

***John William O'Halloran***



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

DA1 3944

**Jaidyn Gluskie**

Born on 13 March 1894 in Geeveston, Tasmania, John William Patrick O'Halloran was the first of six children to John Joseph O'Halloran and Anne Tidwell Davies. Usually known as Jack, he grew up on his father's 52-acre property, was schooled at Geeveston and worked on his father's apple orchard. During his life in Tasmania, he met Winifred May Burns, whom he later married and together gave life to their first child, John Jr.

After enlisting in Claremont on the 29 September 1915, John later boarded the HMAS Ballarat on 18 February 1916 as the 15<sup>th</sup> reinforcements for the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Having served in the 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Militia prior to his enlistment, John was recognised as a Corporal.

On his way to the Western Europe frontlines, John was discharged after succumbing to a severe case of muscular spinal paralysis which he sustained from sleeping on his arm in a funny position. After returning home, he married Winifred May who soon gave birth to their second child, Sheila Mary. Shortly after, John re-enlisted for the second time.

During the period of time between John's discharge and re-enlistment, the Battle of the Somme was in full force. At the time of preparation, the British planned a battle on a fourteen-mile by one-mile front. A week before the attack, 1.75 million artillery shells were fired before the first of millions of Australian and British soldiers climbed over the top of their trenches on 1 July 1916.

After John's re-enlistment, he embarked on the HMAS Palermo to England as part of the 22<sup>nd</sup> reinforcements for the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Upon arrival to England, he was reverted to private and later entered service in France with the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 2 January. After the Battle of the Somme, a stretch of front was handed to the Australian 1st Division, the Division which John was assigned to. Minor raids would continue in early 1917, and on 25 February 1917, the day of John's death, a raid attack on Butte de Warlencourt occurred. Going over the top of the trenches was the 3rd Brigade consisting of the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th Battalions (John's Battalion). Six weeks later, John was killed in action near Le Sars on 25 February 1917 leaving behind him a widowed wife and two very young children.

## My Reflection on the Trip

The 2016-17 Frank MacDonal Memorial Prize (FMMP) overseas trip was one of the most influential and memorable events of my high school life. Many say that your high school years are the best years of our lives. Although I'm yet to conclude this, I have no doubt that it will challenge for that title phrase. Not only was it an educational and joyful period of time, it was also emotional.

Perhaps the theme of this year's FMMP trip was the philosophical reasonings behind emotion and their impact on individuals and groups. After each long travel day, the group would sit down to reflect on the day and to discuss and debate on wartime philosophy. Without realising, I had debated to myself this question just before I began composing my

essay just SIX DAYS before the entries closed. This question puzzled me until I reflected upon my journey which concluded two months ago on the 25 October 2017.

Back in early September last year, I would have been brainstorming what to write my essay on. I can remember that I began writing about how the ANZAC legend was a myth. I scraped this idea, only to the thought that it wouldn't be chosen, because I was writing against the ANZAC's. Almost a year later the same question was asked. "Is the ANZAC legend a myth, or is it something that lives within us?" Based upon the knowledge I have gained during my time at FMMP, here is my conclusion.

*'Mateship' and 'larrikinism' have long been associated with Australia ever since the first tales of humour and valour left the bloodied beaches of Gallipoli. These tales would lay the foundations for what would become known across the globe as the ANZAC legend. Considered by many as the 'birth of a nation' (being Australia), the beach landings at Gallipoli on the 25th of April 1915 marked the genesis of the ANZAC spirit. Although there was no military victory, the Australians displayed great courage, endurance, initiative, discipline, and mateship. These qualities came to be seen as the ANZAC spirit.*

*When the Australians set foot on European soil, they would have to step up their game, for Gallipoli could be almost seen as the 'kindergarten' of warfare. Europe was the university of warfare, and the Australians had many lessons to learn. John William O'Halloran was one of those 'kindys'. Although he never saw any combat during his first embarkation to Gallipoli, he certainly would've experienced the horror of war through the wounded men being treated in Cairo, Egypt.*

