World War I – as seen through the eyes of three young women

A ROSE for the ANZAC BOYS

Jackie French
"A Rose for the anzac boys"

By Jackie French

LACHLAN

BISCUIT CREEK, ANZAC DAY, 1975

Lachie felt embarrassed to have to push his grandfather in his wheelchair for the Anzac Day parade in their country town. Pa had picked a single rose to carry from the bush outside his kitchen and he carried this throughout the parade. Soldiers from other wars arrived. Pa had fought in the First World War, but the butcher had served in the Second World War whilst another had served in Vietnam, and as the marchers paraded through the town to the war memorial, Lachie found it felt good. Wreaths were laid, the Last Post played and the servicemen left to have lunch at the RSL Club. At last Pa stood up shakily, bent down and laid the small, frail rose down amongst the wreaths and said “A rose for the Anzac boys.”

CHAPTER 1

The chapter begins with a letter from Midge, who is a (nearly) sixteen year old girl from a sheep property in New Zealand and who is a pupil enrolled at a School for Young Ladies in England. Because she had lost both her parents, her older brother, Doug, had placed her here when he enlisted to fight in Flanders during the First World War, whilst her twin brother Tim had gone to fight in Gallipoli. In the letter, Midge mentions her friends: Anne, the daughter of an earl and Ethel, a wealthy grocer’s daughter from Yorkshire. Midge is very proud of her two brothers doing their bit in the war.

ENGLAND, 14 JUNE 1915

Letters were the precious link to life at home in New Zealand, or with her brothers who were fighting overseas. Glen Donal was the name of the property where Midge lived in New Zealand and it meant the world to her. She missed it dreadfully and the thought of it kept her going. Today there were two letters, one from her Aunt Lallie, a nursing sister working for the war effort in Egypt and another from her twin brother, Tim, at Gallipoli. The letter from Aunt Lallie, dated 6 June, held very bleak news about the situation in Cairo, describing the terrible conditions at the hospital and shocking details of the wounded soldiers flooding in from the front. (pages 15 and 16). Although the army censor had blacked out many words from her letter, the impact of the appalling situation was not lost on Midge.

Tim’s letter dated 24 May (page 18) also wrote of the death and carnage experienced but he said that the Aussies respected the Turkish soldiers they were fighting, though they could not say the same about the Germans.

Midge’s friends Anne and Ethel appeared, telling Midge that she was required in the headmistress’s office. Talking of the letters with her friends made Midge feel helpless, stuck in the school in England whilst she wanted to be contributing in a practical way, to help the
soldiers, or Aunt Lallie in the hospital. Rolling bandages or making baby clothes for refugees as they did at school did not seem useful enough and she wanted to see real action.

CHAPTER 2 (page 25)

Miss Hollington informed Midge that a third letter had arrived that day. It came from the War Office, telling her that Private Timothy Smith was listed as missing in action on 22nd May. Midge – in a daze - explained that Tim had been too young to enlist so he had signed up under another name, not their family name of Macpherson.

Midge would not accept that Tim was dead. She pointed out to Miss Hollington that Tim’s letter had been dated two days after he was listed as missing and she also said that there would be many soldiers named Smith, but Miss Hollington did not want Midge to keep hoping.

Her friends supported her, though Ethel suggested that perhaps the officer who’d written the report had got the wrong date, whilst Midge wondered if Tim could have been taken prisoner, or been injured. She believed there were many reasons why men would seem to have gone missing and absolutely refused to consider that Tim could be dead.

The futility of being in an exclusive English girls’ school whilst there was so much need for assistance in nursing the soldiers left Midge feeling empty, whilst Anne’s anxiety over the hateful spots on her face which ruled her life took Midge’s mind briefly off Tim. Anne’s life seemed to be mapped out for her because of her aristocratic upbringing and she knew that once she left school, her mother would arrange parties and dinners where she would hopefully meet some other aristocrat who would marry her and her duty would be done.

During the night, Ethel woke the other two with an idea about how they could do something real towards the war effort. She suggested that they serve the thousands of soldiers passing through the railway stations in France with the cocoa which had made her father’s fortune in the grocery business. They realised that there was nothing currently in place which could cope with the thousands of wounded and other soldiers making their way out to the front, and they could set up a canteen where they could offer a hot drink of cocoa and a sandwich to help fill their stomachs. Ethel said her father would pay for it and would also make sure they kept up supplies.

