

GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

2015 Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Tour

By Lauren Hutchinson

Charles Campbell College
Year 10



Presbyterian Banner, March 1916

Reverend John Claude McPhee

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Bravery, honour, mateship, courage; all describe the true spirit of those who fought on the 25th April, 1915 at Gallipoli. On this date, the ANZAC legend was born and in the face of pain and suffering, the ANZACS fought against all odds. As well as soldiers and nurses, chaplains were also present providing spiritual support to all. Reverend, John Claude McPhee was a man who gave up his usual life of preaching and study, in order to follow the troops to the Front and support the ANZACs who showed immense determination and valor throughout the war.

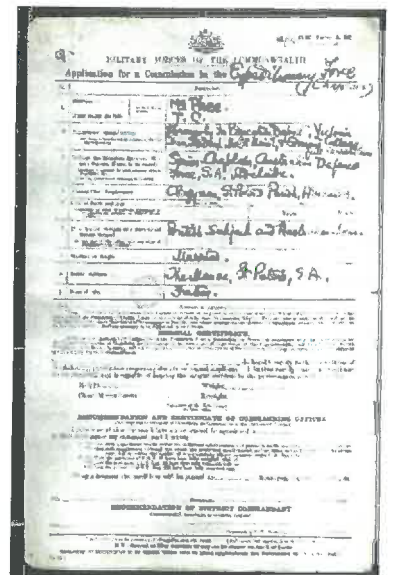
The Gallipoli campaign was designed to divide Germany from their allies. The plan was to send a large army made up of Australian and New Zealanders to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula, and gain control of the Dardanelles with the aim of completely removing Turkey from the war. This plan seemed infallible. However, once the troops arrived, they realised there were many flaws in it. The terrain was unfamiliar giving the ANZACs a huge disadvantage, reinforcements from the sea could be attacked by the Turks from the cliffs above, and because of the unsafe and difficult landing, approximately 2000 soldiers died the first day¹. Despite this, the ANZACs continued on and showed exceptional courage and determination even though their hopes of victory were slowly slipping away. It was the determination of these brave Australians that laid the foundation for the ANZAC spirit.

The ANZAC spirit is one of bravery, mateship, courage and pride for the country. On the shores of Gallipoli, the Australian and New Zealand forces fought with determination, strength and a fire in their hearts to prove they were a force to be reckoned with. They showed courage and sacrifice in the face of enormous uncertainty, being terribly outnumbered, ill-equipped and fighting in unfamiliar and harsh terrain. There was a deep sense of camaraderie and mateship between ANZACs as they had the attitude of 'don't let your mates down'. Even when your 'mate' was shot, you never just left him; you dragged him behind a rock or back down into the trench, risking your life because that was just what you did. Regardless of the circumstances, the Aussie's ironic humour and sense of brotherhood never faltered. Australians take pride in the way they 'lend a hand' when someone is in need and this was the ANZAC's attitude towards helping out their 'mother country' by joining them in the war. The ANZAC spirit is invincible and is not something that can be seen, yet it demands to be felt, and though thousands of Australians and New Zealanders died at Gallipoli, we remember them for their bravery, valour and mateship they showed amongst the horrors of war. The ANZAC spirit lives in all who remember the sacrifices of our fellow countrymen.

Typical of this spirit was that shown by Reverend John Claude McPhee who was present at the landing. McPhee was a Presbyterian Clergyman born in Victoria, but once married, relocated to South Australia with his wife. They lived in The Manse in St Peters and he was the minister of the St Peters Parish, Adelaide. On the 8th September, 1914, McPhee enlisted as a chaplain to the Australian Imperial Force and was ranked a *Class 1 Chaplain (colonel)* under the Unit Name of *Chaplains' Corps*.²

¹ *Great Australian Stories; Gallipoli*. Robert Hillman

² Australian ANZACS In The Great War 1914-1918



As chaplain, McPhee wanted to provide faith and support to troops throughout the horrors that would surround them. At Gallipoli, he spent much time burying fallen soldiers, these services were usually held at night to reduce the risk of mourners being killed by enemy fire. Depending on the number of deaths each day, McPhee could be up all night conducting these burials. On one occasion, he completed a burial at 3am, only to resume his work again at 5am³. There was a time when a temporary truce was made to allow for the fallen soldiers of both armies to be buried. McPhee was part of this and overall buried eleven Australians that day, describing the scene as 'gruesome and horrible beyond all imagination'⁴. Chaplains not only conducted burial services, but also answered and censored letters⁵, visited the wounded and dying, conducted Bible Class, and looked after 'the spiritual welfare of the soldiers'⁶.

