The War That Didn't End ALL WARS
When developing a concept for the cover design for this issue I worked closely with contributing editor, Bronwyn Steven’s. In 2017 Bronwyn attended the Australian Government ceremony held to remember the enormous loss of Australian lives on the Western front in 1917. Although we had discussed some ideas for the cover I happened to browse through her photographs when I came across an image of poppies which I felt would be the perfect cover due to its long association with Remembrance Day. ‘In soldiers’ folklore, the vivid red of the poppy came from the blood of their comrades soaking the ground’ (Aust Army). Bronwyn relates her experience and meaning behind the photograph:

‘The photo on which the cover image is based was taken on the Reflective Trail established in Polygon Wood as part of the commemorations. We walked the trail in the dark early morning hours. The field of thousands of hand-made poppies was a moving symbol of massive loss of life and horrific injuries suffered by all the forces who fought here. The French, the British, Canadians, New Zealanders and Germans along with the soldiers from their flung empires. Also, of the enormous toll taken on French and Belgium citizens as this brutal war ravaged their lands’.

Poppies were the first plants to bloom in the ravaged earth of the battlefields on the Western Front and with their blood red colour became a symbol of death on the battlefield. The widespread use of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance for those killed in WW1 was instigated by Moira McCrae of the American Red Cross. She had been inspired to do so by Canadian John McCrae’s poem ‘In Flanders Fields’ and was supported in this by Anna Guerin of the French Red Cross who had silk poppies made and sold to raise money to support the wounded and the families of those killed. The use of the poppy was quickly adopted by Returned Service organisations. Today it is widely recognised as a symbol of remembrance in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Reference:
Social Alternatives is an independent, quarterly refereed journal which aims to promote public debate, commentary and dialogue about contemporary social, political, economic and environmental issues.

Social Alternatives analyses, critiques and reviews contemporary social issues and problems. The journal seeks to generate insight, knowledge and understanding of our contemporary circumstances in order to determine local, national and global implications. We are committed to the principles of social justice and to creating spaces of dialogue intended to stimulate social alternatives to current conditions. Social Alternatives values the capacity of intellectual and artistic endeavour to prompt imaginative solutions and alternatives and publishes refereed articles, review essays, commentaries and book reviews as well as short stories, poems, images and cartoons.

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- copyright release form
- title page listing contributing authors, contact details, affiliation and short bio of approximately 80 words
- abstract should be a maximum of 150 words
- three - five keywords.

Please use Australian/English spelling and follow Harvard referencing. Submit tables, graphs, pictures and diagrams on separate pages. Remove in-text references identifying authors and replace with [name removed for the review process].

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The War That Didn’t End All Wars: Alternative histories

Bronwyn Stevens

The articles in this themed edition ‘The War that Didn’t End All Wars’ look behind the government-driven narrative of war and national identity. They analyse and challenge characterisations of the war as a unifying force that helped forge a nation. They question an Australian triumphalism that exaggerates the role of Australians and ignores the contribution of our allies. Some authors are critical of the ‘militarisation of Australian history’ which they argue sees the important achievements of civil society being ignored while a searchlight is directed to military achievements. Some question the validity of the large amounts spent on commemorations of World War I, some of it overseas, expenditure amounting to half a billion dollars spent so far. This is to be supplemented by the just-announced half a billion dollars for a major extension to the Australian War Memorial which critics fear will include elements that will undermine part of the original purpose of the War Memorial.

Other articles in this issue examine lesser known parts of Australia’s war history such as the efforts to trace the missing and respectfully bury the dead. Alternative explanations are debated for the dramatic increase in attendance at war commemorations at home and on the battlefields. These include a focus on the impact of the war, the trauma caused by the huge toll taken, of lives lost or ruined by battlefield injuries and trauma; by the grief and loss of their families at home. These stories of individual soldiers are being brought before us through an examination of war records, diaries and letters. The impact of the war on individual families is also explored. These accounts supplement a purely government-led militaristic interpretation for the increased interest in WWI. Far from glorifying war, these personal accounts serve as an awful warning of its terrible cost. The last contribution reflects on David Olusoga’s account of the way millions of non-white soldiers who fought on all the war fronts were written out of history – a fate shared by the indigenous soldiers of Australia. In the UK this is finally being recognised and a campaign Remember Together has been launched to recognise ‘the people from different faiths and ethnic backgrounds who fought for Britain in the first world war’, including 400,000 Muslim soldiers (Davies 2018, British Future, 2018). The Australian War Memorial also now has a site recognising the service of indigenous soldiers (Moreman ND).

In his article ‘‘We cannot fight forever”’ Australia, the First World War and the question of commitment’, Frank Bongiorno argues that in many government-funded commemorations of the centenary of WWI it is portrayed as a unifying experience, the making of a cohesive nation, displaying Australian virtues and achievements. But he argues that this is an incomplete and misleading picture that ‘erases the home front’. The focus on Australian achievements on the battlefield ignores the ‘butchery’ of the war, the huge casualties, growing grief and war-weariness. ‘Arguably’ disunity on the home front made the period 1914-1918 ‘the most divisive few years in Australia’s history’. The country ‘was torn asunder’ by the bitter and divisive conscription crises. The close ‘No’ vote resulted in a split in the governing Labor Party as Hughes and his pro-conscription followers left and joined the opposition in a pro-war Nationalist Party. Bongiorno explains that wage freezes, shortages and rising prices increased divisions between the government and industrial labour culminating in a national strike that was smashed by patriotic strike-breakers. Government retribution on the strikers left a long-lasting legacy of bitterness and division. As the war dragged on, the support of the Labor Party and industrial labour continued to diminish. Backing for a negotiated peace drew the hostility of pro-war forces. Waning Labor participation in recruitment campaigns incurred increasing hostility from the government and those who advocated a ‘fight-to-the-finish’. The failed Irish Easter Rebellion in 1916 exacerbated divisions between Catholics and Protestants. Yet these divisions have been ignored in the government-funded WWI commemorations whose cost, ‘likely greater than the expenditure of all other belligerent nations combined’, continues to escalate.

Mark Cryle also examines disunity on the home front during WWI in his article ‘‘The Tragic Pageant of War” : ANZAC commemoration in 1917 and 1918’. His focus is on the wartime ANZAC Day commemorations first held in 1916 as a day of mourning to remember the fallen. However, he notes that by 1917 and 1918 ANZAC Day had become a day to reinforce an ideological position around recruitment, conscription and to affirm the politics of the Nationalist Party. The ceremonies no longer attracted the bipartisan support they had in 1916 in the wake of the Gallipoli casualties. The conflicting aims of ANZAC ceremonies – mourning the dead and
increasing recruitment – exacerbated rather than healed the divisions stoked during the conscription campaigns. Speakers at official ANZAC ceremonies emphasised the need for increased enlistment and attacked as disloyal voters opposing conscription. Inordinate pressure was placed on eligibles to enlist. These calls became more urgent and more divisive in 1918 after the losses of late 1917 and spring 1918. Even more contentious was the new allegation that it was not the dead who should be mourned but those who are fit to go but stay behind. The rhetoric increased in virulence – those who didn’t enlist became ‘the enemy within’. Not surprisingly, attendance at official ANZAC ceremonies began to decline as some mourners retreated to church services and other private ceremonies. Cryle concludes that by 1917 and 1918, ANZAC Day was more a source of division than a salve for the grieving and for those ‘disillusioned, exhausted and ambivalent’.

In her article ‘Family History, Great War Memory and the ANZAC Revival’ Carolyn Holbrook identifies a substantial increase in the number of Australians participating in ceremonies commemorating World War I. She examines various explanations for this revival which she designates as ANZAC 2.0. Among the explanations considered are those that identify the revival as government driven – influenced by ‘political sponsorship and indoctrination.’ She considers such explanations to be insufficient alone and identifies challenges from scholars who reject the notion of ‘sponge-like absorption’ of militaristic messages leading to rising nationalism. Holbrook also considers explanations that emphasise the importance of subjective family memories and studies of trauma and the suffering of the soldiers which increase interest but temper ‘tendencies towards glorification’ of war. Holbrook then argues that one explanation whose importance has been overlooked is the growing interest in family history and the increased number of family histories published from the 1970s. These were based on the experiences of family members and are grounded in individual experiences rather than ‘traditional materially-focused war history’. These fostered ‘an empathetic connection between subject and reader’. They were not ‘undiscerning receptacles of state propaganda’, rather they increased interest in ‘young men innocently caught up in a tragic situation’. Holbrook concludes that ‘the provenance of ANZAC 2.0 lies in the family history boom that began in the 1970s.’

