

Ben Murray Aboriginal WW1 Gallipoli Veteran



Figure 1
Only portrait of Ben Murray

Bravery, courage, loyalty, teamwork, mateship, these are some of the characteristics recognized in the ANZAC Spirit. A term that came about during World War One, the ANZAC Spirit was a phrase used by many to describe the soldiers from Australia and New Zealand who embarked on the journey of their lifetime. It is now a common reference to describe the soldiers of World War One. It depicts the personality of the ANZAC soldiers and how the world perceives the ANZAC soldiers.

Ben Murray was a soldier who showed true ANZAC spirit. He was a man who deserves to be recognized for his service. Ben Murray was one of the brave 500 or so Aboriginal soldiers to serve at Gallipoli.¹ Born in 1891 in South Australia, he had an Aboriginal mother and an Afghan father. At the age of 5, Ben went to live with his mother at Muloorina Station, which is 50km northeast of Marree on the edge of Lake Eyre. At the age of 16 he then moved to an Aboriginal mission at Kilapanina on the Birdsville track. In 1914 when Ben was 23 he had his own camel team who carted wool for nearby stations.² The next year Ben Murray travelled far away from his home in South Australia and fought with the ANZAC's as apart of the Gallipoli Campaign.

The Gallipoli Campaign was a plan to gain control of the Gallipoli Peninsula during World War One. Organised and designed by the Winston Churchill Government, the campaign would mean that the British and the Allies would have control of the Dardanelles waterway, which would be a massive advantage against the opposition. Churchill urged men around the Commonwealth to come and serve with him. Australia sent 21,000 men. Joined with New Zealand troops, the Australian troops travelled to Egypt to train to be soldiers. Together the Australian and New Zealand army became known as the ANZAC's. They fought to gain control of 67km of beach. The campaign officially began on the 25th April 1915 and ended on the 9th January 1916. A total of 2000 men were killed on just the very first day of the campaign. This day, the 25th April 1915 is probably the most significant day of the Gallipoli campaign and for the ANZAC's.³

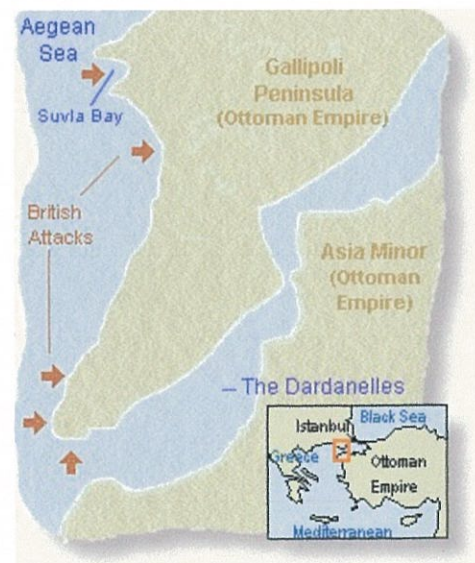


Figure 2
Map of the Gallipoli
Campaign

¹ Awm.gov.au, (2014). *Aboriginal ANZACs* | Australian War Memorial. [online] Available at: <http://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2008/04/24/aboriginal-anzacs/>

² Southaustralianhistory.com.au, (2014). *Aborigines in South Australian History*. [online] Available at: <http://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/aborigines.htm>

³ Wikipedia, (2014). *Gallipoli Campaign*. [online] Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallipoli_Campaign

Figure 1: Australian Aborigines in World War 1." *Australian Aborigines in World War 1*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 June 2014.

Figure 3: "Battle At Gallipoli, 1915." *Battle At Gallipoli, 1915*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 June 2014.

Ben Murray played an important part in the history of the Gallipoli. He was one of 1000 Aboriginal men who enlisted in World War One.⁴ They were only a small number of the total of 21,000 men from Australia but their role in the war is still significant. Ben Murray travelled to Egypt where he trained to be a soldier. This experience would have been strange as this would be his first time outside of Australia. He was either apart of the 9th or 10th battalion but records are unclear. There are almost no official records for Aboriginal men going to war because the Australian Government did not acknowledge Indigenous descent when completing official paperwork.⁵ He travelled by boat to Gaba Tepe (now known as ANZAC cove) on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Landing at night on the 25th of April, there ships stopped about 1km away from shore and the men then rowed to shore. There were a total of 36 rowboats. Ben Murray's battalion went further south while the 11th battalion headed north up the beach. As the Turks began firing, Ben Murray and his fellow soldiers began climbing the steep slopes and cliffs lining the beach by sticking their bayonets into the cliffs and levering their bodies up. If things had gone to plan Ben Murray would been apart of a battle to capture a Turkish trench behind Gun Ridge or attack an artillery range at Gabe Tepe. Instead, the majority of the men in the 9th and 10th battalion headed for the 400 plateau. There, they built a trench and began firing at the Turks.⁶

It is recorded that the Turks captured him and he became a Prisoner of War but there are no records stating when and how. Many Prisoner of War records say that many ANZAC's who were captured by the Turks helped build railroads so that the Turks could get over the Taurus Mountains near Syria.⁷ This is the most likely what would have happened to Ben Murray as a Prisoner of War. Ben Murray was fortunate enough to survive and was released on Armistice Day⁸. Back in Australia he worked and lived along the River Murray and the Murray Mallee. Years later he returned to the north of Australia where he was originally from and worked hunting dingoes on horse back. When retired he devoted his spare time to helping anthropologists and historians to map and record important Aboriginal sites. His death is unknown but many say he was well over 100 years old when he did pass away.



