

CHAPTER XXXX

The donkey (and mule) in the Gallipoli Campaign of World War I

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The invaluable contribution that the horse has made in the history of warfare is well documented; not so well recorded is that of the donkey and mule. This paper will discuss the role played by both these animals in the Australian defence forces in the Gallipoli campaign in World War I. This campaign became the most important event in forging the Australian nation; it created the legendary “digger” and was, according to Cochrane, “the pre-eminent legend of Australian heroism and self sacrifice”.¹



Fig. 1: Simpson and his donkey

The single most important and emotive representation of this legend is Simpson and his donkey, the official icon of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. This paper explores the stories of Simpson and his donkey “Murphy” in some detail. It will trace the origins of the donkeys used by the stretcher bearers from the start of the campaign and consider their role as “favourites”, pets and mascots, the focus of affection amidst the brutality of war.

Mules, on the other hand, were valued for their strength, agility in the mountainous terrain and great work capacity but were left to their Indian muleteers; the Australians found them to be stubborn, awkward to handle and bad tempered. To explore the origins and transportation of the mules to Gallipoli, it is necessary to investigate the Indian Mule Corps who lived and worked with them. It is interesting to note here that reports about and appreciation of the contribution that these animals made in both the First and the Second World Wars, are far more widely available in American and British records. Both the donkey and the mule have, to a large extent, been overlooked in the history books of Australia. This paper will begin to redress this oversight.

Simpson’s Donkey

No road too rough for the tiny hoofs
And never too long the day...
And the richest prize in the world to him
 was a wisp of a ration of hay
Thro’ stony creek and unyielding scrub,
 in thirst and in heat and in cold,
He picked his way with unerring feet
 and a spirit serene and bold,
And ever the wounded men gave thanks
 for the two great hearts of gold!
And I think that angels walked beside
 as they marched in their lowly state;
Day in day out where the red death smote,
 they carried their precious freight –
And the sunshine’s glow is in hearts today
 That else had been desolate.

H. “Crosscut” Wilson, 1916²

On the night of the 25th April Simpson annexed a donkey, and each day, and half of every night, he worked continuously between the head of Monash valley and the beach, his donkey carrying a brassard round its forehead and a wounded man on its back. Simpson escaped death so many times that he was completely fatalistic; the deadly sniping down the valley and the most furious shrapnel fire never stopped him. The colonel of his ambulance unit, recognizing the value of his work, allowed him to carry on as a completely separate unit. He camped with his donkey at the Indian mule camp, and had only to report once a day at the field ambulance. Presently he annexed a second donkey. On May 19th he was coming down the creek-bed, when he was hit through the heart, both the wounded men being wounded again. He had carried many scores of men down the valley, and had saved many lives at the cost of his own.³

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a general introduction to the role played by donkeys and mules in the First World War and to investigate in more detail their use in the Gallipoli Campaign, especially from the perspectives of the soldiers in the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The history of the horse at war has been widely documented⁴ and, to a certain extent, especially in the United States, so has that of the mule.⁵ However, the donkey has been awarded little space in those histories concerned

with recounting the contribution of animals at war. What literature there is comes from England⁶ and America;⁷ I have found nothing similar in Australian writing. The history of the mule as an adjunct of war has been recorded in all the major campaigns in recent history.⁸ At Gallipoli, they also proved invaluable as beasts of burden, transporting vital supplies to the troops. Donkeys were used in many of the same campaigns as mules but the records of their contribution are more difficult to uncover. In the Gallipoli campaign, however, their role was more diverse for, although brought to the peninsula initially as a method of transportation, they also became a source of comfort, affection and fun. They performed an important role as stretcher bearers to the ambulance units and, ultimately, they formed the foundation of a mythology.