*John had no clue what war was about. Just like many other young men, he was heading on an adventure, and getting paid for it. After being discharged as a result of severe musculo spinal paralysis, John signed up again, this time knowing the odds. This was the turning point in his identity. John was no longer signing up for an adventure; he knew that it was anything but. John signed up because at the time, it was the right thing to do, for King and country. After only two and a half weeks on the front after his second embarkation, John was killed in action.*

*Often, a group identity evolves into a greater culture, and the ANZAC legend is an example of this; still today, the influence of the legend is greater than it seems. Australians have remembered those who fought every 25 April for 101 years on ANZAC Day, which is now a nationwide holiday. This day exists because of the ANZAC legend. The Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize existed because of the ANZAC spirit that lived on within Frank MacDonald. In fact, this very project today is in existence because of the ANZAC spirit that lives on within each and every one of you.*

*Today, some people argue that the ANZAC legend is a myth. And they're not wrong. The ANZAC legend is a myth, and as more and more years go by, it becomes even more mythical.*

*But it is the myth that reminds us of the respect we must pay to these soldiers, to Frank MacDonald, and on this day, in more particular, to the men who today will be/have been fully recognised and commemorated for their contribution to today's society and the ANZAC spirit. The myth reminds us why 420,000 everyday men made the ultimate sacrifice, for King and country. The ANZAC legend is a group identity which has been, and will continue to be essential to Australia's culture.*



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## ***A Letter to John***

Dear John William Patrick O'Halloran,

Might I just say, what an honour it has been researching you and your family history. A whole century ago on 25 February 1917, you rose towards the clouds. Unfortunately to this day you have no known grave, but that does not mean you are forgotten. Since your passing, you left two very young children with your widowed wife. With family support, she rose them with her new partner to become very capable and composed beings.

Your son, John Jr, was in fact the first son of an old boy to return to St Virgil's College as a boarder in June 1929. He later enlisted in the Armoured Division of the 2nd A.I.F, who fought in the Second World War. After returning from the war, he fled to South Australia to start a new life. He then married, raised a family and lived a happy and healthy life as a gardener, opening his own gardening business. He peacefully passed away in 1989 in Whyalla, South Australia.

Your daughter, Sheila Mary O'Halloran, who you would've only known as a baby, gave birth to four children and remained on the orchard you worked on for most of her life. After your wife's passing, it was the only thing the family had of you left. She worked on it passionately, so much so, that she worked there till her almost very last breath, where she had a bad fall. Some decades later, she peacefully passed away on 7 July 2007 in Hobart, Tasmania.

On 22 January 1911, you walked through the doors of St Virgil's College as one of the first boarders. Since then, the school motto was developed. "By Deeds, Not Words Alone". It was what you portrayed during family life, growing up in Geeveston and working on your family's orchard. It was what you demonstrated whilst fighting for the 12th Battalion part of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Division. It was what you showed among these fields at your time of death whilst looking directly at the face of the enemy. And today, it IS the memory that you left with your family and friends. You heard the call to country, and you responded "by deeds not word alone", and that is why it leads me to believe that the school motto was created with you in mind.

But not only are you remembered by your family and loved ones, but you have also become a part of me. To me, you have no rank, unit or service number. To me, you represent the story of almost 420,000 Australian men, who either died or had to rebuild their lives and become acceptable to society. To me, you're an unsung hero, echoing why I commemorate you today on your family's behalf.

John William Patrick O'Halloran, I present to you my school tie. A symbolism of our connection through our education at St Virgil's College. Knowledge is the most powerful tool, and I vow to use it for the greater good with you in my consciousness. I also present to you the latest volume of "Words & Deeds", the newsletter of the Old Virgilians. Signed by the principals of St Virgil's College, I present it to you on behalf of the Old Virgilian Association. It signifies your connection with the school community and I hope you may read it. And I finally present to you the messages from your contemporary decadents. On behalf of your family in Australia, I thank you for your strength, your courage and your sacrifice for king, and country.

I shall never forget you and this moment, and may you rest in peace as we remember you through our thoughts and actions, "by deeds not words alone",

Yours Sincerely,  
Jaidyn Gluskie