

# 2015 Premier's ANZAC Spirit Award

By Mathew Wallace



# George Deane Mitchell

## The Gallipoli Campaign

“While the campaign is considered a military failure, Gallipoli became a household name in Australia and with it the ANZAC tradition was created. Gallipoli became the common tie forged in adversity that bound the colonies and people of Australia into a nation.” (Army.gov Staff, 2014)

The Great War that erupted from Archduke Franz Ferdinand's death soon parodied its own name as conflict on the Western Front degenerated into a stalemate composed of out-dated pre-industrial era tactics. The direness of the situation led the British War Council to propose a plan that sought to destabilise German power by authorising Britain's colonies to launch attacks on Germany's allies. (Army.gov Staff, 2014) Thus, the AIF received the call to arms in 1915 whence a plan was devised to capture Constantinople via beach landing before pressing further inland to relieve the Western Front. (Australian War Memorial) Months of training were embarked on before the Australian Forces landed at Gaba Tepe, now known as ANZAC Cove, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April. (Army.gov Staff, 2014) The tragic circumstances surrounding the Gallipoli dawn landing extended to encompass the entirety of the campaign in Gallipoli, rendering any prior training irrelevant. It is a subject of great debate whether the Australian forces landed at the correct beach, yet the courageous defiance on display against the Turkish guns reflects the highest degree of bravery. Alas, the resilience embodied at Gallipoli was not capable of breaking through the Turkish lines. This resulted in a highly successful withdrawal of Australian and British forces from the beach with a total Australian casualty number of over twenty-five thousand brave Australian patriots, of which nearly eight thousand died. (Australian War Memorial)



George Mitchell enlisted in the AIF as a Corporal on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1914 at the tender age of 20. He joined the South Australian 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which made up the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade in combination with the 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> South Australian battalions. Mitchell, along with the South Australian 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade, was amongst the first forces to land at a time estimated around 4:30 am. (Australian War Memorial, 2014) Mitchell survived the initial landing and constructed defences for the remaining battalions. He endured three months of the year-long operation before succumbing to an enemy more deadly than the Turkish guns; enteric fever. (Gammage, 2000) Mitchell reinlisted in 1916 after suffering the brutally realistic and sudden evacuation that was all too common due to the poor conditions in the Gallipoli trenches.

Figure 1: A map of the Dardanelles Strait with details regarding the landings on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1915. (Anzacsite.gov, 2010)

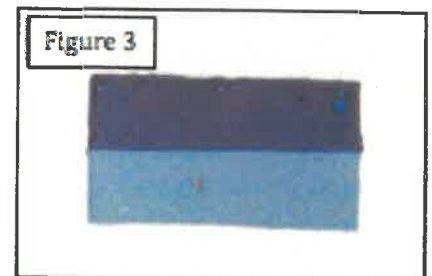
More is known about Mitchell's experiences at Gallipoli from his twelve volume long diary that details his experiences at battlefields including the Somme, Ypres, and Gallipoli. (Anderson, 2012) The diary provides startlingly poignant descriptions of events during Gallipoli such as the landing, "The fury of the enemy rises higher and higher. We do not know if we are frightened or glad. The bow grates on the shore. To right and left are other boats grounding. We amidstships wait impatiently in the hail as men scramble and blunder over the thwarts to take the place of those jumping from the bows. 'Too slow. Over the side!' The water closes about my legs, rises to my armpits. I gasp with the cold and the shock of it." (Sydney Morning Herald, 2008) Ultimately, the famed larrikin Mitchell experienced what every hero involved in the campaign saw and felt with his recount of events providing a truthful embodiment of every soldier's thoughts and fears.

### George Mitchell's Background and Family

Mitchell was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1894 into a family of five children at Caltowie in South Australia. He adopted his given names from his father, George Deane Mitchell, whom made a hardworking living as a railway porter in order to support his family and his wife, Annie Smith. Mitchell's upbringing encouraged hard work and honesty, which were considered most important traits. This is in part due to his religious orientation, Methodism. (Gammage, 2000) Tensions between major European political powers escalated as Mitchell entered his adolescent years,



however his isolation in Australia separated him from the political strife threatening to engulf the world. Mitchell ventured on differing employment pathways throughout his life with his only job prior to enlistment in the AIF being a clerk at Thebarton, a suburb in Adelaide. (Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia, 2013)



Whilst Mitchell led a highly documented and rewarding military career, eventually rising to Major, along with a brief political foray whence he won the seat of Oxley and served as an independent, the effect his service had on his family and friends is not greatly documented. Mitchell was similar to the thousands of likeminded adventure seeking Australians who enlisted in the AIF at the time. Speculation into his family's pride when they learned Mitchell was to be awarded the Military Cross and the Distinguished Conduct Medal is unnecessary, as well as the horror when he was withdrawn from active service due to sickness. However, Mitchell's service had pronounced effects on Australian communities throughout World War II. Mitchell unsuccessfully contested the seat of Oxley in