Whilst it was a long way from nursing, Midge had to recognise that because of their age and lack of training, they would not be allowed to go and nurse in France, but they might just be allowed to go and do this relief work. The three girls decided that this was certainly a practical way to contribute.

CHAPTER 3 (page 36)

Midge’s Uncle Thomas was her guardian now that her brother Doug was away, and she had a job to try and get him to agree to her going with Anne and Ethel to France, but as his son (Midge’s cousin) Michael had just written from the trenches describing the horror there, (page 41), Uncle Thomas had to recognise the need.
CHAPTER 4 (page 43)

Midge sends Aunt Lallie a letter from France in which she describes the canteen the three girls have set up in the railway station nearest to the front lines. The trains carry men to the front as well as hospital trains bringing the wounded back to Calais, Paris or to England. Ethel’s father sends supplies of beef, flour, cocoa and powdered milk twice a week.

Ethel had discovered an amazing source of energy now that she had such a worthwhile purpose and she was a marvellous organiser. She had arranged for a baker to bake bread for the sandwiches they made, and had organised for trestle tables and coppers to boil up the cocoa, as well as braziers for heat, and had set up a good, functional canteen.

A visit from an ambulance truck driver, who was a girl, stunned Midge. Although she had learned to drive at home on Glen Donal, she had never seen another female driver. Slogger, the driver, informed Midge that there was going to be thousands of wounded men arriving soon and that they would need to ensure they had a ready supply of cocoa and bread. More ambulance trucks and horse-drawn ambulances began to arrive and Midge saw the men laid out in vast numbers of stretchers along the platform. Nothing had prepared her for this. The stretchers seemed endless and the men so quiet and still. They had seen hell and now they waited for what help they could get. As she watched the numbers of bodies grow. Ethel had sent to the village for extra help, whilst Anne and Midge carried hot cocoa amongst the wounded men. Wounded soldiers kept arriving in anything that would carry them: farm trucks, carts, delivery trucks, cars and on foot.

Cocoa after cocoa, loaf after loaf to be sliced, and still the stretchers and ambulances came and left. Slogger returned a third time and told Midge that sometimes, all they could do was to smile at the men and comfort them. The girls worked endlessly, and after a day and a night, Anne told Midge that she must go and get some sleep. Ethel continued to take control capably, but whilst recognising that they had never been more needed, the girls could see how pointless war is and what a terrible price was being paid.

(Page 59) "Another night. Another dawn. And suddenly it was over. The platform was strangely empty. Only the memories of pain and death remained."

CHAPTER 5 (Page 61)

In a letter to Doug, Midge tells him that some Tommies (English soldiers) said that the Anzacs were the bravest, stubbornest troops around and that she is so proud of him. She explains that this is why she needs to do her bit too, rather than just sit around in England, knitting socks. Ethel keeps count of the numbers of men the girls serve on the canteen so that supplies can be maintained, and Midge tells Doug that they served ten thousand last night.

Aunt Harriet describes how families at home in England contribute to the war effort by sending parcels to the men at the front, knitting socks for them and billeting soldiers who have been returned home and are on their way back to their own homes further on.

Rosemary Buchanan: summary "A Rose for the Anzac Boys"
Doug mentions in a letter that the British officers have no idea, and Ethel had commented earlier that they send the men into unwinnable situations whilst issuing ridiculous orders.

In another letter to Dougie, Midge reveals that the forces have retreated from Gallipoli and “that so much was lost for nothing.” (page 65). Again, there is reference to the inadequacy of the British generals. There is still no news of Tim.

1 MAY 1916

Whilst trying to deal with the baker who was not delivering all the bread that they ordered, two Aussie soldiers came into the shop and heard Midge’s Australian accent. One chats to her while the other gets the captain, who can speak French and can help Midge to get the situation sorted. Midge thinks that the baker has been trying to cheat them, so she makes sure the message gets across that the girls will weigh the bread and will be fully aware if he tries to cheat again. And they will also check that the bread is made from their finest quality flour, rather than the inferior flour he might try to use. Then Captain Marks offered to buy her a coffee at the nearby café.

The two chatted easily and Midge found it a luxury to sit in the sun and have a break with Gordon. She tells him about her beloved Glen Donal and asks if he has come across Tim. He asks her if he can write to her, to stay in touch.