Craig Deayton elaborates on the suffering of the troops and the grief of their families in his article ‘“To Sanctify and Hallow the Memory”: The search for Australia’s missing from World War I’. He argues that when Australia entered the war there was no conception of the scale of carnage of war or the mental anguish of families that would follow. Of the more than 60,000 Australians killed 18,000 have no known grave. Many families received little information on their fate beyond a bare notification of killed or missing. The enormous losses at Gallipoli and the Western Front resulted in parents desperately seeking information on their missing sons or the circumstances of their death. But the ‘task of answering these pleas was simply beyond the resources of an Army stretched to breaking point’. Unofficial channels filled ‘some of the silence’. These often sanitised the actual circumstances ‘in the whitest of white lies’ to spare families the awful truth. Deayton also elaborates on the little-known work of Vera Deakin and the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau in Cairo. It sought information about the dead and missing to pass back to grieving relatives despite the barriers to obtaining accurate information. Deayton explains how after the war ended a War Graves Detachment was created to begin the gruelling task of locating, identifying and exhuming soldiers buried across the devastated landscape. This group of volunteer troops performed their task with a dedication unfortunately not matched by their replacements; the scandal ridden and incompetent Australian Graves Service who were disbanded in disgrace. The Commonwealth (previously Imperial) War Graves Commission now manages the many cemeteries established for Commonwealth personnel killed on the battle fronts. Deayton concludes that Australia’s Unrecovered War Casualty’s Unit continues to search for the WWI missing and ‘successful or not’ this search ‘will never end’.

In his commentary ‘The Militarisation of Australian History’ Henry Reynolds denounces the militarisation of Australian history that has reached a peak with the events commemorating World War I. He notes the massive public expenditure on the commemorations which includes the Monash museum at Villers-Bretonneux and the Light Horse Museum in Beersheba. Monuments have been built while books, films and research projects have been subsidised. Professional curriculum materials have also been developed for children. This promotion of the pre-eminence of war history has bipartisan support and is difficult to critique being sanctified by the sacrifice of those who died and suffered in our wars. He argues that a generation has been subjected to ‘state inspired propaganda’ starting with the assertion that the nation was made on the beaches and hills of Gallipoli, ‘a particularly pernicious doctrine’ implying that countries need war to achieve maturity; a doctrine shared with fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. He argues that the militarisation of our history favours war over peace, the military before the civil and the imperial over national leading to a distortion of our history. Battles are commemorated but not the democratic participation of citizens in the conscription referendums. Far from unifying the country, divisions intensified. The success of the pre-war Australian Federation is cast into the shadows by the spotlight on war. Reynolds identifies other distortions, the long history of indigenous Australians is ignored, the role of our forces and leaders
is exaggerated while the contribution of our allies is downplayed and there been no serious evaluation of the worth of the great cost of the war. In the last paragraph he asks the telling question, ‘How can anyone can take pride in contributing to such an unparalleled disaster?’

In ‘The Great War: One family’s history’ Marian Simms catalogues the history of fifteen members of one extended family who served in WWI. The details of their service provide a graphic illustration of the horror of the war and the grievous legacy it left to their families. The fifteen young men whose lives are detailed here served on all the major fronts: Gallipoli, Palestine, and the Western Front. Tom fought at Gallipoli. A wound impaired his sight, eventually resulting in blindness. Bill fought with the Light Horse in Palestine where he was hospitalised several times but survived the war. Four of their cousins also served. Silas was killed in March 1917 on the Western Front. His brother Charles suffered a severe gunshot wound on St Quentin Road and was repatriated to England in September 1918. He died suddenly in May 1919. Their cousin Frances served in France. He suffered a series of illnesses culminating in influenza but he survived the war and enlisted again in WWII. Another cousin, Percival, enlisted in March 1915 serving first at Gallipoli and then went to France. He was arrested absent without leave and was hospitalised with dysentery, pneumonia, heart problems and arthritis. He returned to Australia but died in 1922. Five second cousins also served. Brothers Sydney and Richard were in the Light Horse and were both killed in the Sinai campaign. Their cousins Plunkett and Donald Needham died on the Western Front. Their grandmother Margaret Carey lost four of her five grandsons to the war. This catalogue of injury, illness and premature death demonstrates the terrible impact WWI had on one Australian family.

This issue also contains two memoirs from the editors, direct descendants of troops who fought in WWI. Their experiences mirrored those of the relatives of innumerable families affected by the war. Specific details differed but the war cast a long shadow on them. Michael Buky’s grandfather was killed by a sniper in Belgium in the last few months of the war leaving his pregnant young wife to bring up a child in poverty in post-war England. Deprived of a husband’s salary she had to subsist on a meagre war widow’s pension. He, like so many of those who fought, lies in a cemetery in Belgium. Bronwyn Stevens father was in the 13th Light Horse and survived the war but it hovered in the background of family life. Her father rarely spoke of the war and it was many years later she learned some details of his war service in Egypt and on the Western Front where he was wounded.

The final item in this themed issue is a reflection by Pat Weller. He writes of attending the service held at the Buttes New British Ceremony at Polygon Wood which commemorated the centenary of the battles in the region, known collectively as the Third Battle of Ypres. He also writes of seeing the rows of graves; of the absurdity of the chaplain speaking of a God of Peace and of wondering how Christian nations dropped the core values of their beliefs to fight and kill each other’s soldiers for four long years. He then reflects on other, forgotten soldiers, portrayed in David Olusoga’s book, The World’s War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire (2014). These were the four million non-white soldiers and workers who were largely erased from history for so many years – a fate that also awaited Australia’s indigenous soldiers.

World War I left a terrible legacy for Australia and the world – horrendous casualties, shattered lands, ruined economies and grieving relatives. The guilt clauses and reparations of the Treaty of Versailles laid the seeds of WWII. It is important that the war should be commemorated and its victims remembered. But questions remain about the cost of Australia’s WWI commemorations and the triumphal tone attached to them. It is probably optimistic to hope that our leaders will reflect on that terrible cost and consider Lord Gowrie’s words at the opening of the Australian War Memorial in 1941. That they will make their rhetoric less about glory and more about tragedy and ensure that the commemorations, like the War Memorial itself are:

... not only a record of the splendid achievements of the men who fought and fell ... but also a reminder to future generations of the barbarity and futility of modern war (Gowrie 1941, cited by Stephens).

References

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Bronwyn Stevens has written, co-authored and co-edited books, book chapters and articles on Australian Politics, the interaction between Australia and the international community and public history. She is currently coordinating editor of Social Alternatives.
‘We cannot fight forever’: Australia, the First World War and the question of commitment

FRANK BONGIORNO

The casual observer of Australia’s centenary of ANZAC commemorations might conclude that World War I was a unifying experience, a conflict that forged a confident and cohesive nation within a victorious empire. Gallipoli has been understood as a foundational story, the butchery on the Western Front as an expression of national mettle, and the victories of 1918 as a demonstration of Australian achievement before the eyes of an admiring world. Yet World War I was arguably the most divisive period in Australia’s history, as the country was ripped apart by the conscription crises of 1916 and 1917, and the general strike, dividing along the lines of social class, religious affiliation and political and industrial allegiance, and according to attitudes concerning nation and empire. By 1918 many Australians were afflicted by grief and war-weariness. The Australian labour movement and Labor Party, having lost interest in materially supporting voluntary recruitment and distant from the main arena of warfare in Europe, wanted a negotiated peace. It is likely that if the war had continued into 1919, the full extent of Australia’s flagging enthusiasm would soon have been difficult to obscure. The aim of this article is to draw attention to this alternative history, one long recognised by historians of the Australian home front, yet finding no place in modern ANZAC commemoration.

Nelson’s condemnation of the media sits comfortably with the place of war in Australian society today, and is additionally a useful reminder of the role of the AWM in that process. History and myth are invariably involved in a dance; they are lovers as well as rivals. But it becomes ever harder to find a real war in the midst of Australian ANZAC propaganda. One of the manoeuvres is to erase the home front; the war occurs in the Dardanelles and Palestine, in Belgium and France, but not in Australia. For today’s politicians, wars are fought to make nations and to display Australian virtues and they appear as fundamentally unifying experiences.

But World War One was not unifying. It was arguably the most divisive few years in Australia’s history, as the country was torn asunder by the conscription crises and the general strike. By 1918 the country was grief-stricken and exhausted. The aim of this article is to draw attention to the war as a story of qualified commitment, growing division, and burgeoning disillusionment; a history that finds no place in ANZAC commemoration because it clashes with the dominant images of national purpose, heroic achievement and personal sacrifice that are the major ingredients of modern ANZAC collective remembrance.

Opposition leader, Labor’s Andrew Fisher had promised in 1914 that, in the event of a war, Australia would fight
to the last man and the last shilling. But within a few days, he had already added the rider that Australia’s first duty was to defend itself; it would offer whatever it had left over as a tribute to the mother country. One of the fundamental questions about Australia’s war had already been set up; how much was enough when Australia itself was not being directly threatened with invasion? While there was an initial rush to enlist, most of the eligible held back for the time being. There was some enthusiasm for war, but also apprehension. Economically, moreover, the war was immediately a dislocating experience. With the disruption of international trade and finance, prices climbed, and so did unemployment. The government froze wages but lacked the power to do much about prices. After Billy Hughes replaced an exhausted Fisher as prime minister in October 1915, the proposal for a constitutional referendum on prices was abandoned.

By this time, the boost to enlistment that had occurred in the Australian winter of 1915 in the wake of the Gallipoli landing had ended. Hughes spent the first half of 1916 in Europe, where British authorities pressed on him the need for more Australian men. Soon after his return, he was advocating the conscription of men for service overseas, already introduced in Britain in January 1916. But while he had been away, the labour movement had been agitating and organising against conscription. Hughes’s efforts to convert the Labor Party failed and, in the absence of sufficient parliamentary numbers to legislate for it, he managed to persuade the federal caucus – after a long debate – to agree to a referendum. Like the recent same-sex marriage survey, it was legally a plebiscite and could only be indicative; it was essentially a public opinion poll, or plebiscite, under a system of voluntary voting (Australia did not compel federal voting until 1924). The campaign that followed was bitter and divisive, and the No case won narrowly. Hughes, an excitable and confrontational worker caught up in the strike, as was the young Eddie Ward, later a Labor firebrand.

