

Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize 2010

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Sean Lloyd
Year 9
Brighton Secondary School
Age: 14

Using the story of a fallen South Australian World War 1 serviceman/woman on the Western Front, describe what the ANZAC spirit means to you?

ANZAC Spirit is a big part of Australian and New Zealand culture. It is a unique quality that defines the Australian and New Zealand people. It was first recorded at the start of the Gallipoli Campaign during the First World War, where thousands of ordinary Australians and New Zealanders volunteered to fight. These men gave up their peaceful lives to protect their families and to protect their country. Most of these men knew the horrific conditions of war but still volunteered for their country. This was the foundation of ANZAC Spirit. During the Gallipoli Campaign our soldiers further built upon the ANZAC Spirit by showing heroic acts of endurance, courage, ingenuity, humour, larrikinism and most importantly of all, mateship. It is mateship that separates the ANZAC soldiers from other soldiers around the world. The ANZAC's are known around the world for their courageous acts of mateship, for example, John Simpson Kirkpatrick the stretcher-bearer and his famous donkey who heroically stepped into the line of fire to rescue wounded men and take them back to the beach. While returning to the beach with two wounded men he came under machine gun fire and was killed. Simpson is a fine example of ANZAC Spirit but there are many others, including the story of Thomas Charles Baker.

Thomas Charles Richmond Baker was born on the 2nd of May 1897 at Smithfield, South Australia. He attended the Collegiate School of St Peter, Adelaide, where he won the Farrell Scholarship. He played tennis, rowed and loved a game of footy. He was also a member of the cadet corps. He left school in 1914 and became a clerk in the Adelaide branch of the Bank of New South Wales. He enlisted as a reinforcement gunner for the 6th Field Artillery Brigade on the 29th of July 1915 and was posted to the Middle East. His battery was then posted to France and arrived just in time to take part in the First Battle of the Somme. During the battle his commanders noticed that he showed considerable courage. He won his first military medal on 15 December 1916 in action near Gueudecourt for being part of an observation team who recored the fall of shot and range of bombardment. He continuously repaired telephone wires while under heavy fire and was awarded a Bar to his Military Medal when he risked his life for his mates to put out a fire in a gun-pit containing ammunition.

Though Baker had proved himself as a terrific gunner he wanted to do more for his country. Bakers hobby as a child was building model aeroplanes and while in France he was '*almost green with envy*' after watching allied pilots in combat. An opportunity arose and Baker was transferred in 1917 to the Australian Flying Corps as an air mechanic. He was then selected to become an aviator and was sent to No.5 squadron in England for flight training. He made his first solo flight in March 1918 and graduated to a Sopwith Camel pilot on the 15th of June 1918. The next day he joined No.4 Fighter Squadron as a Second Lieutenant with a total of 57 hours 40 minutes flying time.

On the 23rd of June he crossed the lines in his Sopwith Camel and on the 31st of June he scored his first kill. He shot down a Fokker D.V11 at 11:45am southwest of Estaires. During August he destroyed an Albatros D.V, a Balloon and also a DFW C all in the same Sopwith Camel. These four kills had made him recognised as an ace. On the 1st and 2nd of October he scored two more kills in his Camel. In the middle of October his squadron's Camels were upgraded to Sopwith Snipes and Baker was promoted to the rank of Flight Commander. Between the 26th and 30th of October 1918 Baker shot down six enemy Fokker D.V11's with three of those kills being on the 28th near Ath in Belgium. On the fourth of November Baker was one of two No.4 squadron aces tragically shot down over Ath in a battle against the odds, one week before the armistice. The German unit *Jasta 2* shot down both pilots who were both killed by the CO of *Jasta 2*, ace Karl Bolle. These were Karl Bolle's 35th and 36th victories and were his last of the war.

Baker was remembered for his forceful yet pleasant personality and was a well-respected flight leader due to his fearlessness. It was said that, *"This officer has carried out some forty low flying raids on hostile troops, aerodromes, etc., and has taken part in numerous offensive patrols; he has, in addition, destroyed eight hostile machines. In all these operations he has shown exceptional initiative and dash, never hesitating to lead his formation against overwhelming odds, nor shrinking from incurring personal danger"*. Overall Baker had shot down 12 enemy aircraft and also was credited with having forced down four others. Baker was known to have closed to around 10 to 20 feet before destroying his target. Thomas Charles Richmond Baker was buried in the communal cemetery, Escanaffles, Belgium, and a stained-glass window is dedicated to his memory at St John's Church of England, Halifax Street, Adelaide.

Baker shows ANZAC Spirit through his bravery, he fought against the odds for his country and came out with victory. Baker's story appealed to me as I am a cadet just as he was. I am also interested in aeroplanes as was he, which gives me a sort of connection to him. He is an admirable icon for all South Australians to look up to because he bravely fought in the artillery in France and continued fighting in the skies above Belgium. I believe that ANZAC Spirit makes us unique from the rest of the world, it defines us. ANZAC Spirit is not only the ultimate form of patriotism it is the ultimate form of mateship. It is what brings us together in hard times, for instance the Victorian Bushfires, when all firefighters from around the country went straight to help out, even though it was dangerous. Although it was not only the firefighters, it was also the builders who are still repairing the lost houses and it was also the millions of Australians who donated money to the unfortunate people who lost their homes. Also our latest Victorian Cross winner Trooper Donaldson who displayed an unforgettable act of selflessness when he ran, under heavy fire, eighty metres through exposed ground to rescue a wounded interpreter, his mate. It is clear that this was true ANZAC Spirit, it is this which gives us a reputation for not leaving a man behind. And yet Trooper Donaldson just thought that he was helping out his friend.

Australians are still known around the world for never leaving a man behind in battle and I would like this to continue. Many students my age have little knowledge, except for what they are taught in history, about what the ANZAC's have done for both Australia and New Zealand. We must not lose that ANZAC Spirit or we will lose a piece of ourselves.

References: <http://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/australi/baker3.php>
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