

EXTRACT

THE SOLDIER

Frank Wilkie

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THE SOLDIER
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The Soldier (A tribute to the ANZACs)

By

Frank Wilkie

NEWS REEL ANNOUNCER: April 25, 1915. In the pre-dawn darkness the magnificent Australian and New Zealand troops stormed ashore on the Gallipoli peninsula to take on the foe, the dreaded Turk. As soon as their boots hit the shore the ANZACS charged headlong into point blank rifle and machine gun fire, overrunning the enemy trenches and silencing them with cold steel. The attack pushed forward with the greatest dash. Shrapnel and snipers' bullets whizzed about the brave ANZACs as they faced sheer cliffs. Without pause, this race of athletes shed their packs and charged up the cliffs, holding fire until they overran the Turkish positions. For 15 mortal hours the Australians and New Zealanders occupied the heights under an incessant shell-fire, and without the moral and material support of a single gun from the shore. They were subjected the whole time to violent counter-attacks. No finer feat has happened in this war than this sudden landing in the dark, and the storming of the heights, and, above all, the holding on whilst the reinforcements were landing. These raw colonial troops, in these desperate hours, proved worthy to stand alongside the giants of Trafalgar and Waterloo in the hallowed halls of heroes.

The glorious deeds of the ANZACS in the Gallipoli peninsula has sent a thrill of pride throughout the Commonwealth. General Birdwood said he could not sufficiently praise their courage, endurance and soldierly qualities. Though the list of casualties has brought grief to many Australian homes, there is consolation in the thought that all our men were doing their duty for the King and covering themselves in Glory.

SOLDIER: Forget the King. And it wasn't Glory we were covered in either. I mean Georgie wasn't a bad bloke but I wasn't there for him. I signed up for the adventure. To see the world. And at six bob a day? I couldn't believe they were paying us. There was nothing better going at home. Every bloke I knew piled in. Lawyers, clerks, stockmen, grocers, teachers, salesmen and even priests. Dad was proud of me and would have come too if he wasn't past it. Believe me, he tried. Turned up at the recruiting station and all, but they knocked him back.

I reckon all of Melbourne turned out to cheer us off. There must have been 10,000 recruits marching down main street. And the girls! They couldn't keep away. I reckon I stole a thousand kisses that day. Mum went quiet. I mean, you normally can't get a word in edgewise with her but she... she just wouldn't stop crying. She hugged me so tight I thought I'd burst. Didn't know there was such strength in her. "Cheer up mum" I said. "It'll all be over in six weeks. You know I've always been lucky." Dad had to prise her off me. Never seen her so..anyway. We were off.

We sailed across an ocean so blue it hurt my eyes to look at. It was two-up, cards, singing, smoking, drinking and deck games all the way to Egypt. And there I was. Me. In the land of the Pharaohs!!!

We trained with the Kiwis. ANZACS they called us.

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