CHAPTER 6 (Page 76)

Midge and Gordon have been exchanging letters and he reports that the roads are in shocking condition and that although they are in France, almost all the soldiers he comes across are either Tommies or Anzacs. He also suggests meeting her again as he has some leave due. Midge agrees to spend two days with him.

4 JUNE 1916

For her birthday Anne and Ethel gave Midge some precious chocolate. It was hard to get and they had given away the last of it weeks earlier, but the girls had saved their ration. Gordon was due to arrive that day and they were to have two glorious days together, but he did not arrive on the train at the expected time and there was a push on, which meant that there were many wounded coming through and Midge was needed to help out at the canteen where the need was urgent. More and more men came through, more and more ambulances, and Gordon did not arrive on any of the trains which came into the station. The supplies dwindled and Ethel called on the villagers for help. In the meantime, the girls just kept adding hot water to the cocoa to try and spread it out thinly. Page 87: “A year ago, she would have thought that men in agony wouldn’t want to drink. Now she knew that blood loss called for fluid; that shock needed warmth; that just a smile or a hand in theirs could help hold back the terror of pain in a strange country.” Midge forced herself to smile, and to keep on smiling despite the heartbreaking misery around her.

Suddenly Harry Harrison appeared, the soldier who had introduced her to Gordon at the café. He told her that all leave had been cancelled and so Gordon had not been able to come to see her. He had been bitterly disappointed, but last night he had volunteered to cut

Rosemary Buchanan: summary “A Rose for the Anzac Boys”
the barbed wire outside the trenches during the moonlight, and was shot and killed instantly. Harry had been with him and had carried Gordon’s body back. Harry had been worried for Midge, knowing that she would be waiting for Gordon and knowing also that it was her birthday, and so he had come to let her know. When Midge asked Harry how he coped with the horror, he said that he thought of home and escaped there in his mind. He said he wished he had a photo, so Midge gave him one of Glen Donal, which she had in her bag. Harry was delighted, saying it was very similar to his own home.

CHAPTER 7 (Page 94)

Harry sends Midge a letter. Because of their mutual love of their sheep farms, he begins by comparing farming techniques and goes on to describe what has been happening on the front. Again, the scorn for the officers who have no idea of what the men have gone through is a familiar comment, and he makes it clear that the officers demand ridiculous things from them, such as marching for nine hours with only a quarter of an hour’s break.

Midge acknowledged food parcels which had been sent to her by her aunt, with donations from the women in a volunteers’ group. More and more she practised the idea Harry had given her, about closing her eyes and imagining the farm at Glen Donal, to escape the horror of what was around her. It helped her to get through.

She looked back on the year or so that they’d been running the canteen. How tired she was, how far removed they were from the wide-eyed schoolgirls they had been. Now, they had many more volunteers assisting them, and Midge wondered what she would do if she left, even for a holiday. Her Aunt Harriet was really rather a stranger and Aunt Lallie was urgently needed at the hospital. Ethel was such a marvellous organiser and Midge couldn’t imagine life without Anne there, her dear, spotty Anne, but they were still so busy, she didn’t have to think about it.

Slogger, the female ambulance driver was suffering badly with infected hands. This had occurred because her hands were always wet and raw and she was always handling infected wounds. Without her driving the ambulance, it would place an ambulance out of action as there were no other drivers to take over. Midge decided that she could help out this way, and offered her services as an ambulance driver. She had learnt to drive at Glen Donal, and thought she would be able to handle the conditions here, bad as they were.

CHAPTER 8 (Page 105)

Midge receives a letter from the housekeeper at Glen Donal with one of her fruitcakes and some of her fudge. Also a letter from Aunt Lallie advising her that she had been transferred to a Casualty Station quite near Midge’s canteen, but Lallie was far too busy to be able to come and see her. Lallie had received a letter from Dougie, but there was still no more information about Tim’s whereabouts. She had spoken to someone who thought Tim had been captured as a prisoner of war, but this was not certain.
As an ambulance driver, Midge had to leave the place she had been staying with the other canteen volunteers and move into accommodation with other ambulance personnel.

CHAPTER 9 (Page 113)

SOMEBODY IN FRANCE, 1 October 1916

Harry writes to Midge, telling her that he had just returned from the front where there was “exactly the same trench we were in last time; the same mud, same dead trees only a bit deader…” (page 113) “We have been fighting back and forth over the same bit of ground for so long. How many men can die for a couple of miles of mud?”