Labor split over conscription, with Hughes taking a group of his followers with him out of the party room. He was able to remain prime minister by eventually forming a win-the-war Nationalist Party with his former opponents. Many of them did not much like the old socialist demagogue, but they would tolerate him until the end of 1922. A federal election in May 1917 saw a large swing away from the Labor Party, and Hughes was able to form a government with 54% of the vote and 53 House of Representatives seats in a House of 75. The Nationalist Party now also held 24 Senate seats to Labor’s 12. In theory at least, they could now have legislated conscription. But Hughes had promised that he would not do so without referring the matter to the people, and he knew that any effort to introduce conscription without an expression of popular consent would run into the fierce antagonism of a still powerful union movement. A second conscription vote was set down for 20 December 1917. Hughes’s proposal for conscription was this time hedged with all kinds of restrictions and qualifications, but it was once again defeated. If the campaign was less tense, that was only because the result was more predictable. After all that had happened, a Yes vote seemed unlikely and, as it happened, the result was not as close this time round.

In early September, 1917 with volunteer or ‘scab’ labour widely in use, the unions capitulated. The vindictiveness of the authorities was savage; at least a couple of thousand railway workers were not re-employed, and others suffered discrimination and demotion. Company unions were formed; the genuine railway unions were de-registered. Those who had held out were known as the ‘Lily-Whites’ – the union movement struck a badge in their honour. The rancour between those who had remained true and those who had taken the jobs of strikers and remained in the service continued for years. Future prime minister Ben Chifley, demoted from engine-driver to fireman, recalled that the dispute left ‘a legacy of bitterness and a trail of hate’. Joe Cahill, later Labor premier of NSW, was shot dead by a Bingara farmer and brother of a conservative MP. Women were prominent in the strike demonstrations, sometimes – as in the case of those working in railway refreshment rooms – as strikers themselves.

There had been an increase in strikes during the war against a background of declining living standards and the general stress of the war. Working-class discontent exploded in mid-1917, however, over a proposal, from the New South Wales Railways to introduce a ‘card system’ of accounting which unionists interpreted as an attempt to ‘speed-up’ work practices and decided to oppose. When the commissioners refused to withdraw the proposal, the unions struck. August was a time of bitter conflict, of large demonstrations by workers and their families, of strike-breakers emerging from the countryside, the private schools and the university, and of escalation as new groups of workers – such as wharfies – refused to handle ‘black goods’. In this way, the strike spread interstate; thousands of Melbourne workers were also soon out. Union leaders were arrested; one unionist in Sydney, Mervyn Flanagan, was shot dead by a Bingara farmer and brother of a conservative MP. Women were prominent in the strike demonstrations, sometimes – as in the case of those working in railway refreshment rooms – as strikers themselves.

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The extent to which much of the labour movement was by this time alienated from the war is not fully appreciated. Nineteen-seventeen had been a year of turmoil in Russia, with the overthrow of the monarchy early in the year and
the Bolshevik coup on 7 November. The subsequent withdrawal of Russia from the war, and the signing of a treaty with Germany (Brest-Litovsk) in early March, confirmed the worst fears of the Allies. While Russia’s exit from the war came at the same time as the United States was ramping up its involvement, there was no reason to imagine at this time that the war would come to an end any time soon.

The idea of a negotiated peace had been debated in Britain, Europe and the United States during 1917. In August, there was Pope Benedict XV’s ‘Peace Note’ and in November, Lord Lansdowne’s ‘Peace Letter’ to the Daily Telegraph in Britain. Lansdowne was neither a pacifist nor defeatist; he had variously served as Secretary of State for War, and for Foreign Affairs, and he led the conservative forces in the House of Lords. Lansdowne had however gradually become less hawkish about the war as his disillusionment with the empty promises of British generals grew. Nineteen-seventeen had provided yet another summer that failed to deliver the much-anticipated ‘knock-out blow’ that commanders had promised and the politicians – at least until their credulity was stretched too far by repeated disappointment – had believed would deliver unconditional victory. While venom poured on Lansdowne from the press and the politicians, his intervention gave hope to British radicals who desired a revision of war aims in the interests of a negotiated settlement. His letter was also intended to bolster the growing body of moderate opinion in Germany itself; the outbreak of strikes there in January 1918 was indicative of the troubled state of that nation under the strain of war.10

Those in Britain and France advocating a ‘knock-out blow’ managed to maintain their ascendency. They confirmed their determination to fight to the finish at a Supreme War Council meeting at Versailles in early February 1918, which in turn gave a great boost to the most belligerent elements in Germany. The massive German offensive that began on 21 March 1918 ended any possibility of a negotiated peace and by July, their armies had occupied a vast amount of European territory. In retrospect, and notwithstanding the ‘Napoleonic fantasies’ of the high command, Germany had shown that it could not win the war. Having thrown a vast amount of resources into the effort, victory was still beyond it, and yet 800,000 men – including many crack troops – had been lost.11

Those encountering news of the war back in Australia would not have sniffed victory; this still looked like a ‘war without end’.12 Many political and industrial labour organisations had already expressed support for a negotiated peace in the previous months, when the Labor Party held its seventh national conference in Perth in June 1918.13 It called for an international conference, to include working-class and female representation, and which would arrange ‘ equitable terms of peace’. The leftward shift of labour movement opinion is also evident in the opening passages of the report of the Labor Party’s Peace Committee, which conference adopted unanimously:

That, as the Governments of Europe, founded on class rule and adopting the methods of secret diplomacy, have failed utterly to preserve peace, or to bring the present war within measurable distance of a conclusion, and whereas the existing capitalistic system of production for profit compels every nation constantly to seek new markets to exploit, inevitably leading to a periodic clash of rival interests, we contend that only by an organised system of production for use, under democratic control, can a recurrence of such calamities be permanently avoided. The present system, by fostering commercial rivalry, territorial greed and dynastic ambitions, has created an atmosphere of mutual fear and distrust among the Great Powers, which was the immediate cause of the present colossal struggle.14

John Percy Jones, a Victorian Labor Party Legislative Councillor, wrote to his old friend Tom Mann, the well-known British socialist and labour leader who had spent several years living in Australia but was now at home, that:

as far as the Australian Labor movement is concerned, you will know that it had definitely declared for peace by negotiation, and in consequence is being very hotly attacked. Probably you also know that the censorship is very rigid in this country, while prosecutions of the ‘prejudicial to recruiting’ type are pretty rife. Labor here is practically against recruiting, although there is considerable camouflage about the attitude. [Frank] Tudor [Opposition Leader], [William] Maloney [a Victorian member of the House of Representatives] and others appear on recruiting platforms. Most of the members keep off them.15

The ALP conference also subjected participation in voluntary recruiting to conditions, which included ‘a clear and authoritative statement’ from the Allies ‘asserting their readiness to enter into Peace negotiations, upon the basis of no annexations and no penal indemnities’, and an enquiry into Australia’s requirements for home defence and industry. The conference – as a compromise between contending factions – resolved to submit the matter of further participation in recruitment to a vote of members of ALP branches and affiliated unions later in the year.16 (It was saved from having to bring the ballot to a result by the armistice; the party argued that President Woodrow
Wilson's 14 Points were in harmony with ALP policy.) Voluntary enlistment had by this time been reduced to a trickle and Jones was undoubtedly correct that few leading Labor politicians were inclined to do anything to reverse the trend. When asked soon after the Perth conference about his own apparent inactivity despite lending his name to a scheme called the 'Ryan Thousand' aimed at recruitment, Queensland Labor premier T.J. Ryan explained that he had 'refused to become a recruiting agent and to take on my shoulders work that does not properly belong to me'.

Unsurprisingly, Labor’s political opponents and the mainstream press subjected its policy to some very rough handling. W.A. Watt, the Acting Prime Minister, remarked that its ‘poisoned pill will not go down, it sticks in the throat of every decent Australian’. The Adelaide Advertiser declared that the policies adopted by the conference were ‘permeated by Bolshevik principles’ while the Sydney Morning Herald thought a ‘National party’ would ‘be necessary as long as Labor provides a refuge for the men who have preached treachery and cowardice and disloyalty, both in Sydney and in Perth’.

Government propaganda efforts in the last year of the war registered that public enthusiasm for the war was ebbing away in the face of long casualty lists and few signs of progress. Enlistments dropped over the Australian summer from 2,344 in January 1918, to 1,918 in February, and 1,518 in March. The great German offensive boosted numbers a little, to 2,781 in April and 4,888 in May, but they soon declined again to well under 3,000 before climbing again to 3,619 in October. These numbers did not even approach the target of 5,400 that had been set in March on the advice of former Chief Justice of the High Court, Sir Samuel Griffith, and the problem of numbers was now compounded by the government having initiated a system of ‘ANZAC Leave’ for men who had joined up in 1914. In the face of such ‘failure’, the government launched an elaborate propaganda campaign that enlisted the artistic talents of Norman Lindsay – most notoriously, in producing a poster depicting the German ‘Hun’ as a frightful gorilla-man with blood-soaked hands over a globe of the world – and aimed at increasing voluntary recruitment. The war’s end intervened before the efficacy of the campaign’s posters, pamphlets, press advertisements and film could be fully tested, but the very existence of such an enterprise – and the extreme nature of some of the material – speaks to flagging morale and the government’s perception that a remedy was required.

