. |
| O'CONNELL M. | ANDREWS E.W. | HERBERT R. |
| ORMEROD J.E. | ANDREWS S.L. | HICKS S. |
| OSTON F.J. | ARMSTRONG G.A. | HINE C. |
| PAGE A.R.R. | ASHLEY C.W. | HITCHCOCK J.T. |
| PAGE J.W. | ASHWORTH W.N. | HOBSON R.N. |
| PATERSON A. | ATKINS W. | HOCKING E. |
| PUL H. | AUBREY J.W. | HODKINSON O. |
| LYNE C. | AYRE W.C. | HODSON F.W. |
| ARSE J. | BAINBRIDGE R.M. | HOCAN P.J. |
| RICE H.D. | BAKER T.J. | HOLMAN V. |
| RYER A.H. | BAKER W. | HOLST C.L. |
| ITON W.A. | BALL P.J. | HORNER E.W. |
| ERTS A.W. | BALL W.C. | HOWARD H.E. |
| ERTS A.W. | BALME R.B. | HOWE J. |
| ERTS A.W. | BARKER J.C. | |



In Loving Memory of
Pte. WILLIAM ROBERT BYERS,
 No. 1627, A Coy., 46th Batt.

Enlisted in the A.I.F., at Perth, during the month of April, 1916, and received his preliminary training at Claremont camp. He was in camp until June 4th, 1916, on which date he sailed for England, where he completed his training at Salisbury Plains. From England he proceeded to France and took part in most of the battles on the Somme. On Jan. 21st, 1917, this gallant soldier, received fatal wounds to which he succumbed two days later at the Second Am. Casualty Clearing Station, France, at the early age of 23 years. He was buried by his friends in a cemetery near by the place of his death.

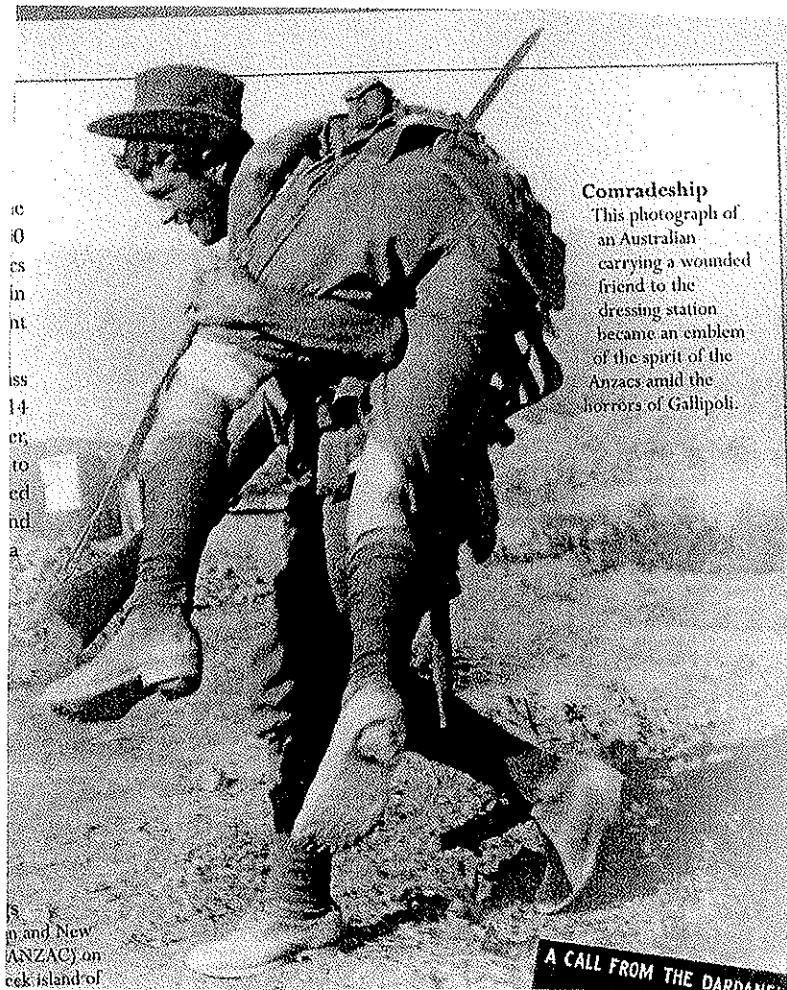
Pte. Byers, who was greatly respected, was the son of Mrs. J. Byers, who resides at 29 York St., Salford, with whom great sympathy is felt at the death of her dearly beloved son.



Appendix 4: Great Uncle Byers

Appendix 5: Mateship-Carrying the Wounded

Willmott, H.P. 2007, 'The Anzacs' in *World War 1*, New York, DK Publishing. pp. 79.



Appendix 6: Private John Simpson

King, J. 2003, 'Meeting Lord Kitchener' in *Gallipoli: Our Last Man Standing*, Queensland, John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd.



Appendix 7: Personal Letter to Miss Brown and Pupils of Wilderness School

Farrall, J. Rowney, P. (ED) 2004. 'Letter from major Sanderson' in *The Wilderness Letters*, Australia, Wilderness School Ltd. pp. 2.

HMAS "RUBIC",
Outer Harbour,
South Australia,
4-12-20.

Miss. Brown,
Ladies School,
Medindie NEAR ADELAIDE, S.A.

Dear Miss Brown,

I am sending to you, through the kindness of the Y.M.C.A., at this Port, a small present for you and the Pupils of your School from the Officers and men of the 3rd., Australian Tunnelling Company, for whose comfort while at the Front, you and your Pupils did so much. The present is a "Gas Alarm Bell" found at the entrance to a German Headquarters dug-out at the time of the capture of Hill 70 near Loos, where our men did so much fighting. I hope it may be possible to make it suitable for use as a School Bell, in remembrance of the kindness and generosity of your pupils in helping to maintain our efficiency at the Front and so to beat the enemy.

Will you please convey to your pupils my thanks and best wishes and accept same yourself.

I hope you have had the pleasure of welcoming home your Brother, Captain H.W. Brown, are now. Will you please give him my kindest regards.

Yours Sincerely,

Alex. Sanderson, MAJOR.

C.O., 3rd., Australian Tunnelling Company.