This paper will focus on one special donkey and his master, John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who, with the help of the power of myth and legend, became the symbol of the Australian soldier. The available literature in Australia about Simpson and his donkey is immense, generating: “a veritable ocean of representations, ranging from the popular to the scholarly, celebratory to critical”.⁹ There are those written at the time, which have had a great influence on later histories, in particular *The Anzac Book* by C.W. Bean,¹⁰ the Official Australian War Historian. His account, like many others which followed, was based on the testimony of individuals¹¹ and it is in the diaries and letters and oral evidence that mentions of the donkeys and mules were found. Accounts devoted entirely to Simpson and the donkey¹² which recount his life and exploits and are concerned with turning the individual into a mythical hero, fit to represent the Australian ideals of mateship and courage, an example to inspire others and to be a vital part of the nation’s rituals of remembrance. There is little interest in the donkey itself, however, only as an adjunct to the man, and factual evidence behind the legendary stories is difficult to uncover. Many histories of Gallipoli, such as *Gallipoli* by Moorehead,¹³ do not mention Simpson or donkeys, but inspired renewed interest in the campaign and then further inspired powerful myth-makers such as the film *Gallipoli* by Peter Weir¹⁴ and the series of paintings by Sidney Nolan.¹⁵ More recent works question the Anzac legend, and one of those has been useful for this paper. Peter Cochrane’s *Simpson and the Donkey: The Making of a Legend*¹⁶ proved to be a valuable resource. Not only did he research and deconstruct the creation of the myth, he also attempted to trace the history of the donkeys involved in the campaign from the available evidence. However, Simpson and the donkey sit within the history of mules and donkeys who served throughout World War I, and it is to this larger canvas that the paper now turns, before further exploring the man and the myth.

World War I

Mules and donkeys were used extensively during World War I. Mules had been the main means of transport in most theatres of war since the Roman and Greek armies used them for pack work and riding.¹⁷ Although motorised transport was beginning to take over by the time of WWI, it was understood that animal transport was still vital in many areas, such as the hot, dry and mountainous conditions at Gallipoli. The British Army, which had vast experience and knowledge of horses but little with mules, had to turn to those units which had served in India, where mules had proved invaluable on the rugged Northwest Frontier. Mules were bought from Canada, North and South America, Spain and Portugal, India and South Africa and Travis claims that between 300,000 and 400,000 were used in total.¹⁸ Baynes reports that the mule’s greatest triumph was that achieved on the Italian front; “he was at his best on those steep, zigzag trails leading up to the Italian stores or gun positions”.¹⁹ As he explains:

There is no animal who more surely repays all that is done for him. With well-cared for, well-disciplined mules, marches of between fourteen to sixteen hours duration were on many occasions accomplished over the most difficult and dangerous paths.²⁰

The mules endured terrible conditions in the trenches of France, on ground that was unsuitable for both mules and donkeys. Most of the ammunition at Passchendaele was delivered by mules: “over ground that was hardly passable, even for infantrymen, and that gradually became transformed into lakes of impure mud, many feet deep”. Many mules drowned in the mud and many hundreds drowned in shell holes.²¹ However, their good health won accolades from all quarters. Many officers were said to prefer mules to horses for all purposes because of their powers of endurance and resistance to bad conditions and their length of life at the front. Few fell sick and they were “incredibly brave under fire” while “their staunchness, their strength, their blind trust in their stoic drivers” was “wonderful to behold”.²² Cooper claimed that: “Anyone who served with him was a convert for life. For like most mongrels, the mule is highly intelligent, bursting with character, and full of heart” and that it is this mongrel quality “of being half horse, half donkey, known as hybrid vigour that gives mules their amazing stamina”.²³

At Gallipoli, however, the claims made about mules and their contributions to the war effort were contradictory. Soldiers either loved them or hated them. There was a common belief that they were vicious, obstinate and would kick at the smallest provocation. Carbery reported that the beach at Gallipoli was: “a mass of men, mules, munitions and shrapnel; and the most deadly of these were the mules”.²⁴ There was prejudice against these most “lowly of beasts” and at Gallipoli the ANZACS were glad that the Indians looked after “the brutes”. The lowliest job of all was considered to be that of caring for the mules.²⁵ Cooper quoted an ex-cavalry officer who confessed that when he was put in charge of mules, he thought that “he had fallen right off the social ladder”.²⁶ However, he, like so many others before and after him, “came to love and respect” mules through working with them. Converts believed that it was only the inexperience of handlers that caused the intelligent mule to play up. Once there was understanding and respect between them, the mule was seen as unsurpassed in the tasks they could perform and there were many tributes to them, their bravery, stamina, hardiness and perseverance. Mules were most successful as mountain pack animal as they did not slip on steep winding tracks and did not panic, if allowed to pick their own way up. There were many reports of the mule’s common sense in dangerous situations, for example, falling over a cliff or getting caught in barbed wire, situations in which horses would panic and die.²⁷