Strikingly, the sixth volume of the First World War Official History – the final volume on the Australian Imperial Force in Gallipoli and France, and the last written by Charles Bean – recognised that Australia had ultimately offered something less than the last man and last shilling. Bean was not writing specifically of 1918, but it was in relation to the last year of the war that the force of his argument seems most powerful:

The Australian people did not make a total effort; they did not take every step that could have been taken had they felt themselves face to face with the threat of immediate extinction. Like so many other peoples since, a great part of them would recognise that threat only if it came in one form – invasion of their country … The war efforts of all sovereign states, as of individuals, were a measure not only of their virility, courage, loyalty – or other qualities that make up national morale – but also of their realisation of the direct threat to possessions which that morale would lead them to defend.

In other words, Bean was suggesting that a sense of distance from danger ultimately acted as a brake on Australia’s war commitment. If so, it is hardly surprising that, as the war moved towards its fourth year, a government led by an erratic prime minister who had twice been unable to muster a majority for conscription should also find the larger task of popular mobilisation increasingly beyond its powers.

Counterfactual history is invariably a dangerous exercise, but it is worth considering what kind of contribution Australia would have been able to offer if the war had extended into 1919 or 1920. Ernest Scott, in his volume of the Official History, provided a rosy picture, rejecting the idea ‘that the A.I.F. would have dwindled to insignificant proportions’ but conceding that a division would probably have had to be broken up in 1919. But the tide of opinion was changing in Australia by 1918 in a manner that was unlikely to have encouraged buoyant recruitment. As we have seen, Labor, which had always contained a minority opposed to or ambivalent towards the war, was now formally committed to a negotiated peace, and it had signalled only conditional support for voluntary recruitment that, in practice, really amounted to window-dressing for practical withdrawal of involvement. Social divisions – probably involving some degree of violence – would likely have further opened up in the event of a lengthier war. Religious sectarianism was already rife: 60,000 attended the 1918 St Patrick’s Day March in Melbourne, at which Daniel Mannix, the anti-conscriptionist Archbishop of Melbourne, had refused to raise his biretta for the playing of God Save the King, but did so to honour the martyrs of the Dublin Easter uprising of 1916. It had been the brutal British suppression of this rebellion that had turned Mannix against conscription, and to some extent against the war itself. His actions predictably provoked a Protestant outcry demanding his prosecution for sedition. There was growing paranoia, and not only about Catholics: about
spies, sabotage, and even supposed sightings of German aircraft and submarines. The labour movement, already disaffected by rising prices and declining wages, angry at official authoritarianism and repression, and influenced by radical and even revolutionary ideology, was increasingly cynical about whose interests were being served by the war. And fear of Japan, which figured across the political spectrum and among various shades of opinion about the war and conscription, might have intensified, placing additional pressure on governments to attend to home defence rather than sending resources to Europe and the Middle East. Australia was a fearful, inward-looking place by the end of 1918; it might have been even more so, if the war had extended for much longer.

Perhaps, even if victory had come – as it surely would have done eventually – Australians would recall the war very differently; less in terms of an ANZAC Legend forged at Gallipoli, and the Australian contribution to the victory on the Western Front in 1918. Possibly, the dominant note would have been national exhaustion, even a sense of having let the Allied side down. At any rate, a different history is likely to have shaped a different kind of collective remembering.

The centenary of the last year of the war has spawned a sense of national triumphalism. If the centenary of Gallipoli was a celebration of the ordinary soldier as secular saint, the centenary of 1918 has been the year of Monash and ‘his’ victories in France: a $100 million ‘cutting-edge multimedia’ Sir John Monash Centre at Villers-Bretonneux calls for Monash to be posthumously made a Field-Marshall (rejected by the government); even preposterous claims from a former military lawyer and serving Labor politician, Mike Kelly, that Monash’s skill as a commander revolutionised modern warfare, saved thousands of Australian lives, and ‘ended the war earlier’. And with a reminder that no edifice is too extravagant for Australia’s ANZAC heroes, the Director of the Australian War Memorial soon chimed in with announcement of a bid for a new tunnel to be constructed under the building – at a possible cost to taxpayers of half a billion dollars – to facilitate expansion of its exhibition space (and, he argued, contribute therapeutically to welfare of returned service personnel).

Australia’s spending on the centenary was already approaching $600 million and so likely greater than the expenditure of all other belligerent nations combined. Yet, the centenary’s grand scale was certainly not matched by the quality of historical appraisal or public education. Indeed, there is reason to suspect that the sheer volume of activity in 2015, in particular, induced boredom and ANZAC or ‘Gallipoli fatigue’. Public controversies – and therefore public attention – have increasingly been showered on Australia Day, 26 January, with the result that interest in 25 April has flagged. The elisions that modern ANZAC Day has been promoted to effect – the artful forgetting that it was a war in defence of a White Australia within the British Empire – have in this way returned to haunt Australian commemorative culture, rather as they continue to haunt post-imperial settler society.

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**End Notes**

1. Fumley Maurice (Frank Wilmot), To God: From the Weary Nations, Australasian Authors Agency, Melbourne, 1917.


9. Ibid.


12. Ibid., ch. 10.

13. Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the
There are twenty-seven young Afghan men that come to our makeshift school in the afternoon.
At first I battle to tell them apart; the Mohammads, Alis and Ali Rezas.

Today is their third day
the guard brings me three
sixteen- and seventeen-year-old boys.
We sit in the demountable
by the whir of an ancient air conditioner.
On the window painted wire
forms thin bars.

We look at
letter sounds and names
pronouns, proper nouns, conjunctives.
They are struggling
to form the ‘n’ sound, so I show them
a little self-consciously
how my tongue is positioned
behind my teeth.
The students try,
furrow their brows and try again
until the strange task
has us eye to eye, laughing
in one language.

Suddenly they seem so close
the blood and breath of them.
I look toward Ali and see the shape
of his eyebrows
notice the way they thicken then disperse
when lit by the light from the window.

I witness the wounds crudely stitched
that run up Mohammed’s arm
until the strange task
has us eye to eye, laughing
in one language.

I inhale the warmth of Mussa
his scent of cigarettes, spice and sweat.

The music teacher arrives
with drums, CDs and a whiteboard marker.
Together the students sing,
‘I am, you are, we are Australian’.
I turn and quickly leave the room.

From the collection The Sky Runs Right Through Us, published by UWAP, February 2018.

RENEE PETTITT-SCHIPP,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
‘The Tragic Pageant of War’: ANZAC commemoration in 1917 and 1918

Mark Cryle

Australia’s first ANZAC Day commemoration in April 1916 has attracted the attention of a number of historians and has been subject to a wide variety of interpretations. Rather less has been written about the subsequent commemorations during the war years. By 1917, public sensibilities were changing and social divisions were widening, especially in the wake of the conscription debates. ANZAC Day in 1917 and 1918 were less a salve to the wounds which fractured Australia, than it was a symptom of them. While the commemoration was rarely, if ever, critiqued, it lost meaning for that significant portion of the population who did not endorse conscription, resisted enlistment and who felt increasingly disillusioned, exhausted and ambivalent, not to say hostile, to the nation’s war effort and its effects.

It was January 1917, and the debate was lively – another meeting, another smoke-filled room, another failure to achieve consensus around the vexed matter of a national day of commemoration. Like their fellow Australians still in the grip of a long and bloody war, delegates at the Queensland Branch Conference of the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union were weighing up the merits or otherwise of endorsing one particular public holiday out of the many being mooted.

The debate, as recorded in the Worker, is enlightening insofar as it gives insights into the preferences and values of this sub-group of Australians. The celebration of Christmas and Easter presented no problem, and neither did New Year’s Day. Eight Hours Day (Labour Day) was, unsurprisingly for this group, strongly favoured, while the Irish heritage of many in attendance was underlined by the suggestion that St Patrick’s Day be a day of choice. As the debate ebbed and flowed, one voice was heard to propose ANZAC Day – first commemorated eight months earlier in April 1916. The suggestion was rejected by another delegate in no uncertain terms. For him, the celebration of ANZAC Day would serve to perpetuate the present war. He proposed, in its place, the commemoration of 28th October, the date in 1916 when Australians voted against the introduction of conscription – ‘Anti-Conscription Day’. Another spoke out saying that he had no intention of commemorating ANZAC Day ‘and had never encouraged anyone else to do so’ (Worker 25 January 1917: 15).

The debate, as recorded in the Worker, begs the question: How was it that this remembrance, conceived, according to one of its most prominent historians, as a day of mourning, an ‘ecumenical requiem’ for departed soldiers and ‘an act of piety to honour the nation’s fallen’ (Moses and Davis 2013: 34, 86) could be so controversial and spark such vigorous opposition?