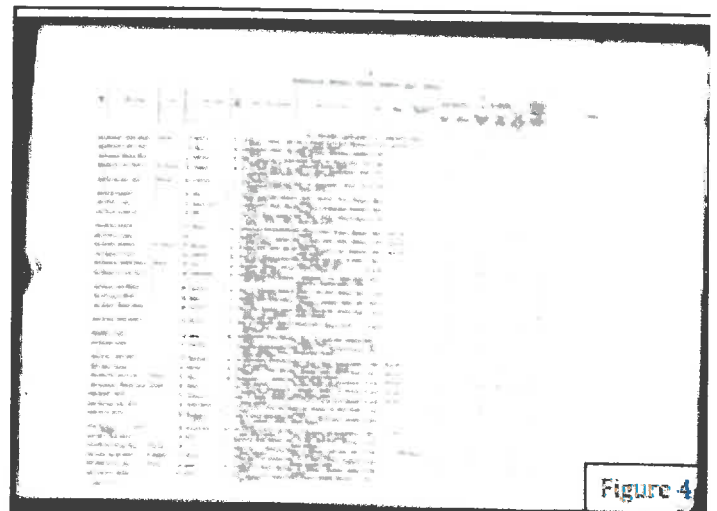


Figure 2: Soldiers of the 10<sup>th</sup> battalion line up on board a transport ship. (Anzacsite.gov, 2010)

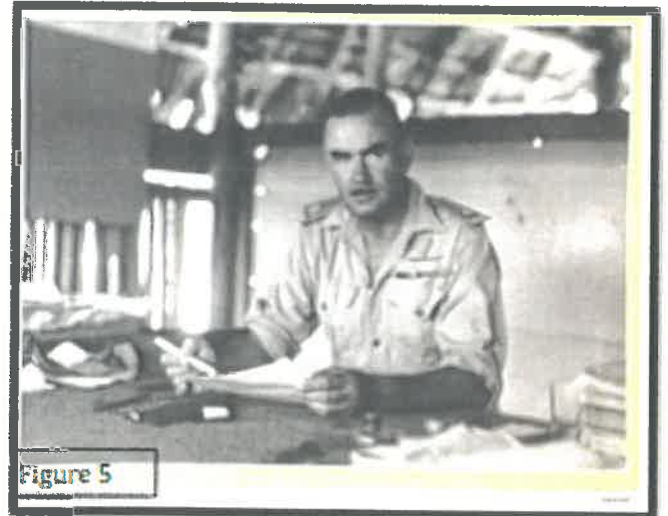
Figure 3: The colour patch of the 10<sup>th</sup> battalion. (Australian War Memorial, 2014)

Figure 4: This is a digital copy of the embarkation role that catalogued the details surrounding Mitchell's embarkation to Gallipoli. (Australian War Memorial, 1914)

Figure 4



leave during which his seat was contested and lost in 1944. (Parliament of New South Wales, 2014) Military service, the capacity to inspire men, and efficient organisational skills were integral to Mitchell becoming councillor of an RSL branch and allowed him to pen several books regarding frontline life. (Daniel, 2007) It is through philosophical constructs portrayed in books including *The Awakening* and *Backs to the Wall* that he affected the community as the mass distribution of these works portrayed wartime life through an extraordinary individual's eyes.



### The ANZAC Spirit

Historical and contemporary acknowledgements of the ANZAC spirit tend to regard themselves with exemplary bouts of bravery conducted on the battlefield during which our armed forces formulated and polished the meaning of what a true hero is. The daring gallantry displayed by soldiers both past and present raises them to a pedestal of auspicious reverence to which many believe they may not rise. For how could everyday Australians escalate themselves to the legendary selflessness of these heroes? However, whilst one may point to the exemplary performance of our armed forces as an example of the ANZAC Spirit, one encounters difficulty in regards to defining this term without this example available.

My opinion on the matter is that this assumption is in fact a conjecture as the ANZAC Spirit far exceeds confinement to the military or our revered exemplars. Indeed, upon examination the nature of what a hero is provokes differing responses from any individual within Australia. Terms like courage, loyalty, and valour are often used. However, the narrowing of the recipients of these terms is a redundant practise as Australians far and wide strive to display these ideals within their lives without expectation of being championed or receiving famed recognition. The reasons for this selflessness vary along with the situation but the fact remains the same in regards to exemplifying all that is good about the ANZAC Spirit. Millions of people unknowingly contribute to and propagate the ideals of the ANZAC Spirit without expectation of grand acknowledgement for their actions, but rather for the satisfaction of making the world better. Comparisons can hence be drawn to the displays of our nation's armed forces, as expectation of glory is not a driving factor in enlistment, rather the motive for enlistment stems from the desire to safeguard the people from external threats.