Many thousands of donkeys also served in WWI. In the East Africa Campaign of 1916-17, for instance, thousands died a terrible death from tsetse fly, others from the supposed antidote, arsenic. “Out of the 34,000 employed in the campaign, there were 1,042 alive at the end. Horses and mules died in equally appalling numbers”.²⁸ Donkeys served with all the Allied armies in France. They carried food in great panniers to the soldiers on the front lines, being small enough to weave their way along the trenches, allowing the distribution of rations as they went. They also carried ammunition and “worked chiefly at night”.²⁹ In the Near East, 8,000 were employed to carry baskets of stone, helping General Allenby build a road from Jaffa to Jericho. Thousands of big Cyprus donkeys were used at Salonika and Egypt: “The Egyptian pack donkey, which varied in colour, was a useful creature”.³⁰ Four hundred had been sent up to work in supply lines in the Judean Hills and carry food over country where no roads existed. There is an account of how they saved the soldiers at El Salt. Food and ammunition were running out and the troops could not be reached. Two hundred donkeys were loaded up and, marching all night over “appalling country”, they covered 40 miles to save the stranded soldiers.³¹

Baynes, when recording the deeds of animal heroes in times of war, had a great deal more to say about the attributes and contributions of mules than those of donkeys. However, he admitted that: “the little long-eared donkeys also marched and worked and died with the patience with which they are famed” and that “the ass, plodding and steady, would go until he dropped”.³² Although not as strong or sturdy as the mule, donkeys were also an important means of transport in the various theatres of War. In France, they made friends with the soldiers wherever they went, sometimes being taken into the trenches for mutual warmth. Baynes recounted the story of a British officer who was touched and impressed

by a donkey that he met on the road in a French donkey transport line. As they passed, he noticed one little donkey had no ears. On enquiry, the driver explained to the officer that an exploding shell had cut them off and at the same time blinded the donkey, yet still he walked on with his load.³³

However, it was as mascot, pet and companion that donkeys played one of their most important roles in times of war. Animal mascots are part of military history, used as morale boosters and good luck charms, inspiring pride and love in men far from homes and families. They accompanied men through training and into battle and were highly regarded by the soldiers, becoming a symbol of the group and its courage. It was traditional for British regiments to have a mascot; for instance, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in India had a donkey as a mascot. Mules were highly prized in the American army and became their mascot for the West Point football game in 1899. The mule has been a valued mascot of the United States army ever since.³⁴ Personal pets were not acceptable but a group mascot was used to rally spirits and pride, to provide amusement and enjoyment. They became a focal point of care and affection, their games often causing smiles and laughter, an antidote to the death and destruction and brutality of war. Kramer reported that: "In WWI the popularity of mascots with the troops at the front was universal".³⁵ Soldiers travelling from Australia brought many animal mascots with them: "Every ship that leaves the Commonwealth with troops on board carries a miscellaneous collection of Australian animals and birds as mascots of the different troops". Men enlisting from Gilgandra were given a horse, a kangaroo, a cockatoo, a fox cub and a cattle pup.³⁶ Cochrane reported that cats, possums, wallabies, kangaroos, dogs, monkeys, birds, pigs, donkeys and white rabbits all went to Gallipoli. He also noted that the regimental pet of the 7th Army Services Corps was a miniature donkey and he included a picture of the donkey, dressed in pyjamas and hat on a troopship. Another donkey foal was photographed drinking from a mug; both have smiling soldiers looking proudly on. They were obviously considered as more than just a mascot, being "humanized" in this way, and as one officer put it: "the donkeys were a peg for many a pious tale".³⁷ Nowhere was this more so than at Gallipoli.