In contemporary Australia, ANZAC Day is the pre-eminent national commemoration. It combines the reverent acknowledgement of a century of war service by the nation’s veterans with a celebration of those putative national characteristics which have, according to the national mythology, been demonstrated on the battle front – mateship, egalitarianism, courage, endurance and larrikinism. Yet ANZAC Day was not conceived in a neutral political space. Debates around the preferred date of any national day have always been inextricably linked to questions around the re-defining of national identity (Firth 1970: 21). Notwithstanding the Barrier Miner’s claims that ‘there is nothing political about the ANZAC service’, (28 April 1917: 4,) the day had quickly become an occasion to reinforce an ideological position around recruitment and conscription and to affirm the politics of what was to become the Nationalist Party. The commemoration was the work of influential groups of politicians, clergymen and military personnel whose purpose was twofold – to publicly acknowledge and manage the tragic human cost of the war and, somewhat paradoxically, to promote ongoing commitment to the struggle on the home front. By late 1916, the latter imperative had been increasingly thwarted in Australia. Since the outbreak of war in August 1914, public sensibilities had changed and social divisions had widened, especially in the wake of the conscription debates. As one newspaper noted in April 1918, the
nation’s attitudes to war were no longer as they had been when ‘the public mind … was not … [yet] … dulled by the endless impressions of the tragic pageant of war’ (The Leader, 27 April 1918: 33). Simply put, the years 1917 and 1918 did not see ANZAC Day commemorations attracting the kind of bipartisan support that they have since attained a century on.

The ANZAC commemoration event itself was bedevilled by its multiple and often inherently contradictory imperatives, the most palpable of which was its commemoration of the war dead at the same time as promoting recruiting. Australian politics and society during this period was characterised by increasingly disparate and irreconcilable voices (Beaumont 1995, 2013; Evans 1987; Lake 1975) which ANZAC Day failed to accommodate. Its effect on Australia was more divisive than unifying, in that commemoration served to widen the political and social fissures in Australian society caused by the war rather than to heal them.

It is hardly surprising that historians have given more critical attention to the very first ANZAC Day than to the second or the third. John Moses, the most prolific author on the organisational origins of the first commemoration in April 1916, has, in a number of publications, stressed the role of Queensland’s ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee (ADCC) led by Anglican clergyman Canon David Garland (Moses 1993, 1999, 2002, 2008; Moses and Davis 2013). Moses says little about what happened at the 1917 and 1918 commemorations, however, other than noting that ADCC continued to make recommendations and to record the conduct of the ceremonies and that the day continued to gain traction nationally (2013: 177, 285).

The misleading idea that continuity of commemorative practices was a feature of the last two years of war is evident elsewhere. John Robertson, while outlining some features of the 1917 and 1918 commemorations, emphasises their continuity of purpose with the inaugural one, noting the ‘momentum’ which the commemoration acquired, while asserting that its ‘pre-eminence as a national event had yet to be charted’(1990: 248). Tanja Luckins, too, has addressed the psycho-social aspects of the 1917 and 1918 commemorations, focusing on the events as occasions for the expression of public grief and arguing that ‘mourning continued to be the dominant tone of the day’(2004: 95). Joan Beaumont has widened the focus, examining both ANZAC rhetoric and rites in 1917 to conclude that the former was ‘a similar mix to 1916: triumphalism and exhortations to the population for ongoing sacrifice, intertwined with individual grief’, while the latter ‘seem still to have been fluid and improvised at the local level’. Beaumont then emphasises recruiting initiatives at the 1918 event, going on to describe that commemoration as ‘especially sober because of events on the Western front’ (2013: 307-8, 421).

Other studies, by contrast, have suggested that the dynamics of ANZAC commemoration did shift in significant ways after 1916. Stephen Garton, for example, notes that enthusiasm for ANZAC Day waned after the Armistice (1996: 67). Alastair Thomson makes a similar point, arguing that it was not until the mid-1920s that the commemoration began to re-establish itself and regain national prominence (2013: 150). It is Raymond Evans’s study of the Queensland home front, however, which most clearly asserts that it was not simply a case of ‘business as usual’ in 1917 and 1918. Evans notes waning enthusiasm for ANZAC Day earlier than Garton or Thomson suggest – in the remaining war years in fact – citing an eye-witness account of the 1918 Toowoomba commemoration and noting that ‘loyalist enthusiasm had fallen to the level of mere pantomime’ (1987: 40, 143).

ANZAC Day speakers delivered a clear message that all ‘eligibles’ should enlist and that the vote against conscription was a disloyal travesty – two sides of the same rhetorical coin. The ‘loyalist’ message, voiced by those who urged total commitment to, and greater sacrifice for, the war effort was central to commemoration in 1916. In the following years however, that rhetoric lost its power to engage the broad sweep of the Australian public, with the effect of ‘un-fixing’ ANZAC as a discursive rallying point. Thus ANZAC Day in 1917 and 1918 were less a salve to the wounds which fractured Australia than it was a symptom of them. While it is rare to discover the type of public critique recorded in the pages of the Worker as noted above, ANZAC Day lost meaning for that significant portion of the population who did not endorse conscription, who resisted enlistment and who felt increasingly disillusioned, exhausted and ambivalent, not to say hostile in relation to the nation’s war effort and its effects.

At the time of the above-mentioned debate, the nation was riven by deep social and political divisions, with commemoration failing to unify its people. Rather, commemoration had become symptomatic of those divisions, providing an outlet for the rhetoric of loyalist pro-war conservatives increasingly embittered by the defeat of the conscription plebiscites in 1916 and 1917 and the virtual collapse of voluntary enlistment. While the pews at ANZAC Day church services remained filled to overflowing, the attendance at civic commemorations fell in comparison with 1916 – a signal that, by 1917, a significant portion of the population had felt alienated from ANZAC Day events. Put another way, the fault lines created by ideological, class and sectarian tensions were not repaired, but rather reinforced by ANZAC
commemoration. The galvanising of the nation in the struggle to win the war remained a primary message of the commemoration. ANZAC Day rhetoric came as a package. It allowed no space for those who needed to grieve for and honour lost loved ones and yet were exhausted by, sceptical of, or disillusioned about the nation’s role in the war.

At commemorations in 1917 and 1918 ANZAC Day’s ‘healing’ imperatives were frequently trumped by the perceived need to boost enlistments. Despite the inordinate degree of social pressure placed upon ‘eligibles’ to rally to the flag and replace the casualties, voluntary enlistment maintained a consistent downward trajectory throughout 1916, 1917 and 1918. As they had done in 1916, recruiters used ANZAC Day as a tool, evidenced in the familiar eulogising of the achievements of the Australian Imperial Force and ongoing mobilisation around the war effort. A significant addition, however, was the chimera of unity behind the cause and an entreaty to the populace to do ‘nothing unworthy’ of the ANZACs.

The rhetorical edifice was beginning to show cracks – fault-lines of contestation – central to which was the implication that voting against conscription had, in fact, been an act ‘unworthy’ of the Australian troops at the front – the diggers as they were popularly known. Speaking at the Brisbane ANZAC Day meeting in Exhibition Hall, Governor-General Ronald Munro-Ferguson told his audience: ‘A nation will go up higher or go down lower by the simple test of the response made by her sons to the tap of drum and by her daughters to the call for national service’ (Brisbane Courier, 26 April 1917: 9). In neither Munro-Ferguson’s ANZAC Day proclamations nor those of Prime Minister William Hughes was there recognition of loss and trauma, though in 1918 Hughes did request that churches conduct services on the day.

After a second electoral defeat for conscription in 1917, the calls from the federal government and the military for more recruits became increasingly urgent in the wake of the success of the German Spring offensive in March 1918. The timing, for ANZAC Day, was propitious. Both Defence Minister, George Pearce, and Recruiting Minister, Richard Orchard, released ANZAC Day statements in 1918 stressing the need for more men and eschewing any reference to remembrance of lives lost in the cause (Age, 26 April 1918: 17). Once again Munro-Ferguson, in his message, made a call to arms, devoid of any expression of lament or of any acknowledgement of the pain of loved ones. The bereaved were merely enjoined to continue their efforts towards ongoing mobilisation at the home front. The Governor-General stated outright that ANZAC Day would be an ‘empty celebration, unworthy of the day we commemorate if unattended by a great improvement in recruiting’ (Age, 25 April 1918: 6).

In their urgency to deploy ANZAC Day in the work of enlistment, it was as if the nation’s political leaders had forgotten one of the commemoration’s fundamental imperatives. Unsurprisingly, local ANZAC Day speakers echoed the same sentiments at their events. In 1917, prominent Cairns lawyer, A.J.P. MacDonnell, told his audience: ‘We should not lament for the dead. We should lament for those people who are fit to go and who are lagging behind their mother’s apron strings’ (Northern Herald, 27 April 1917: 54). New South Wales’s champion recruiter, Captain Ambrose Carmichael, spoke at the Tamworth ANZAC Day event in 1918, telling the audience that:

His sympathies did not go out so much to the men and women who had sent their boys and had lost them. His sympathies were with those who had sons who could but did not go. He congratulated the parents of those boys who had fallen at the front (Daily Observer, 26 April 1918: 5).

Clearly the Day’s imperatives had shifted from where they were in 1916. The needs of the bereaved were largely ignored here. This was almost exclusively about mobilisation of the home front and a far cry from Garland’s grand vision of an ‘All Souls Day’ to which John Moses refers (2008: 5-6).

