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Jack's Journey

Kit Cullen



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Kit Cullen began tracing the story of Jack Collyer, an unknown ANZAC solider at Gallipoli during the period of the landing on May 1 and 2, 1015, using Collyer's diaries and service record. Unfortunately, the last diary ended as Jack entered the firing line on Bolton's Ridge at dusk on April 25. He was wounded a week later. Where was Jack and what was he doing when he was wounded? What Kit discovered over ten years of painstaking research is extraordinary. Jack's platoon was ordered to go to the aid of about 60 Royal Marines who had been trapped for two and a half days in an isolated trench. The Marines were running out of ammunition and water, and needed support. To do so meant running the gauntlet of a death trap-an exposed fifty-meter long track, marked by the Turks as a killing ground. As the platoon braved the death trap, one by one, most of them were killed or wounded, the latter including Jack. Snowy Robson carried ammunition and water to the beleaguered garrison without being hit. An hour later he also guided and took charge of No.3 Platoon 4th Battalion which was ordered into the valley to reinforce the isolated trench. In all, Snowy diced the death trap six times-five in daylight-without being hit. The position and the Marines were saved. Five Allied gallantry medals were awarded for the action, including the first Victoria Cross at Anzac. The other extraordinary aspect of the 4th Battalion's participation in the action was the corruption of the historical record by Charles Bean. Bean omitted any reference to the 4th Battalion in his telling of the story in the Official History, instead giving the credit for saving the Marines to his brother's unit, the 3rd Battalion, which played a part on May 2 in relieving the Marines and the remnants of the two 4th Battalion parties. Bean misused a letter from the Royal Marine hierarchy specifically praising the 4th Battalion's sacrifice and courage, claiming its sentiments for the 3rd Battalion. The tragic heroism of Jack and his mates, and Bean's historiographical skulduggery, would have remained hidden if Kit Cullen hadn't stumbled on them in the course of his research.

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