Figure 3
Photograph of a group of Aboriginal Men leaving to WW1

⁴ HeraldSun, (2014). *Little Aussie battlers: 'Secret service' of Indigenous soldiers*. [online] Available at: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/archive/news/little-aussie-battlers-secret-service-of-indigenous-soldiers/story-e6frf7l6-1226381328608>

⁵ Julia Ryan, L. (2014). *Indigenous Australian soldiers - World War I and Australia - Research guides at State Library of New South Wales*. [online] Guides.sl.nsw.gov.au. Available at: <http://guides.sl.nsw.gov.au/content.php?pid=489033&sid=4179124>

⁶ Awm.gov.au, (2014). *9th Battalion | Australian War Memorial*. [online] Available at: https://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11196.asp

⁷ Awm.gov.au, (2014). *Stolen Years: Australian prisoners of war | Australian War Memorial*. [online] Available at: <http://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/stolenyears/ww1/turkey/>

⁸ Southaustralianhistory.com.au, (2014). *Aborigines in South Australian History*. [online] Available at: <http://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/aborigines.htm>

Figure 3: Indigenous Australians at War by Garth O'Connell." *Indigenous Australians at War*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 June 2014.

Ben Murray showed many of the characteristics that reflect the ANZAC spirit. Firstly he showed courage when he went to war even though there were many racist remarks about him going. He was also probably anticipating ongoing racism to occur at war but surprisingly it is recorded, that at war Aboriginal soldiers were treated equally.⁹ He also continued fighting and never gave up hope even after seeing men who were finally starting to accept him die next to him. This shows many of the traits in which the ANZAC spirit is described. He was courageous, brave, loyal and showed teamwork and mateship. These are all ways in which the ANZAC spirit is described. The ANZAC spirit is a way we describe how the ANZAC's fought and the soldiers typical character and personality. It is a way in which the other countries perceived the ANZAC's. It was also seen as a way of cheering up family members when their loved ones had been killed at war by telling them how brave a soldier they were.



Fig. 4
ANZAC's in the trenches at Gallipoli

The war did not only affect the soldiers but also their communities and families they left behind. This may have been even more difficult for Ben, because of the strong kinship and cultural connections he would have likely had with his family and community. In South Australia families would have been left emotionally unstable when knowing that their loved ones were never coming back or if they had come back disabled or with post traumatic stress. It would have been difficult to accept that they were different to how they were before the war. The war also left communities with lots of unfilled jobs. This had an effect on the South Australian economy. People who wouldn't normally do certain jobs were forced to complete them because the men whose jobs they used to be were not there. The percentage of women working at the start of World War One was 24% and by 1918 during the end of the war this percentage had risen to 37%.¹⁰ This also had an effect on food. Men who used to grow food were which caused a need for rations that then made life difficult for some communities. Women were also obliged to knit clothing for the soldiers and pressure was put on them to help the war effort even though in some cases they might not have supported the war.

This experience would have been a challenging yet exciting experience for Ben Murray. It would have been a totally different environment from what he was used to. To be treated as an equal would have been strange and when coming back to Australia would have been frustrating to then have been back to being a victim of racism. It would have also been upsetting for him to know that his efforts at war were never acknowledged. Only recently has the Australian community recognized the large number of Aboriginal ANZACs who defended Australia in World War One. Many people did not know they even fought until Aboriginal war veterans held their own ANZAC Day March in 2007 rather than be forced to walk at the back of the traditional ANZAC Day March.¹¹ Ben Murray was and still is a true ANZAC.

⁹ Julia Ryan, L. (2014). *Indigenous Australian soldiers - World War I and Australia - Research guides at State Library of New South Wales*. [online] Guides.sl.nsw.gov.au. Available at: <http://guides.sl.nsw.gov.au/content.php?pid=489033&sid=4179124>

¹⁰ Anzacday.org.au, (2014). *The Australian Home Front during World War 1 - Women's role and place*. [online] Available at: <http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/homefront/women.html>

¹¹ Illawarra Mercury, (2013). *Aboriginal Diggers 'couldn't even get a beer in a pub'*. [online] Available at: <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1449559/aboriginal-diggers-couldnt-even-get-a-beer-in-a-pub/>

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