At recruiting rallies during 1917 and 1918, Gallipoli remained an instrument of political rhetoric invoked as the cause célèbre, with a call to arms continuing to be the primary message of most wartime ANZAC Day events. National recruiting conferences were held in Melbourne in April 1917 and again in April 1918, each producing declarations of the importance of ANZAC Day in the national recruiting endeavours (Register, 5 April 1917: 8). Commemorations in 1917 and 1918 were an occasion for the familiar parade of recruiting appeals witnessed in earlier times. In Brisbane, a ‘recruiting tramcar’ followed the march in 1917 bearing the messages ‘100 Passengers Wanted’ and ‘Coo-ee – All Men This Way’ (Daily Mail, 26 April 1917: 7). At other events, horses were led with empty saddles, sometimes by women, while men were invited to fill them (Argus, 28 April 1917: 18; Geelong Advertiser, 13 April 1917: 2; Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer, 18 May 1917: 2). It was an invitation that many continued to feel free to refuse.

Some ANZAC Day rallies had all the hallmarks of revivalist evangelical gatherings. An account of the event in Maitland in 1918 is particularly instructive in this respect. The Maitland Weekly Mercury reported that, after an introduction by the mayor and the singing of patriotic songs, Miss Evans was given the platform. ‘Do you know that we have the enemy in our midst to-day', she
trumpeted. ‘Let us wake up and face these people. We cannot prevent the war but we can prevent defeat’. The next speaker was Private McFarland, who noted that he had been a union organiser before the war but now, as ‘repentant sinner’, had shifted his loyalties:

‘Is there an eligible in the crowd’, he appealed, ‘who will come along and help my mates on the other side’. Immediately there was a response, amidst a scene of great cheering. Mr. Bradshaw, who was seated at the piano, struck up a patriotic tune, and during the excitement, another young man stepped forward towards the platform (4 May 1918: 9).

The inclusion of a female speaker at this event is telling. Typically, women were conspicuous by their absence from the speakers’ platform at ANZAC Day commemorations, yet the influence of attractive young females in getting young men to don the uniform was well-appreciated by recruiters. It was an indication that recruiters were prepared to pull out all stops to boost their figures. Moreover, it was a sign that the distinctions between ANZAC Day and any other recruiting rally had become increasingly blurred.

Elsewhere, rejected volunteers were asking to be allowed to march with the soldiers. One correspondent wrote to the *Brisbane Courier* in April 1917: ‘If the authorities will grant us this small favour, the general public will be able to see who are the real shirkers, as no doubt, on such an occasion, even men who have volunteered are looked on with much scorn’ (*Brisbane Courier*, 13 April 1917: 7). Implicit in this request is an appreciation that the ‘eligibles’ were likely to be ‘looked on with scorn’ at an ANZAC Day commemoration. As a loyal supporter of the war, the correspondent in question needed to identify himself clearly at an ANZAC Day parade as one who was a ‘supporter’ of the event and not an ‘opponent’. In similar vein, the Mayor of Wagga Wagga, Alderman Oates, while recruiting at an ANZAC commemoration in Sydney in 1917, vigorously confronted, berated and harangued ‘eligibles’ in the crowd because they declined to enlist immediately. The situation almost descended into violence and recruiters had to be restrained (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1917: 8).

ANZAC Day commemoration was clearly no place for those who might feel in any way ambivalent about rallying to the flag. That said, the question of whom or what Australians should ‘recognise’ as an enemy was a vexed and divisive one. The notion of the ‘enemy in our midst’, as espoused by the speaker in Maitland, shatters any illusion of national unity around ANZAC commemoration. Speakers at these events acknowledged division. Participants recognised it and indeed, it seems, enforced it with moral coercion. ANZAC Day in 1917 and 1918 were no place for a fit-looking, healthy male out of uniform or one who did not wear his badge of allegiance in one form or another.

Gallipoli continued to be mobilised in a political struggle against those who had opposed conscription. The debates around two failed conscription plebiscites in 1916 and 1917 polarised the nation and descended into rancour, hysteria and public violence. The legacy of this polarity was such that the cause of voluntary enlistment could no longer be espoused in anything approaching a milieu of respect and tolerant acknowledgement of political difference. Rather, it turned into a witch hunt, with ANZAC Day becoming a strategic weapon in that rhetorical assault. The day was now an occasion for public recriminations and the passing of moral judgments about the nation’s choices on that issue in 1916 and in 1917.

Most ANZAC Day spokespersons adopted an unequivocal position on conscription. From the editorial column, the platform and the pulpit, conscription’s advocates hurled invective at those who had chosen to actively oppose it and, by implication, all of those who had voted against it. For loyalists, the memory of conscription’s defeat was etched indelibly in their political consciousness. One Melbourne newspaper, in its ANZAC Day editorial, sought to analyse the causes of the defeat of the conscription plebiscite in these terms: ‘We know that the cause was due to political prejudices, to selfish unconcern, to covert and active disloyalty, and to the craven fear of those who dreaded the personal risks of war’ (*Leader*, 4 May 1918: 31). Those who had trailed the Australian flag in the ‘mud of shame’ or who felt ‘craven fear’ of the risks that fighting involved (*National Leader*, Brisbane, 20 April 1917: 5), would likely be absent from any event in which they were so castigated.

Such invective, of course, made no allowance for the fact that a significant proportion of serving men in the AIF voted against conscription. Indeed, Keith Murdoch reported to Hughes that voting on the front of Europe was three to one against conscription and that the army’s majority had been carried by troops in the Middle East, further behind the lines in Europe and in training in England (Robson 1970: 119). The high-handed moral judgements around conscription passed down by ANZAC Day speakers made no allowance for the complexities of the issues which informed the votes in 1916 and in 1917. Nor did they allow for expressions of compassion or support for those who grieved for loved ones killed and maimed in battle.

ANZAC Day attacks on anti-conscriptionists were more than matched by censorious moral judgements about the ‘cold-footed slackers’ and ‘selfish, soulless
The bipartisan political support which ANZAC Day attracts was appropriated by the forces of pro-war loyalists to pursue words, ANZAC Day in 1917 and 1918 were thoroughly and politicians delivering the judgements. In other not firmly aligned with the pressmen, preachers, teachers little space discursively for consoling the bereaved or indulgent and immoral. There were no grey areas and virtuous and noble. Not doing so was cowardly, selfish, moral binary. Fighting for the nation and the empire was articulation of an unmitigated and definitive political and this discourse. ANZAC Day was an occasion for the derision. There was nothing inviting or inclusive about to volunteer could expect to be subject to censure and sixty percent of eligible Australian men who chose not to partake fully in the prosecution of the war was deemed to be a moral failing and an abrogation of all that ANZAC had come to represent.

The decision to vote against conscription and/or not to enlist was held to be a disavowal of all that was righteous and decent about the ANZACs’ achievements. Such pronouncements continued to be delivered at ANZAC Day events in 1918. In Adelaide, Senior Chaplain Ashley Teece repeated what was by now a familiar theme when he told the audience at the commemoration that: ‘He did not mourn with those whose relatives were dead; he rather mourned with those who, having sons with no legitimate hindrance, refused the challenge of their country and declined to serve her’ (Advertiser: 26 April 1918, 7). Thus dismissed, those less than fully committed to the nation’s war aims could be castigated while their families were pitied.

ANZAC Day was thus an occasion to deliver and reaffirm moral lessons about appropriate forms of patriotic behaviour. Had they attended ANZAC Day commemorations – either civil or in church services – the sixty percent of eligible Australian men who chose not to volunteer could expect to be subject to censure and derision. There was nothing inviting or inclusive about this discourse. ANZAC Day was an occasion for the articulation of an unmitigated and definitive political and moral binary. Fighting for the nation and the empire was virtuous and noble. Not doing so was cowardly, selfish, indulgent and immoral. There were no grey areas and little space discursively for consoling the bereaved or managing the grief of any whose ideological position was not firmly aligned with the pressmen, preachers, teachers and politicians delivering the judgements. In other words, ANZAC Day in 1917 and 1918 were thoroughly appropriated by the forces of pro-war loyalists to pursue their own ends.

The bipartisan political support which ANZAC Day attracts now was conspicuously absent a century ago. After the failure of the first conscription plebiscite, the Labor Party split in January 1917. Hughes took twenty-three of his parliamentary supporters with him, joined with the conservatives and formed the National Party, which he led to the polls four months later. As a consequence, ANZAC Day 1917, which preceded the federal election by less than two weeks was much more a ‘Nationalist’ event than it was a national one. The day lacked a convincing, affirming rhetoric of national cohesion. As the self-proclaimed, ‘win-the-war party’, the Nationalists saw and took an opportunity to campaign for the electoral defeat of Labor from the podium at ANZAC Day events. In Fremantle on 25 April 1917, Defence Minister George Pearce made the day the centrepiece of a campaign speech. Now, like other conservatives, he insisted that Labor was responsible for the ‘party politics’ which impeded the nation’s full commitment to the war (Daily News, 26 April 1917: 6). Manifestly, neither Pearce nor his Nationalist colleagues had sought an end to party differences. Rather, they sought the defeat of Labor at the polls and invoked and appropriated the ANZAC story to achieve that end.