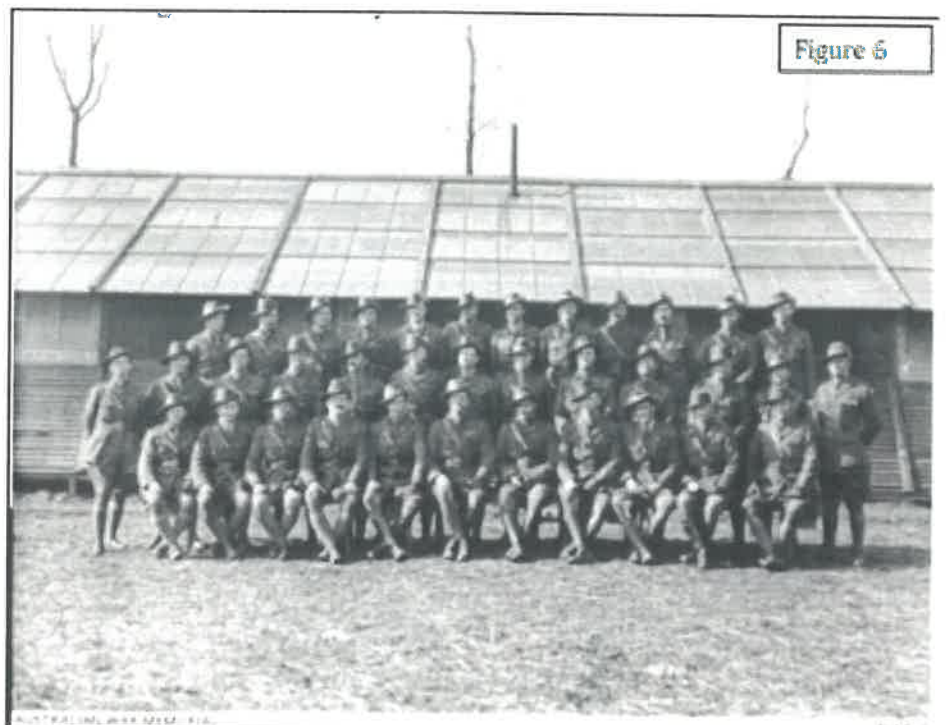


Figure 5: This is a picture of Mitchell during a planning session in World War II. (Gammage, 2000)

Figure 6: Lieutenant Mitchell stands with his comrade officers within the 48<sup>th</sup> battalion in 1918. He is the fifth from the left in the back row. (Photographer, 1918)

of our nation's armed forces, as expectation of glory is not a driving factor in enlistment, rather the motive for enlistment stems from the desire to safeguard the people from external threats. Therefore, the nature of the ANZAC Spirit provokes differing interpretations but the noble interpretation remains the same. A fixed definition of the ANZAC Spirit cannot be found within any textbook or statement issued by the government, yet the magnanimity inherent within the term resonates throughout us all. For these reasons, the ANZAC Spirit cannot be solely defined by words, although they paint a canvas of it, and is instead defined by the genuinely humanitarian displays of Australians in all walks of life.

The service of George Deane Mitchell truly personifies all of the traits that are facets of the ANZAC Spirit. His participation in both of the World Wars can be looked on with nothing but respect and exaltation for the distinguished manner in which he conducted himself on numerous fields. He was twice the recipient of awards recommended by fellow soldiers, one being the Military Cross he received for "conspicuous bravery and leadership during the German attack on Albert during which he charged the opponent and captured 30 of them, whilst inspiring his men." (Australian War Memorial, 1918) He was commended for his 'absolutely fearless and inspiring manner' during this engagement, evidence of which had surfaced the previous year with Mitchell receiving a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his courageous display at Bullecourt during sustained attacks by the German forces. In this instance, Mitchell dauntlessly safeguarded his force's flanks for six hours whilst they withdrew due to the severe German attacks. After this, he swiftly volunteered to venture forth into No Man's Land, whilst under heavy fire, and did not rest until numerous wounded soldiers were saved. (Australian War Memorial, 1917)

Displays like this truly exemplify the ANZAC Spirit, yet Mitchell testified to the courage that was displayed by his comrades throughout the entire war from Gallipoli to the Somme as evidence that all of the soldiers conducted themselves admirably. (Daniel, 2007) Thus, the service of every soldier deserves to be recorded in the annals of history and held up for future generations as examples of champions who idolised and propagated the true meaning of the ANZAC Spirit.



Figure 7: This image displays George Mitchell's diaries. The image was obtained from an Australian War Memorial collection. (Anderson, 2012)

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