Midge replies to Harry’s letter describing her work in the ambulance team. Their headquarters are in a chateau. The orderly she is working with had been a student at Oxford but gave up her place to do the ambulance work in France. They often work eighteen hour days and keep very odd hours, depending on when and where they are needed. Food shortages everywhere mean even here the staff may be given bread made out of ground acorns with bran and potato added. (This was typical world-wide as farmers struggled to keep pace with the demands of the war effort, men were needed to fight and so could not work the land, and shortages occurred everywhere. To cope and to try to make for a fair market, the government put everyone on rations, so they could only get so much of a particular food per week, spreading the supply further for the general public.)
The whole of Midge’s ambulance operation is largely funded by a duchess, although the Red Cross is the formal authority. (This shows how some wealthy people in England contributed to the war effort.)

5 November 1916

Page 119 “The gas cases were the worst. Mustard gas meant blindness and burnt lungs and skin. Phosgene gas was even worse; a foul yellow liquid bubbled from the men’s rotting lungs until they died. Men mostly suffered their wounds silently. But the gas cases screamed.” “Gas cases needed to have a tent of dampened sheets above them as bedclothes or even bandages would stick to their burnt skin.” (Remember, some of the boys fighting were not much older than you.)

The girls were called out to pick up wounded who had suffered a gas attack. The headlights on the car failed and they were forced to drive through the dark and the mist over rutted roads, and to make matters worse, they had three flat tyres in one trip. Midge drove slowly while the other girl walked in front of the car with a lantern which meant that the journey to catch the midnight hospital train took hours and hours.

When they arrived at the station, Midge was delighted to see Anne whose skin was now spot-free. Anne walked back with the lantern while Midge returned to pick up another load with the ambulance. On the way they were bombed by an enemy plane. Midge was all right, but she “stared, speechless, at the ruin of Anne’s face.” (page 126)

CHAPTER 10 (page 127)

Rosemary Buchanan: summary “A Rose for the Anzac Boys”
Back in England to recover, Anne sends Midge a letter telling her that she is helping nurse burns cases in her mother’s aristocratic home, where a convalescent hospital had been set up. “I think she decided that they were so used to grotesqueries they wouldn’t be shocked by my face…but the men are very kind…” “Wilkins our old butler, feels it worst. He nearly cried when he first saw the scars.”

15\textsuperscript{th} April 1917 Slogger, the driver who’d had the infected hands was back and Midge found herself realising she’d miss driving the ambulance. “Each ambulance journey might be a short trip into hell, but it was also a slap in the face for the devil. The ambulances and their drivers brought a glimpse of hope and comfort into a world of mud and death.” (page 129.)

When an opportunity arose for her to volunteer for a further stint, Midge didn’t hesitate, even though she was told that she would have to drive a colonel to inspect medical facilities, and he would not be an easy person to be with.

The car was familiar to Midge and as she had to be out overnight, she had some luggage with her. She was kept waiting for over an hour before the colonel appeared with a young lieutenant and a captain. She ignored much of the conversation, but when he said that shell shock would have to be ignored and not allowed on the men’s medical cards, Midge could not help herself from challenging the colonel. He considered that men who reported with shell-shock were simply too scared to do their duty, whilst she had seen what a terrible frightening affliction it was and what a great cost it had to the soldiers’ mental health. Of course, it did not take long before the colonel told her to mind her own business. When he began to talk about shooting pheasants, Midge realised how much she despised this man.

Because she was provided with accommodation in their hotel, Midge saw how these officers were treated with absolute luxury and astonishing meals. “…because of men like you, she thought, stupid men, ignorant men, men in charge because of who they are, not what they are – is that why so many have to die?” page 138.

As soon as she could escape, she left the colonel and hitched a ride with another ambulance so that she could leave the car for the colonel, standing idle and without her as a driver, at the hotel.

CHAPTER 11 (page 142)

Harry Harrison sent a letter saying that the exhausted men are to be sent back to the front, and that a general – whom they treated with contempt – had been out to give them a pep talk. Harry tells Midge that her letters mean a great deal to him.

The ambulance which had taken her away from the horrible colonel had delivered her to the casualty clearing station where her Aunt Lallie was stationed, but Midge did not come across her immediately.

