

Soldier Boy

» From *Unbroken* to *Gallipoli*, actor Travis Jeffery has kept his characters in khaki. He tells **Matthew Myers** about life in the trenches.

DNA: Tell us about your character in [TV miniseries] *Gallipoli*.

Travis Jeffery: I play a working-class Perth boy named Stewie who's a bit of a rough-head looking for adventure. He's the kind of guy who likes to jump in and have a go, and is disappointed if he misses out on the action. Like a lot of the other guys that join up, he's a larrikin, which is a big part of the ANZAC image and legend.

In your research, did you discover a whole

new side to the ANZAC soldiers? Yes, I watched documentaries and read a lot of books such as *Gallipoli* by Les Carlyon, which the series is loosely based on. I was also lucky enough to go to Gallipoli last year and took my mum along, who hadn't been out of the country in twenty years. I had never been to Turkey myself, so it was fantastic to check out Istanbul and to see where it all happened. It was also incredible to see how respected everything is at Gallipoli now, and how well the graves are

taken care of. That was really lovely to see.

Do you think after watching *Gallipoli*, young people will see their heritage in a new light?

I think so. I was never really taught about it at school and I think most people get a gist about the war in general, but the great thing about Channel Nine's *Gallipoli* is that it shows the individual, which we can sometimes skim over. It shows the poor blokes in a dark trench with nothing but their bare hands left to fight with, and fighting some other poor guy who's doing it for the same reason: for god and country. That's why ANZAC Day is so important, because we are not only remembering the war, but also the individuals. Of course television shows embellish, but the writer Christopher Lee did such an incredible job in keeping it realistic. It's heavy, but it gives a really good insight into what these boys went through.

You've also played a soldier in *ANZAC Girls*, the documentary *Changed Forever* and in Angelina Jolie's *Unbroken*. Yeah, *Unbroken* was an incredible experience and I was really fortunate to get to work on something of that size and energy, and it was so close after graduating from drama school. It was really good to see how everything worked at that level, and not to mention that it was an absolutely incredible story. It could be quite taxing because we were all playing prisoners of war and tried to drop as much weight as we could, so there was a bit of fatigue and it was quite tiring at times. But it was definitely worth it. The story of Louie Zamperini is so inspirational.

What actors have influenced you? Heath Ledger has always been a big hero of mine. I really respect the integrity and work ethic he had, and how fearless he was when he approached roles. It's such a tragedy that he passed away so young. He inspired me to go to drama school. He rode horses, too, which is a common link. I thought *Brokeback Mountain* was interesting with the way it was handled.

Would you play a gay role? Yes, I played a gay role last year in a film called *The Tender Dark*, which is a great story, again with integrity and I had no problem playing that. I played the love interest of a young boy. It's set in the Fifties and tackles issues around repressed homosexuality. I have a very fleeting appearance, but it had such a great script that I wanted to do it. It should be at the gay film festivals this year. **If you were gay, who would you go for?** It would definitely be between Chris Pratt and Matthew McConaughey. Chris Pratt seems like a lovely big teddy bear and you'd spend most of your time laughing with him. He's become very ripped and he's also a great actor.

Who is your diva? Does Bette Midler count?

Of course! She's a legendary diva. How does someone as young as you know Bette Midler? I guess from growing up with her movies. I loved her in *Hocus Pocus*! I think her song, *The Rose*, is fantastic and she really nailed *I Put A Spell On*



Travis (far right) in *Gallipoli*. "My high cheek bones make me look sick!"

"I'll probably be out of work until 2039, when they start doing the WW2 centenary stuff!"

You in *Hocus Pocus*. She's a very versatile and interesting cool lady, though I think sometimes her mouth needs to be washed out with soap! **Growing up in Gen Y, have you witnessed homophobia?** I know it exists and that's very frustrating, but I don't think I ever witnessed it first hand at school. I grew up in a small town and I only really remember one kid coming out, and he was actually quite well supported. I remember some people making passing comments, but I never saw any physical kind of homophobia. My family have been really supportive in that way. We have gay friends who would spend Christmas with us, and I feel very lucky to have grown up with that.

What do you think was the trigger point where your acting career took off? I think it was getting the role in *Unbroken*. It's really handy to now have something with so much credibility behind me. I auditioned for the role of an Aussie character and in the end it didn't come about, but Angelina [Jolie] really liked the look I had, so they kept me in the loop and I started to lose weight because I knew that if I got the role I'd be playing a prisoner of war. So I wanted to get a head start. A few weeks turned into a few months and then it was all quite hectic and last moment. I was at work one day and I got a call from my agent saying the Aussie role had been given to somebody else, but they

had me in mind for a Scottish role and could I audition? I had never done a Scottish accent, so it was a little bit intimidating. I had to fly up to Queensland to meet with Angie, so I managed to get in a couple of dialect classes. When I got to the set, I met the other guys who had already been cast and Angie said, "Okay guys, grab some food and we'll get you into hair and wardrobe." I was like, "I'm a little confused. Am I up here for an audition?" And she said, "Oh, sorry, you got the role last night and we start shooting Monday." It was one of the best acting experiences I've ever had – so far.

You caught the eye of Angelina Jolie! That's pretty cool. Yeah [laughs] I think it's because I have high cheekbones that make me look sick! But it was lovely meeting her after growing up watching her films, and the charity work she does outside of acting is just amazing and so sincere. She's one of the loveliest people I've ever met! The passion she had for this project was nothing short of inspiring.

What's the next project in store for you? I've just finished working on an episode of *The Doctor Blake Mysteries*, which was a lot of fun, and I'm also working on the docu-drama *Changed Forever* in Adelaide, which is about WW1 as well.

You're not being typecast, are you? [Laughs] No, not at all. In fact, I'll probably be out of work until 2039, when they start doing the WW2 centenary stuff!

Do you wear Jocks, fitted boxers or freeball? Fitted boxers for the support and comfort, and I'm afraid to say that's also the case under my WWI uniform. I probably should have got some old cotton long johns to be authentic!

MORE: *Gallipoli* is screening on Channel Nine. Follow Matthew Myers on Twitter @MattMyers1964