

Humanity

The sound of guns was continuous. All day and all night. There were occasional breaks as each side waited for the other attack first but the majority of the time the guns never stopped. A young soldier, regiment number 2241 from the 21st battalion was yet to learn this. That in Gallipoli there is no time for empathy or compassion or any kinds of emotion aside from hate. That you had to leave your humanity behind as you entered the trenches with only one goal: to kill other human beings. He was yet to learn that if you had the opportunity to die but take another's life with you were fully expected to do it. He was yet to learn that when a soldier enters the trenches in Gallipoli, nobody in the entire world expects them to live. But this soldier was new; he had not yet learned the lessons that every human being who came here had either learned or they had died.

He was a young man, about 16, and had to lie about his age to get into the army. He was rather tall with a good physic and a solid build; he looked as though he had played sport before he joined the army. He had short, brown hair and a bronze tan. Back at home he was considered very good looking. Here he was just another number among the thousands, fighting for their country. He was wearing standard issue army clothes, boots, a hat, and a hip flask. If the sergeant had taught him one thing throughout his whole army training it was this; your hip flask is your most valuable tool. Never share with anybody as you get 400mLs per day and each person must ration their own water correctly. The soldier had no issues with this as he had never liked sharing. He'd always preferred to let other do their thing and just mind his own business.

On the third day the soldier was in Gallipoli, he was put on the firing trench for the first time yet. This meant he was in the trench closest to the Turkish lines, only ten or twenty feet of mud, decomposing bodies and barbed wire separating them. This land is called no man's land and anyone who so much as pokes their head up to look at will most likely be shot. This trench is where 90% of the casualties occurred. On this day, not very much was happening. The gunfire had ceased over an hour ago and everyone was bored and restless. Nervous energy and adrenaline was running high and everybody needed something to do. There were five guys playing a game of two-up in the mud, though the coins would only spin for a few seconds in the mud. The young soldier was surveying the battleground through a periscope rifle when a flash of movement caught his eye. A robin was caught in a coil of barbed wire right in the middle of no man's land, its colours vibrant against the brown backdrop. It thrashed around but its leg was caught and obviously was not going to get out on its own. The soldier's eyes quickly swept the battlefield again. Still no movement. He knew the Turkish were there though, staring through the sights of their mounted machine guns. The boy sighed. There was nothing he could do for it. He turned away from the battlefield and went to walk away. But something made him hesitate. Something his mother had said just before he left. "Keep your humanity."

The soldier turned, his resolve strengthened. He grabbed his bright red handkerchief and stuck his arm up out of the trench. About ten people could have shot his hand right now but no shots were fired. The soldier slowly began to climb out of the trench. His comrades yelled and tried to pull him back but they were too late. The young man climbed out of the trench and slowly stood up. He was acutely aware of the sniper scopes winking at him as the sun reflected off them into his eyes. Yet still no shots were fired. He began to walk across no-man's land. The decaying bodies smelt fifty times stronger out of the trenches and looked even worse. Still he kept walking, slowly and calmly. He reached the bird tangled in barbed wire. Fumbling, he untangled its leg. The bird didn't move

though; it stayed sitting on his hand. The soldier unhooked his hip flask and undid the lid slowly, careful not to scare the bird away. Carefully he tipped the flask upward and some water dribbled out. The bird immediately fluttered over to the small stream of water and started drinking. It emptied half his flask. Then it flew off. The soldier slowly made his way back to his trench. He climbed slowly down, ready to face the wrath of his commander. But nothing the commander would say could bring him down. He had left the trench and walked halfway across no-man's land and no one had shot him. The Turkish had shown just as much care for that bird as he had. At that moment, he realised what very few others had learned before him. No matter who you are with, where you are or what you are doing there is always a chance to show others that in the face of any situation you will keep your humanity. Because if he can do it in the face of war and death, is there any situation where you can't?

By Lachy