Gallipoli

During the Gallipoli campaign, mules and donkeys were used for all the purposes outlined so far. However, it was the mule which made the most valuable contribution in the transportation of vital materials up the treacherous ravines to the front lines. Travis argues that the army in Egypt played a significant role in providing these animals for almost all the operations in the Mediterranean and African campaigns:

Its biggest task though was support of the British and Australian Armies in their drive against the Turks...Some 40,000 mules were used in this theatre of operations, driven by muleteers of many colours and creeds.³⁸

In his personal account of serving with the Indian Mule Corps, Major H.M. Alexander, included mention of the Zion Mule Corps, under the command of Colonel Patterson: "The men were all Jew refugees from Syria, and were a motley crowd, speaking many different languages".³⁹ However, from the research of Australian histories that I have carried out so far, the impression given is that the mules and their handlers were from India. Colonel Joseph Beeston, commander of the 4th Australian Field Ambulance paid tribute to the Indian soldiers and their mules, responsible for the delivery of ammunition to the infantry. He wrote of the Sikhs as a "brave body of men" who were "adept in the management of mules". He described how the mules were:

hitched up in threes, one in the rear of the other, each mule carrying two boxes of ammunition. The train might number anything from 15-20 mules. All went along at a trot, constantly under fire.⁴⁰

When a mule was hit, it was unhitched, the ammunition removed and on they went again: “nothing stopped them”.⁴¹ Alexander is fulsome in his praise for the ANZAC soldiers and believed that: “The Anzacs called every Indian ‘Johnny’ and treated him like a brother” and told of their friendship with the Indians and their appreciation of the mules:

They were not accustomed to these little, hardy, sure-footed beasts, which seemed to impress them favourably, for they talk of breeding them for work on their stations after the war.⁴²

Once again, the reporting of and reactions to mules and their handlers are contradictory, depending on the writer’s knowledge and experience of them. However, the reports canvassed so far would confirm that the mules and their handlers proved both brave and invaluable during the Campaign.

Bean recounted the arrival and fate of the first mule corps which were landed to support the ANZACS, as an early example of their relationship during the Campaign. The 26th (Kohat) Indian Mountain Battery landed at Anzac Cove on 25th April. In command was Captain H.M. Kirby, an Englishman, and they immediately set off in support of the Australian Infantry. Bean told of the relief brought to the infantry by this support but described how the Turkish bombardment intensified resulting in many casualties. The Turkish fire was too great for the mules to be brought up: “the valley behind was littered with dead animals”.⁴³ Alexander explained how a mule corps, peculiar to the Indian Army, operated. At full strength, the Corps has eight troops of 96 mules each. In charge were the troop sergeant majors, assisted by two corporals and about 50 Indian drivers. “The mules are recruited from the Argentine, China and the Punjab. Some are bred in India at remount depots from country bred pony mares and imported English donkeys”.⁴⁴ The average height was 12.2, anything over 13 hands was considered a large mule. The mule corps were used to provide transport of ammunition, entrenching tools, medical and signaling equipment to the front lines.⁴⁵ Mules worked well for those who knew how to govern and guide them and quickly became attached to their drivers. The drivers were never changed, unless it was unavoidable and there are many stories of the fondness of the men for their mules. The Sikhs refused to take leave as they could not bear to leave their mule for anyone else to handle and the mules worked tenaciously for their trusted handlers. There are many stories of a “fatally wounded mule refusing to drop dead until he has carried his pack home to safety”.⁴⁶

The challenges of transporting goods from the beaches to the soldiers were an ongoing cause for concern during the campaign. Vital supplies had to be constantly hauled up the steep hills under fire and, although horses were used for some transport: “it was more often the surer-footed mule used as a carrier, in addition to his sometime role as a stretcher bearer of the wounded”.⁴⁷ Those who served at Gallipoli were aware how much they owed to the mules and their Indian drivers for the supplies of guns and ammunition, food and water that they carried up those razor sharp cliffs to the front lines. Bean noted: “What would we have done without ‘Johnnie’ and his sturdy little mules? Horse or motor transport could not have faced the difficulties of Anzac”,⁴⁸ while Lance Corporal Archibald Barwick, 1st Battalion, AIF, described them in his diary:

I don’t know what we would have done without the mules at Anzac. I reckon we would have starved you should have seen some of the tracks they had to climb and talk about slippery every bit of food, ammunition, clothing and nearly all our water had to be carried by the mule teams up to the trenches it was a task I can tell you and it had practically all to be done at night for the Turks could see them in daylight and the Indians were responsible for this work and deserve a heap of praise...⁴⁹

There are also pictorial records of the mules at work at Gallipoli. Photographs of mules show forty or fifty at a time wending their way up steep gullies in single file, transporting guns, shells, stores ambulance wagons.⁵⁰ Sketches painted by Captain Hore during the

campaign provided a remarkable visual record of the mules and their drivers in Mule Gully, as they went about their daily routine.⁵¹

Donkeys, on the other hand, served a dual purpose, as transport and pet: “the donkey’s utility mattered most, followed closely by its endearing qualities as a pet and mascot”.⁵² Bean contrasted donkeys with mules, noting that the latter could do more work but “that the donkeys are the favourites with the men on account of their temper”.⁵³ They generally did the lighter work, carting water, meals or biscuits but they also carried guns. In the relocating of 4th Field Ambulance, Beeston commented on the use of donkeys for carrying equipment. He said that when he noticed ten grazing nearby, he told his men to “confiscate” them for the unit’s use. It would appear that the main reason that donkeys were brought to Gallipoli was to carry the water cans: “A number of donkeys with Greek drivers had been landed on April 25th for water carrying. The drivers were soon deported, and after the first days the donkeys fed idly in the gullies, till they gradually disappeared”.⁵⁴ Cooper had a vivid description of donkeys serving at Gallipoli: “like animated scrap heaps they staggered up the beach weighed down by so many water cans, you could hardly see the little animals underneath”.⁵⁵ General Birdwood, concerned about the problem of transporting water to the troops on the front lines, reported that he: “obtained about 100 small donkeys (from the island of Imbros) to carry tins of water, which I am glad to say they did with great success”.⁵⁶ He also told this story to Bean adding that 300 mules were purchased along with refugee drivers from Alexandria.⁵⁷ A New Zealand soldier reported that they brought several donkeys with them on the troop ship *SS Goslar* – to test drinking water. It was believed that donkeys would not drink poisoned water, so they were to test all the water before the men and horses were allowed to drink.⁵⁸ So it seems that the donkeys at Gallipoli came from several places, from Egypt, from the Greek Islands where the troop ships landed, and some came as pets and mascots with the soldiers from their own countries, and that they were brought mainly with a view to their use as beasts of burden.

However, donkeys at Gallipoli served other purposes than those for which they were originally intended. Cochrane pointed out that: “its part in the leisure time of soldiers was possibly as important as its role in the ambulance units”, both roles being fortunate outcomes of their presence there, once their drivers had been sent back.

They played a part in the free time of the soldiers and were the focus of fun and affection. “Donkeys were a source of amusement during long periods between battles”.⁵⁹ Cochrane cited many examples from soldiers’ letters home that featured stories of the donkeys that they had named and made pets of.⁶⁰ Trooper Bluegum wrote about them in dispatches to the *Sydney Morning Herald*: “They divide their time between the 2nd Light Horse and the 3rd Infantry Brigade and the boys give them biscuits”.⁶¹ He and others referred to Jenny and her foal, Little Jenny or Little Shrapnel. In *The Anzac Book* Bean referred to Jenny the foal as; “a delightful diversion, with her frolics and gambols” and ponders on the significance of her life: “Though of short duration, her life appeared a charmed one while it lasted. Her freedom of action being the envy of every soldier on the beach”.⁶² Soldiers believed that donkeys led charmed lives and treated them like lucky mascots. As Trooper Bluegum also reported; “The soldiers swore by the donkeys’ luck, and when the shells burst stood by the animals rather than fly for shelter”.⁶³ Another soldier recorded in his diary:

I saw it myself and thousands of other men must remember the little black donkey with a purple tie around its neck. It used to graze in Rest Gully... and what miraculous escapes from shrapnel!⁶⁴