McPhee wrote several letters to the Church in Adelaide about his experiences of the war. In one letter, he wrote of an admiration for the troops saying 'the men fought magnificently and hung on with almost incredible tenacity to the positions'⁷. He went on to say the soldiers were high spirited and 'capable of doing anything'. He said 'they are really splendid fellows and great fighters. It is an honour to be associated with them in the task set here.'⁸ This letter gave the families back in South Australia a reassurance that their loved ones were fighting well, whilst concealing the reality of the full brutality of the war. The church took great pleasure in reading McPhee's letters and⁹ they applauded his patriotism¹⁰ and knew that he was doing a wonderful job with the troops and serving God's kingdom.

McPhee returned to Adelaide on March 15, 1916,¹¹ but took a year's leave to restore his composure and mental health. Later that year, a memorial and prayer service was held on the Parade Ground, King William Road, to commemorate the anniversary of the Gallipoli landing. McPhee shared the service with two other chaplains and he delivered the sermon saying:

'Those present who were at the early landing on Gallipoli twelve months ago, would remember how easy it was to live a whole lifetime in a few minutes, and would realize that there were occasions, such as that, when the normal mode of reckoning time seemed futile, because they were living in deeds and not in years.'

('The Fallen ANZACs', The Advertiser, 1916)

He also made a comment that the ANZACs had 'left behind forever their boyhood, but not their buoyancy'. He believed that among the men at the front he detected 'a genuine deepening of the religious faith', and 'they deeply mourned their heroic dead, but they knew they had not died in vain.'¹²

This sermon impacted the lives of the South Australians who didn't go to war because he was giving a speech of admiration for the troops and their courage and sacrifice. This sermon was presented to the families and friends of the ANZACs and was intended to give them an assurance of the bravery and determination shown in battle.

³ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

⁴ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

⁵ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

⁶ Presbyterian Banner, July 1915

⁷ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

⁸ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

⁹ Presbyterian Banner, June 1915

¹⁰ Presbyterian Banner, December 1914

¹¹ Presbyterian Banner, April 1916

¹² 'The Fallen ANZACs', The Advertiser, 1916

McPhee was a chaplain who provided faith and spiritual support, burial rights, morale and hope for the soldiers in the midst of battle when it seemed like the world was collapsing around them. He provided occasional refuge from the

horrors of war and death and encouraged the soldiers to pray for strength. He also performed Holy Communion with the soldiers, reassuring them of God's grace and love for them. McPhee was self-giving and provided spiritual support selflessly and sacrificially. It was recorded that he became sick with the flu, but continued his pastoral care in the face of danger and still had a selfless nature to serve the soldiers, give God's love to all and live by example the self-giving life of Jesus.

(Left: McPhee's Casualty Form, National Archives)

As a chaplain, one of McPhee's main duties was to conduct burials, even amidst danger, and usually it was his job to dig the graves¹³ and often had to hold services under enemy fire. At times he couldn't finish the services as they had to rush to cover¹⁴. On one occasion there was an explosion and all soldiers fled for cover, but McPhee stayed to finish the benediction and as he stepped away from the grave, another explosion occurred where he had just been standing¹⁵. McPhee reports another occasion where a messenger told him there was a man lying in a trench, dead. He hurried over to the man and brought him back to the graves, all whilst enemy fire was raining over him¹⁶. McPhee risked his life for a man he didn't know, in order to give him a proper burial. All these incidents were acts of selflessness and love, and true expressions of the ANZAC spirit.

The ANZACs were true heroes in the way they fought for peace and freedom with determination and fire in their hearts. As Australian's, we are both indebted and proud of the sacrifices made by the ANZACs, and McPhee was incredibly proud of the nation he came from, saying,

'The last fifteen months have taught me to be prouder than ever of my Australian origin and upbringing on the national side, and of my Presbyterian nurture on the religious side.'

(Presbyterian Banner, March 1916)



*Australian War Memorial
Front Row, left: J. C.
McPhee*

¹³ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

¹⁴ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

¹⁵ Presbyterian Banner, February 1916

¹⁶ Presbyterian Banner, August 1915

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- April 1915, pg. 9, 10
- June 1915, pg. 13
- July 1915, pg. 6, 7
- August 1915, pg. 5, 6, 7
- November 1915, pg. 7
- February 1916, pg. 7
- March 1916, pg. pg. 6, 7
- April 1916, pg. 6, 7
- July 1916, pg. pg 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
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