Condemnation of Labor was not limited to Nationalist candidates. The conservative press also used ANZAC Day to point accusing fingers at the labour movement, with many ANZAC Day editorials in 1917 featuring stinging attacks (Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April 1917: 10; Cairns Post, 25 April 1917: 4; Daily Advertiser 26 April 1917: 2). Clergymen speaking at ANZAC Day events likewise joined in the campaign to impugn Labor’s role during the conscription campaigns. (National Leader 27 April 1917: 5).

While its opponents sought to position the labour movement as oppositional to ANZAC, labour and the working class had to deal with the difficult matter of how they positioned themselves. The labour movement, along with Australian society in general, polarised during the 1916 conscription referendum, and the gap widened further throughout 1917. Mounting working-class radicalisation and militancy brought even greater division between the parliamentary and industrial wings of the movement (Bollard 2006: 77). While some Labor politicians continued to speak on ANZAC Day platforms and endorse the day’s values, most did not. Trade union representatives too, absented themselves.

In some working-class areas, the turnout at commemorations was minimal. In Port Adelaide, in 1917, the Mayor complained about the poor attendance at the town hall for the civic commemoration. He then went on to heavily endorse the ‘win-the-war’ Party for the forthcoming election, stating that ‘if the opposition had nothing better to advance than their anti-conscription ideals, they should be anti-conscripted out of the state’ (Advertiser, 26 April
1917: 9). However, Labor was well-supported in the Adelaide electorate which retained this district in the 1917 federal election, despite losses at the polls elsewhere. In a working-class area with such political leanings, many chose to ‘vote with their feet’ when their local conservative mayor was known to be running the ceremony.

Port Pirie was another Australian Workers Union-dominated, industrial town with a population of over nine thousand in 1917 and an ‘honour’ list which included eighty ‘fallen’ men (Eklund 2012: 143-4). Yet, there was little effort to enact a commemoration there in 1917, apart from a small memorial service held in the town hall (Port Pirie Recorder and Northwestern Mail, 26 April 1917: 1). The Kalgoorlie Miner, which served a town with a similar demographic, noted that (a mere) several hundred gathered for their 1918 commemoration, from a total population of close to eight thousand. In Broken Hill the conservative daily, the Barrier Miner, passed ironic comment on the lack of numbers at the 1917 commemoration (Barrier Miner, 29 April 1917: 3). Five hundred were in attendance, including school children who had little choice in the matter, from a town with a population of over 27,000 (Smith 1920: 110). Put simply, ANZAC Day commemorations, when they took place in mining towns and port areas, often lacked community and trade union support and appear to have been the preserve of a minority of loyalist pro-war conservatives who chose to defiantly fly their flag of allegiance in the face of local apathy or even hostility.

Others were half in the embrace of ANZAC Day without committing to all that it encompassed. Some smaller labour groups organised their own separate commemorations on ANZAC Day in 1917 and 1918. They did not ignore the commemoration but rather chose to engage with those elements in it which matched their needs. Unionists had lost friends and loved ones on the killing fields and they shared that grief communally. Doubtless these occasions were devoid of the loyalist hoopla which accompanied the ‘official’ events. Adelaide’s labour newspaper, the Daily Herald, recorded a small ANZAC Day gathering of clerical and labouring staff in the Government Stores in 1917 (Daily Herald, 26 April 1917: 7). Likewise, railwaymen in Peters burg, South Australia, took part in a small commemoration in the locomotive sheds on the same day (Petersburg Times, 4 May 1917: 2). In 1918, South Australian railway workers held a similar event at Wallaroo (Register, 27 April 1918: 9). They had their heroes to honour and their dead to mourn. By virtue of its overt politicisation, however, official ANZAC Day ceremonies held no appeal to citizens who sought a community of the like-minded with whom to share their grief and to honour and to pay their respects to the dead. Such a community was not to be found within the increasingly shrewl pro-loyalist camp. Public engagement with ANZAC Day, as the national day, actually declined after 1916. On the whole, the numbers attending fell in comparison with 1916 (Cryle 2016). Crowds tended, understandably, to be less enthusiastic about the patriotic pomp and ceremony and more reflective on the damage done. The event did not attain a primacy on the commemorative calendar nationally, nor did governments endorse it as a public holiday. Moreover, many sought their own smaller memorial observances away from the dither of heavily-orchestrated official pro-war civic events, showing a preference for forms of ANZAC commemoration and memorialising of the war dead in which loyalist pro-war oratory was conspicuously absent. It follows that, despite the rhetoric which surrounded it, the commemoration lost impetus as a genuinely national civic event through 1917 and 1918 as it struggled to meet the demands placed upon it by the mounting stresses of war. While it may have remained an occasion for the public acknowledgement of grief and loss, ANZAC commemoration was viewed by many as just another in a range of patriotic events organised by those who sought to promote an increasingly politically divisive war.

ANZAC Day, by 1918, would continue to be a work in progress. While 25 April’s status as an iconic date in Australia was well-established, the occasion was no closer to being a cohesive national observance than it had been in 1916. Indeed, in the years since the commemoration’s inception, it had shifted further from that point rather than closer to it. Thus while ANZAC Day was not peripheral by 1918, it was certainly multi-faceted and increasingly divisive. In combining solemn acknowledgement of the war dead with recruiting, underpinned by unapologetic militarism and frequently leavened with carnivalesque fund-raising, ANZAC Day failed to bind the nation’s wounds. Many circled the day on their calendars and acknowledged its significance, commemorating it in their own way. Still others were alienated from the patriotic clamour and obsequious deference to empire which surrounded the occasion. They were alienated too by the recrimination and bickering around conscription and enlistment that were pervasive at the time. By 1918, then, 25 April had morphed from an occasion that embraced a range of constituencies to one more narrowly committed to a particular ideology around the war. As a national unifier, the ‘one day of the year’ was still awaiting its day of arrival.

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The pain of war of war is communicated from these Somme survivors to another generation of soldiers (Photo by David Newell-Smith/GNM Archive/The Observer/The Guardian).
Family History, Great War Memory and the ANZAC Revival

CAROLYN HOLBROOK

Various explanations have been given for the revival of ANZAC commemoration since the 1990s. Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds and others have identified the propagandising role of the state, while Christina Twomey has described the increasing salience of narratives of trauma and suffering, which allow war commemoration to ‘speak’ in the contemporary idiom. More recently, Jim McKay has detailed the inadequacies of the state-driven narrative and attributed the ANZAC resurgence to a complex set of transnational factors, including battlefield tourism. This article argues that none of these explanations reaches sufficiently far back to explain a revival whose origins are discernible in the 1970s. It shows how the international trend for genealogy and family history led Australians to take an interest in their soldier ancestors, and how these intimate and sympathetic histories from the Great War were the foundation stones upon which ANZAC 2.0 was raised. The article argues that the grounding of the re-born Anzac legend in the personal and prosaic offers some protection against the buffeting of political and commercial headwinds.

In 1965, a group of 300 Australian and New Zealand veterans of the First World War travelled to Turkey for the fiftieth anniversary of the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915. The ‘Gallipoli pilgrimage’, as it was known, was organised by the Returned and Services League and sponsored to the tune of £20,000 by the Menzies Government. The late historian, Ken Inglis, travelled with the elderly men and wrote vivid reports for the Canberra Times. One of the most striking moments, Inglis later recalled, was when ‘four young Australian hitch-hikers, two boys and two girls, in parkas and jeans’ appeared at Anzac Cove to greet the old diggers. The backpackers were ‘welcomed by the old men as unexpected evidence that some young Australians cared about the ANZAC tradition. They were the only people on the beach, moreover, who actually displayed excitement’.

If the ageing travellers of 1965 could have returned three decades later, when thousands of globe-trotting backpackers huddled in the freezing dawn at Anzac Cove, they would have been in no doubt that ‘young Australians cared’ – though perhaps they would have been sceptical about the nature of the new-found interest. Such was the appetite to attend the centenary dawn service in 2015, that the Australian Government was compelled to limit attendees to 10,000 people, the majority of whom were chosen by public ballot. The winners of the ballot joined the prime minister and other dignitaries at Anzac Cove on 25 April 2015 for a dawn service that was streamed live to an audience of millions back in Australia.

From the perspective of 2018, one of the most enduring and significant legacies of the Great War is the role that its memory occupies in the national mythology. Australia Day is increasingly bedevilled by calls to change the date (#changethedate), given the difficulty its celebration on 26 January presents to Indigenous Australians. ANZAC Day on the other hand becomes ever more influential according to measures such as attendance at dawn services, battlefield tourism, commercial exploitation and political sponsorship. Australia is spending more than any other nation on Great War commemoration during the centenary, including the major combatants. The Honest History network estimates the Australian expenditure alone to be approximately $552 million.