But perhaps the role for which donkeys are best known at Gallipoli is as bearers of wounded soldiers. Donkeys worked with stretcher bearers from the very start of the campaign. Records show that John Simpson Kirkpatrick began working with donkeys on 26th April, the day after the landing, and that others soon followed. In records of the Australian medical services, mention is made of Simpson and we are told that: “He was

one of a number of medics using donkeys for conveying lightly wounded soldiers between gullies and the dressing stations".⁶⁵ The donkeys were trained to carry a man up to the operating table and then back out of the tent. They were immediately recognized to be good in a crisis and were much in demand. They may not have been as strong as the mule but, as far as the ANZAC soldiers were concerned, they were far more appealing, amenable and easy to train, and they appear to have been "available". Units reported on their use, for instance, one soldier wrote in his diary: "we picked up some little donkeys yesterday and they came in handy for taking down chaps who had been wounded in the feet".⁶⁶ New Zealand field ambulance bearers as well as the Australians "made use of those hardy little animals for those who were lightly wounded".⁶⁷ Carbery further explained how donkeys were used by the ambulance units for water transportation from the beach to the advance dressing stations and that "as water carriers they were, while they lived, invaluable".⁶⁸

It is therefore clear that donkeys were used by the ambulance units of the ANZAC forces as stretcher bearers and water carriers from the start of the campaign.

Simpson and the Donkey

One of these donkeys was destined for immortality but, as is the case with many legends, he (or they) had several names: Murphy, Duffy 1 and 2, Abdul, Queen Elizabeth, to name the most commonly used. There were varying reports about the numbers of donkeys that Simpson employed: some had him using two at once, others replacing one that had been wounded.⁶⁹ I shall use the most popular number, one, and the most popular name, Murphy. Simpson and Murphy were together to become the symbol of the ANZAC soldiers from Gallipoli, "the pre-eminent legend of Australian heroism and self sacrifice".⁷⁰ Buley reported that when the fighting was at its height and the call for stretcher bearers was heard round the valley: "the Man and the Donkey continued placidly at their work. At times they held trenches of hundreds of men spell-bound, just to see them at their work". He described the little donkey waiting patiently in the bushes while his master dashed to recover the wounded man and place him on the donkey's back before setting off back down to the beach.⁷¹ As with all aspects of this story, there are many branches of the legend, many of which are contradictory, such as the reports of the numbers of wounded soldiers that Simpson and his donkey/s saved. Simpson was said to have worked all day and well into the night, making many journeys up and down Shrapnel Valley, with shells exploding and snipers firing all around him. I quote in full here the summary of events as provided in a letter to Simpson's family after his death. Already the language of legend is beginning to take shape. Captain Foy of the 3rd Field Ambulance wrote to Annie Kirkpatrick from Gallipoli in September 1915, when he learned that the family had not heard officially of Simpson's death:

Your brother landed with us from the torpedo boat at daylight on 25th April so taking part in the historic landing. He did excellent work during the day. He discovered a donkey in a deserted hut, took possession and worked up and down the dangerous gully (Shrapnel Valley) carrying wounded men to the beach on the donkey. This plan was a very great success so he continued day by day from morning to night and became one of the best known men in the division. Everyone from the General down seems to have known him and his donkey which he christened Murphy. The Valley was a very dangerous place as it was exposed to snipers and also was continuously shelled. He scorned the danger and always kept going, whistling and singing, a universal favourite. So he worked for three weeks. On the night of May 18th the Turks made a heavy attack on our position. Early in the morning as usual your brother was at work, when a machine gun played on the track where he was passing. The days of his almost miraculous escapes were past, for he fell on the spot, shot through the heart. He truly died doing his duty... He gave his life in the performance of a gallant and cheerful service that has been excelled by none.⁷²