Her first job was to assist with operations at the crude hospital, which was really only a leaky tent with rows of tables which were draped with sheets and which held bleeding, sick and dying men. There was only one surgeon, and the “anaesthetist” was a chaplain, and Midge was the “theatre sister”. They were both untrained, and this shows how desperate the situation at this hospital was. Indeed, the chaplain revealed that because of his inexperience

Rosemary Buchanan: summary “A Rose for the Anzac Boys”
and lack of training, he had killed three men whilst anaesthetising them, but he had helped to save many, many more. Someone also told Midge that the surgeon had worked for twenty three hours and then had only two hours’ sleep before resuming the unending work.

The work was never-ending, body after body, wound after wound. There was not time to rest or to eat, as each moment would cost a man his life. Suddenly, Aunt Lallie appeared beside her and ordered Midge to rest.

Later, Midge was assisting the surgeon again with a soldier who had injured his arm, when she noticed that the patient had hurt his head and that something was very wrong. She mentioned this to the surgeon who commended her for noticing this.

Midge worked on and on seeing untold horrors. At last, the work was done – briefly – and she and Aunt Lallie were able to have some food and a break together.

CHAPTER 12 (page 158)

Aunt Harriet mentions in a letter, the huge, silent zeppelins which were a weapon used by the Germans to drop bombs over London. The zeppelins were large balloon-like airships which could fly in silently and inflict great damage over a city. She describes how her maid’s home was burnt out because of one of these attacks, and so she has had to come with her two children and live with Aunt Harriet. She goes on to say that the children appear to be ravenous, having lived on bread and lard and dandelion leaves, with mashed potatoes. This would not have been unusual as food rationing hit hard and shortages became drastic.

Still at the clearing station, Midge pleaded with her aunt to be able to stay there but she was too young to be allowed, however, Captain Slater, the surgeon suggested that she should make arrangements to return to her friends at the ambulance – which effectively gave her several months to make these plans. In the meantime, he covered the situation by saying that if anyone official asked why she was there she could say she was “in the process of leaving.” He also commented to Aunt Lallie about the injury Midge had spotted, saying she “had the makings of a good nurse.” (page 162)

CHAPTER 13 (page 164)

Midge writes in a letter to Ethel, describing conditions at the clearing station. The nurses work fifteen hour days except when there’s a push, and then they work longer. The only way to destroy the lice eggs is to iron, so Midge spends a lot of time ironing linen and bandages, which are reused over and over again. The cold is intense, even though Midge missed the winter there. Aunt Lallie’s hot water bottle actually had ice in it! Midge also refers to the Americans finally joining in the war and what a relief this is, as everyone is wondering when the war will end, and is suffering from exhaustion and a lack of hope.
The work was endless and as there were no spare beds, Midge slept in Lallie’s when she was on night duty.

It was in the temporary ward, the part where soldiers whose wounds meant that they would soon be moving back to their units or who would be sent off to hospital trains, where she was surprised to find Harry Harrison who had got some shrapnel in his arm. Harry remembered that it was Midge’s birthday the next day, and when she saw him, he gave her a drawing which one of his mates had done for her, of some roses in a vase. Midge was thrilled with it. The artist’s eyes were bandaged and yet he had produced such a life-like picture. Harry said: “We chose roses ’cause that’s what you are, Miss Macpherson. A rose, among all us thorns.” (page 174).

Aunt Lallie had not forgotten her birthday either, and presented Midge with a locket holding a picture of herself and her brother, Midge’s father, during their childhood. Midge talks of Glen Donal and how she yearns to be back there. Aunt Lallie warns her that she “may find it hard to go back to just being Dougie’s sister after the war,” and that “no-one will really take you seriously as a farmer, They’ll look at Tim, not you, for the decisions…many of the women who have served in this war will find it hard to step back into the background.” (page 177)

Their conversation was interrupted by a rocket exploding right near them. Midge’s ears kept ringing and her head hurt, but there was work to do and she had to reassure the patients. There were some casualties and deaths as a result of the explosion and one of these was the chaplain who had been the anaesthetist for her first operation at the casualty clearing station. As Midge stood at the small white cross marking his grave, Harry came to her to comfort her. He returned to her the photo of Glen Donal which she had given to him a year ago.

CHAPTER 14 (page 186)

Another letter begins this chapter as Midge writes to Miss Davies at home in Glen Donal. She mentions that “we lost over 100,000 men in the last ‘push’, they say, and gained perhaps a mile of ground,” and “our men keep going with such courage despite orders from England that even to me seem such stupidity.” There is still no news of Tim.

