

Centenary of ANZAC

Story by Libby Travers

Even the most eloquent find it hard to explain the significance of Anzac day to Australians. At its core Anzac day marks the anniversary of the first major military campaign fought by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps during the First World War. As the years have gone on, and more battles waged, the day has come to signify the sacrifices made through all wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations.

As we mark the centenary of the battles of WWI over the coming years, starting with the anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli, on the 25th April this year, we will hear much about the ANZAC story, about the way in which those battles and the men who fought in them have shaped our nation. But how can you ever do justice to over 100,000 lives?

We have started with the story of one man, a boy.



Private James (Jim) Martin

The 14 year old boys I know climb trees and ride skate boards, they whine about eating their vegetables and making their beds.

James (Jim) Martin was not your typical 14 year old. At the outbreak of WWI Jim was so adamant he would enlist for service he told his parents if they didn't support him he would sign under a false name and wouldn't write while away. They conceded and the authorities didn't question it. Their only son was 14 and three months when he enlisted in the Australia Imperial Force in April 1915, only a fortnight before the first troops were to land at Gallipoli.

Jim joined the 1st Reinforcements of the 21st Battalion and was sent to train in Victoria before leaving for Egypt in June that year. He was given the service number 1553. Jim was what would become known as a "four figure man", but really he was a four figure boy.

Jim's battalion left Egypt for Gallipoli at the end of August, however their ship was torpedoed by a German submarine and young Jim spent four hours in the water before being rescued. On 8 September his battalion arrived at Gallipoli. They were stationed on the trench lines near

Courtney's Post. Jim's battalion had arrived to discover a bloody stalemate following the failed August Offensive. Conditions in the trenches were dire. They were no more than 70 yards from the enemy. In spite of all of this, Jim's spirits remained buoyed. On the 4 October Jim wrote to his parents "Don't worry about me as I am doing splendid over here." Only a few weeks later, on 25 October, Jim was evacuated to the hospital ship Glenart Castle suffering from enteritis. He died of heart failure that evening. Jim was buried at sea. While the incidences of death by disease and internment (as opposed to in battle) had decreased significantly compared to previous wars in the 19th century, they still accounted for nearly one third of deaths during WWI. Jim was 14 and nine months when he died. He had seen more than most of us do in an entire lifetime. And yet, he was just a boy. Lest we forget.

You can read the story of Private James (Jim) Martin, thought to be the youngest Australian to die in active service, in Anthony Hill's book: Soldier Boy: The True Story of Jim Martin, the Youngest Anzac.

Above: James
(Jim) Martin
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Courtesy of the
Australian War
memorial.