Colonel Monash, commanding officer of 4th Brigade, wrote on 20 May 1915, asking for special consideration for Simpson. He wrote that: "Private Simpson and his little beast earned the admiration of everyone... Simpson knew no fear and moved unconcernedly amid shrapnel and rifle fire, and he frequently earned the applause of the personnel for his many fearless rescues",⁷³ while Padre George Green who buried Simpson claimed that: "If ever a man deserved the Victoria Cross it was Simpson".⁷⁴ Accounts such as these have raised Simpson from the ordinary to the extra-ordinary. As Cochrane pointed out: "while heroism is an individual act, heroes are a social creation".⁷⁵

Many have written the story of Simpson and the donkey and in Australia it has taken on mythical proportions to symbolise not only the "digger" but all that is good and honourable in the national identity. Simpson is lauded as a hero by many historians. As Patsy Adam-Smith put it:

There had to be a hero. The people demanded one. Wholesale slaughter, wholesale bravery are too immense for the puny human imagination to grasp; they overwhelm and depress the collective mind. So there was a hero. But this one was different, this man was as redolent as a gum tree, as Australian as a kangaroo, a real colonial spirit.⁷⁶

The fact that he was an Englishman was largely overlooked because it was claimed he had the larrikin qualities associated with the legendary Australian. Others, such as Cochrane, tried to uncover the "real" John Simpson Kirkpatrick but I am more concerned with the mythical "hero" status because it is the fact that the war hero was not a great military strategist or an exceptional soldier but an ordinary bloke who worked quietly alone in the service of others, with a donkey as chosen companion and helpmate, that is important here. His was the story of many other stretcher bearers in the tradition of selflessness and courage under fire, not able to retaliate, with no weapon but the meager cover of a flag with a red cross. Cochrane pointed out that Simpson was noticed because he was different and he was different because he was with a donkey.⁷⁷

There were many stories of Simpson's special bond with Murphy and his devotion to him, such as the fact that he bivouacked with Indian Mule Corps to make sure the donkey was well fed. Others told of him rescuing one of his donkeys when it was wounded and some reported that the donkey would work only for him. The subplot of fate is evident in many of these tales; Simpson's love for animals which he had shown since he was a boy, for instance, for the horse back home which had pulled the milk cart, and particularly for the donkeys which gave rides on the beach of his home town in South Shields:

Looking over the beach that summer day I thought long, deep thoughts of a laddie who liked to be with donkeys and learned to know and handle them in preparation for a destiny that he could not see.⁷⁸

Simpson's way with animals became part of the legend, such as the stories concerning the possum that he brought with him on the ship on the voyage to Europe and kept during his time in Egypt.⁷⁹

Such was the strength of interest in the stories of Simpson and his donkey/s that many claims were made as to Murphy's origins, and to his eventual fate. Some claimed that they had brought Murphy to Gallipoli, such as Tom Gorman of the 16th Battalion who claimed that the donkey was one of those he brought over from Lemnos.⁸⁰ General Birdwood claimed that Murphy was one of the group of donkeys that he had brought from Imbros for water cartage.⁸¹ The fate of Murphy plays more prominently in the legend and there are many contradictory accounts of what happened to him after Simpson was killed. Most accounts have him being adopted by one unit or another, staying on at Gallipoli. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that "Murphy is still plodding along, the idol of the soldiers".⁸² When Bean sent out a circular asking for information as to the whereabouts of Murphy after the war, the legend had already grown large as so many

claimed to know where he was living. Some reports had him living with Jenny and Little Jenny on the deserted beaches of ANZAC Cove, others that he had been shipped to Egypt, some said he was living in France, still others that he went back to India with the Mule Corps.⁸³ No one knows for certain where Murphy came from or what his fate was but the many stories became important branches of the narrative, adding different dimensions to the legend.

The “real” Murphy can therefore only be known as an archetype, just as Simpson was one representative of the stretcher bearers at Gallipoli. But what of the legendary qualities of the donkey? These were also being formed in accounts written at the time, such as those concerning his stature. Several comment on the small size of the donkey, no doubt exaggerated for effect: “It was a curious, almost grotesque spectacle to see the sturdy little dark-brown donkeys – neither was over 30 inches high – picking their way slowly down the rough bush tracks”.⁸⁴ Another account described the donkey:

It was a queer sort of beast that donkey – a regular bantam in size, except for its ears, which were unusually long, and generally carried at half cock. When his ears went to full cock, the boys knew it was time to look for cover, for it was a sure sign that a big shell was on the way.⁸⁵