The boy from Harry’s ward, Nipper, came to Midge to plead with her not to be sent back to the front. Midge knew it was out of her power, or anyone else’s, to grant this and she could see his terror and knew that he was far too young to be there. She knew that “you fought with the others. If you ran, they shot you – not the enemy, but your own side. And if you screamed in terror, or shook hands with the enemy as you gathered in your dead, they wrote ‘lack of moral fibre’ – LMF - in blood upon your forehead,” (page 188). When they marched out at dusk, they “were men who ..knew what they would face, who had lost faith in most of the men who ordered them.” (page 189)

Aunt Lallie came to wave them off too and said “We patch them up and then we send them off to die. They know it and we know it.” (page 189)

The casualty station had to move as the guns were getting closer.

Rosemary Buchanan: summary “A Rose for the Anzac Boys”
Midge was asked to sit with a soldier who was dying. She could only bring him the comfort of someone who loved his country as much as he did and who was able to sing him a song which his mother had sung to him, as he died.

**CHAPTER 15 (page 195)**

Midge writes thanking Harry for the picture of the roses and for returning her photo of Glen Donal to her, both of which provide her with comfort. She mentions the arrival of the first American troops and what a relief that brought and that she is to return to the canteen where she looks forward to catching up again with Ethel. The special understanding which can take place between those who have shared the horror, such as Anne and Midge, Anne being her closest friend, or Harry and his mates is noted here, along with the knowledge that those at home could never understand. Leaving Aunt Lallie would be difficult.

**CHAPTER 16 (page 203)**

It was almost like coming home for Midge, who knew that Ethel would have arranged for a bed to be made available for her, and to see the familiar sights of the hotel's courtyard.

With Christmas came bitter cold causing frostbite for the troops, Christmas puddings were sent as food parcels, along with special treats for the troops sent from home and the Red Cross. Midge had knitted some socks for Harry and Dougie.

The day seemed quieter than usual as far as their duties were concerned, but Midge was greatly saddened to receive a telegram which said that Dougie had been severely injured. She was requested to come immediately, which frightened her into thinking that he could be dying.

When she arrived in England she could see that war had had a profound impact there as well. Canteens were set up in railway waiting rooms, ambulances filled the streets, the people seemed dispirited and the horses in the streets were thin and plodding.

Dougie lay in a hospital which was very different from Aunt Lallie's field hospital, but which was all too familiar to Midge with its rows of victims from the war, soldiers who had been sent home disfigured. Dougie had lost most of his left leg, but there was hope of an artificial one being fitted and with it, a return to some sort of normal life again. He needed to talk and to tell someone what had happened. The description of this is on pages 216-218. He had been leading a group of men and now all of them were dead except him. Dougie is tortured as much by this fact as by his injuries, but Midge was able to tell him what the dying soldier for whom she sang the song in the casualty clearing station had told her: ‘He said, “Tell the others not to blame themselves. Tell them they did their best. Tell them to live their lives. That’s what’s important. If only one of us makes it out of
this, tell him not to waste it.” She took his hand and told him that they were finally going home to Glen Donal.

CHAPTER 17 (page 220)

Midge writes to Anne telling her how depressing things are in England where the public have been for so long coping with rations, bombings, shortages, despair and little hope. Dougie’s operation had been successful and he was to be fitted for a new leg soon. She commented that many of the men suffer from shell shock, but the army did not like this term as it meant that soldiers had suffered a war wound and were eligible for an army pension, so they tried to call it something else instead so that the men would be discharged without any help at all, or may even be sent back to the front. Midge had been put to work helping these men in the convalescent home each morning, leaving her the afternoons to visit Doug in hospital. Midge tells Anne that Ethel has started her fourth canteen.

At last they had their berths on a small ship going to New Zealand and she focused on her duty to Dougie. It was delightful to find some letters, including one from Harry waiting for her in her cabin. It was written on 25th April 1918 (the day we now remember as Anzac Day because of these men’s sacrifices.) He wrote that things had never been so bad and that it was the worst week ever. There were 100 names listed as missing, and there had been two gas attacks. "In return for 100 lives they had gained a few acres of uprooted earth and a ruined village…..the officers safe in their dugouts, sending us out to die." The men were wrung out and completely without hope. Harry said that the ringing in his ears was constant and that he did not believe his luck could hold out much longer. “It is a stupid, profitless war… but we are trapped in it with no escape.” (page 229) He thanked her for her friendship and was grateful to have been able to write to her, because he knew she understood. He said a mate would forward the letter to her if he did not come out alive.