However, Murphy was already off to a good start as far as legendary qualities went. Donkeys had been associated with Christianity and been a part of religious symbolism for thousands of years. They had been associated with the Messiah who, it was foretold, would come riding on a lowly ass, not on a fine charger as other leaders, to indicate the peaceful nature of his reign. Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey is one of the most enduring Christian symbols in Western culture, as is the story of the Good Samaritan. The association made between donkey and man is one of service, that of selflessness, meekness, humility and peace. Here was the ideal companion for that “ordinary bloke” who became a hero in the service of others. As a single unit they are representative of those qualities which were to be valued by the nation, part of the wider allegory for the bearers and diggers in general: placid and dutiful, courageous and compassionate. Together they represent the archetypal hero of Greek myth in the epic tradition when men were imbued with superhuman qualities. Many of the statues and pictures which commemorate Simpson and the donkey are symbolic of this fusion of myth, legend and religion. For instance, the Corlett monument in Melbourne is reminiscent of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem, while Nolan’s famous painting, *Simpson and the Donkey* has echoes of the Good Shepherd, with the donkey being carried on the man’s shoulders.

It is a matter of contention in Australia that Simpson was not awarded the VC for the brave work that he did in the service of others at Gallipoli and there is currently a private members bill before parliament wishing to rectify this fact and have the Cross awarded posthumously. There are statues, paintings, stamps, coins, books, poems all commemorating Simpson and the donkey but it is Murphy who received the award, the RSPCA’s Purple Cross which was awarded posthumously to Simpson’s donkey at the Australian War Memorial at a ceremony on May 19th 1997. The plaque reads:

For Murphy and for all the donkeys used by John Simpson Kirkpatrick, for the exceptional work they performed on behalf of humans while under continual fire at Gallipoli during WWI (1915).⁸⁶

Conclusion

From the evidence researched for this paper, it is clear that mules and donkeys played valuable roles in the Gallipoli campaign. Although they do not appear in many of the history books, it is obvious from contemporary accounts, such as diaries of soldiers, newspaper articles and medical records, that the contribution of mules at Gallipoli was considerable and perhaps more traditional than that of donkeys: they were simply used as

beasts of burden. Their strength, stamina and climbing abilities proved invaluable in providing the physical requirements of the ANZAC soldiers, whether food and water or guns and ammunition. While references suggest that the number of donkeys diminished during the campaign, the importance of the mule grew as the campaign continued:

Water was a central, daily, vital issue. Without it men could not fight... and the water carrier, with his tins containing the precious liquid was a key and indomitable figure of the Gallipoli campaign.⁸⁷

The attitudes towards them from the soldiers, however, were mixed. Although their contribution to the war effort was appreciated, there was little consideration for them as individual animals. Donkeys, on the other hand, appear to have been universally liked and were appreciated for more than the transporting of food, water and equipment. They were cared for and “personalised” by the soldiers, appealing to the emotions and humanity of men in time of war. But the importance of the donkey went far beyond the Gallipoli peninsula. Together with Simpson he formed the foundation of the myth that was to become ANZAC to future generations of Australians.

It is interesting that the lowly donkey, so often portrayed as a figure of fun, for instance in Weir’s film,⁸⁸ or as environmental pest, is so intimately bound up with the national identity. As a symbol of the “digger”, it is the model of service, patience and humility. The nurturing, feminine qualities associated with the donkey combined with the masculine, fighting qualities associated with the legendary “digger” to form a powerful image. Simpson, honoured for his “heroic” deeds as stretcher bearer, rather than fighting man, was considered a true Aussie because of his larrikin characteristics, such as those of independence of spirit, working outside the bounds of authority, his physical strength, his love of nature (animals) and his rough and ready manner.⁸⁹ Surely, the much maligned mule, with his mischievous and independent ways, lack of respect for authority, brute strength and great capacity for hard work and loyalty, once earned, would better have suited as Simpson’s partner as national icon? Although that gentle little donkey remains the most endearing image of Anzac, the mule was the most enduring.

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