Midge felt devastated reading the letter and thinking that the letter must have been forwarded by Harry’s mate.

The next letter was from one of the soldiers who was with Harry when he was blown up by an explosion. They were all trying to dig him out when they saw an arm twitching, so they knew he was still alive. He had suffered head injuries and a broken arm and would not be fighting any more. The men believed he would recover in England.

The third letter was from another soldier who was writing at Harry’s request, to tell Midge that he had seen Tim killed by shellfire at Gallipoli. He reassured Midge that death would have been quick and painless and that Tim would have known nothing about it, being hit and then buried by the debris, but she knew from personal experience that he would of course, have felt pain.

Rosemary Buchanan: summary “A Rose for the Anzac Boys”
Midge realised she had to get Dougie back to Glen Donal to help him cope without a leg. She knew too, that Harry would go to his home and that they had both survived and were now free.

CHAPTER 18 (page 236)

Letters!

Midge writes to Ethel about life on the farm in New Zealand now that war has ended and then there was a letter from one of the nurses, telling Midge that Aunt Lallie had just died of the deadly influenza epidemic. Another from Anne tells of the news of her forthcoming marriage to an Australian who studied at Oxford to become an archaeologist – not the husband her mother or she had expected. The war took over and he suffered appendicitis and was lucky to escape the war without a scratch. Anne says that he doesn’t mind about her face, recognising that everyone has been touched by the war, and “somehow my face is right, it fits with what’s happened to our lives.” (page 240) The wedding will be small but Anne wishes Midge could be there.

Ethel writes and indicates that she has become a suffragette, lobbying for women’s rights and suggests that Midge should come over and help her and another school friend who has set up a school and a soup kitchen for children in the East End.

Meanwhile at home Dougie had become engaged and Midge finds herself feeling that Dougie needs to be free of someone who remembered the days of war and his agony. She wondered if Glen Donal was still home for her now that Dougie was there to run the place and had his fiancée.

Another letter, which she had missed at first, brought the answer about what she should do. It was from Harry’s mother in Australia, saying that now he is home, he is silent, haunted and unhappy, unable to talk to anyone of his war experiences. She describes having taken him somewhere where a song about the Red Cross nurses was played, and Harry’s face had lit up, and he said he knew a nurse, and said Midge’s name. Harry still hears the guns all the time and he said that Rose would understand. Rose Macpherson of Glen Donal in New Zealand. Harry’s mother was appealing to Midge to help her understand why Harry can’t speak or how they can help him.

CHAPTER 13 (page 248)

Midge sends Ethel a letter letting her know that she will not be coming back to England and is instead going to go to Harry in Australia to offer reassurance and suggestions to his family, and perhaps be able to help him, too, by being a listening ear. She even wonders about being able to help out as a sheep farmer, on their farm.

She sent a telegram to Harry’s family saying when she would arrive, gets to Australia and buys a car so that she could drive to Moura, where the Harrisons live. The nearest town was Biscuit Creek, where the story of this book began. She noticed the rabbits and the fences

Rosemary Buchanan: summary “A Rose for the Anzac Boys”
needing repair, knowing that the men had been lost or maimed during the war. She had ideas about how she could farm, and found similarities to her home of Glen Donal.

By the time she got to the property, she was shaking and wondered if Harry would recognise her, but he smiled and stopped to pick her a rose, and she knew she loved him.

LACHLAN

BISCUIT CREEK, ANZAC DAY, 2007 (page 257)

The scene, once again is with Lachlan immediately after the Anzac Day parade, so we have returned to the scene where the book and story began. He is now an adult, a soldier who has returned a year earlier from Afghanistan. On his wall at home, the drawing of the roses is hung.

Today there was no wheelchair to push and this time, some of the medals were his. He, too, carried a rose from the garden as his grandfather had done. He knew that Pa would have understood. Pa knew that the soldiers were the ones who gave nobility to the cause, "whilst the same men who run everything else, who make the money, give the orders." (page 259)

Lachie waited until everyone but the family had gone, just as he had with Pa all those years ago. He looked at the wreaths, then tenderly laid the rose amongst them, saying "Rest in peace, Pa. We shall remember them." Sergeant Lachlan Harrison saluted.