This article focuses on what might be described as ANZAC 2.0; the transformed version of the ANZAC legend that emerged following the commemorative malaise of the 1960s and 1970s. It weighs the various explanations that have been given by scholars for the ANZAC revival, from political sponsorship and battlefield tourism to geopolitics and the rise of trauma culture. The article argues that insufficient credit is given in these biographies of ANZAC 2.0 to the role of family historians, and it seeks to reassert the ways in which the highly personal, sympathetic and multifaceted accounts of the war produced by family historians have influenced contemporary ANZAC commemoration.
Top-down Explanations for the Anzac Revival and their Limitations

The claim that the revival of ANZAC commemoration is due to political sponsorship and indoctrination – ‘the militarisation of Australian history’ has been highly influential. This explanation was most forcefully expounded by Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, Joy Damousi, Mark McKenna and Carina Donaldson in What’s Wrong with Anzac?6

Published in 2010, the book argued that Australian history is overly weighted towards military themes, and that this martial bias comes at the expense of subjects such as the dispossession of Aborigines and late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century achievements in social welfare and industrial arbitration. The authors claimed that government has been the prime mover behind this emphasis, principally through its funding of educational materials produced by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, which have served to indoctrinate in young Australians a militaristic and politically conservative view of the past. The authors also argued that funding to institutions such as the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives for the digitisation of personnel records has created a nexus between family, military and nationalist history. Most alarmingly, What’s Wrong with Anzac? claimed that the obsession with military history was used by politicians to justify Australian incursions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A variation of the political explanation for the revival of ANZAC emphasises Australia’s place within the global community over domestic political considerations. Scholars have noted the increasingly anti-British tone of representations of the Great War during the 1970s and 1980s. Daniel Reynaud, Jenny Macleod and others have written about the manifestation of this anti-British feeling in films such as Peter Weir’s acclaimed 1981 film, Gallipoli.7

According to James Curran and Stuart Ward, the cultural repudiation of Britishness evident in the ‘New Nationalism’ of the late 1960s and 1970s was a reaction to Britain’s pivot away from its former empire towards Europe.8 In Australia’s search for a post-imperial identity, this line of reasoning contends, the state crafted a new version of ANZAC drained of its former emphasis on loyalty to the British empire. As Mark McKenna has written:

With Anzac’s Imperial origins receding from public memory, the legend could now be refashioned as the Bastille Day or Fourth of July Australia never had, the day which cut Australia adrift from its Imperial past in one fell, heroic swoop…9

Andy Mycock, Shanti Sumartojo and Ben Wellings use a similar geopolitical analytic frame in the introduction to Nation, Memory and Commemoration. They argue that the social and political fragmentation caused by globalisation have required the state to examine new means of binding state and citizen, and that ‘[r]emembrance and commemoration play a part in this renewal of national narratives’.10 In the Australian context, Wellings notes that ANZAC has proved a more effective unifying device than multiculturalism, republicanism and Reconciliation, while simultaneously supplementing Australia’s middle power diplomacy, given the growing trade in ‘trench tourism’.11

State-driven explanations for the revival of ANZAC have not been without their critics. Graeme Davison has questioned the assumption by historians that the public rituals of ANZAC Day are a clue to private sentiments, given that people think ‘ “upwards” only intermittently, and sometimes unwillingly from the private domain of home and family’.12 Anna Clark’s recent work on the historical consciousness of ordinary Australians also casts doubt on ‘top-down’ accounts. In a series of conversations with community groups around Australia, Clark found that impressions of ANZAC are far from settled and uniform: she reported ‘considerable disagreement and debate about [ANZAC’s] meaning on the ground’. Her conclusion that ‘the Anzac legacy has generated a commemorative space more complex and uncertain than public and official demonstrations of Anzac pride’ suggests that official pronunciations are refracted through the subjective experiences of their audience.13 In the case of ANZAC, these subjective refractions might be the private family memories of a Great War descendant, or the grief of personal loss or misfortune transposed onto the tragedy of the Great War. Clark found that interest in ANZAC was mediated to a large degree by personal connections, though a personal connection did not necessarily indicate an uncritical engagement with ANZAC:

[M]oments of historical connection and inheritance are overwhelmingly personal. And they tend to occur when people can situate themselves and their own family or community stories within or alongside the public, national narrative in question. In other words, people’s engagement with the Australian story is framed by personal experience, rather than the overt presence of an innate, official, and abstract national history – hence the ancestral allure of Anzac.14

The self-interested nature of historical engagement reported by Clark suggests that there are limits to the effectiveness of state propagandising about matters such as ANZAC commemoration.

In questioning the veracity of ‘top-down’ explanations of the ANZAC revival, other scholars have highlighted the fallacy of assuming a direct line between the swathes of curriculum materials produced by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and their use in the classroom. The
sociologist Jim McKay has written that ‘teachers and students do not have messages about Anzac injected hypodermically into their brains from resources produced by the Department of Veterans DVA resources’, while Richard White has described the scepticism with which official sources are regarded:

“We cannot assume that [information] is simply absorbed sponge-like by audiences. Schools, media, personalities, and politicians are the least trusted about the past ... Far more faith is placed in sources that are less likely to promote a singularly national past: in family anecdotes, or books.”

The observations above about the limitations of the state-driven thesis are reflected in the research of sociologists Timothy Phillips and Philip Smith into understandings of ‘Australianness’. Phillips and Smith used data collected from six focus groups to show that Australians formed their understandings of national identity quite separately from official pronouncements. They found that ‘Australian values and ideals seem to be grounded in, and shaped, by everyday life, in popular culture, real individuals, real places and real community groups, rather than by the abstract ideals of political discourse.’ According to this logic, replicated in other studies, the ideas that people hold about the ANZAC legend are ‘located in personal experience and popular culture’.

The circumstances of the ANZAC resurgence confirm this interpretation. The stirrings of ANZAC 2.0 are discernible in the 1970s, a period when politicians were careful to distance themselves from ANZAC commemoration, given its controversial nature. In an interview in 2012, former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser expressed the lack of political interest in ANZAC: ‘In my time as prime minister if I’d gone to Anzac Cove for ANZAC Day, people would have said “What on earth is Fraser doing?”’

It was the decision of the Hawke Labor government to sponsor the 1990 return to Gallipoli by a group of elderly veterans that opened the floodgates of politically-sponsored commemoration of Australian war experience. That decision was only taken after it had become apparent that popular attitudes to ANZAC were changing.

According to the Hawke Government’s Defence Minister, Kim Beazley, the enthusiastic public response to the Vietnam Veterans’ Welcome Home march in Sydney in 1987 provided an important signal that the antagonism towards ANZAC commemoration that had characterised the 1970s and early 1980s was fading. Similarly, the great success of the 1990 pilgrimage to Gallipoli gave heart to Hawke’s successors, Paul Keating and John Howard, as they carved out an increasingly prominent role for the political commemoration of war.

Paul Keating’s prime ministership provides further evidence of the limits of ‘top-down’ explanations for the ANZAC revival. Keating sought to shift the emphasis of ANZAC commemoration from the Great War and Gallipoli, to the Pacific theatres of the Second World War. In a speech delivered in Port Moresby on Anzac Day in 1992, Keating claimed:

“The Australians who served here in Papua New Guinea fought and died not in defence of the old world, but the new world. Their world. They died in defence of Australia, and the civilisation and values which had grown up there. That is why it might be said that, for Australians, the battles in Papua New Guinea were the most important ever fought.”

Keating succeeded in increasing public interest in the Pacific campaigns of the Second World War, especially Kokoda. He failed, however, in his attempt to supplant Gallipoli in the public imagination with Kokoda. This failure corroborates the findings of Clark and others that the Australian public has an agency in ANZAC commemoration that ‘top-down’ explanations do not account for.

**Other Explanations**

An alternative to these ‘top-down’ explanations for the resurgence of ANZAC was provided by the historian Christina Twomey who declared in 2014 that its popularity was not evidence of the militarisation of history. She wrote:

“Australians will better understand the current embrace of ANZAC if we stop confusing it with a love of militarism. ANZAC is a mythology with its origins in the exploits of men at war, but there is little talk today of weakening enemies and soldiers as exemplars of military manhood.”

Instead, Twomey linked the revival of ANZAC commemoration with the increased salience of trauma in Western cultures: by the 1980s ‘the suffering of soldiers in war and the potential for them to be traumatised by it became a central trope in the public discussion of Anzac’, she wrote. By tempering tendencies towards glorification with reminders of the suffering caused by war, trauma culture has carved out an acceptable public ‘space’ in which ANZAC can be venerated.

Jim McKay has also been critical of the ‘militarisation of history thesis’, contesting its assumptions about the uninterrupted transmission of state propaganda to the public. McKay’s recent book about Transnational Tourism Experiences at Gallipoli claims that Lake et al.’s thesis in What’s Wrong with ANZACc? is ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically inadequate.
2018.29 not declined: the ‘Unlock the Past’ website lists more than the 1970s and a further 54 in the 1980s. Interest has instance, 36 new historical societies were established in Historical societies also prospered. In South Australia, for which grew tenfold during the 1970s and 1980s.27 was manifest in membership of genealogical societies, 1960s. The burgeoning Australian interest in family identity popularity of genealogy and family history beginning in the of a broader phenomenon, which saw a boom in the family history boom. 

Family History
While the trauma zeitgeist has provided a discourse within which the ANZAC legend can be accommodated into the cultural mainstream, the stirrings of the ANZAC resurgence were discernible before the language of suffering and vulnerability became commonplace.26 Similarly, Gallipoli battlefield tourism is a phenomenon that dates from the 1990s, twenty years after the family history-driven resurgence began. In order to understand the origins of ANZAC 2.0, it is necessary to examine the family history phenomenon.

The interest of family historians in the Great War is part of a broader phenomenon, which saw a boom in the popularity of genealogy and family history beginning in the 1960s. The burgeoning Australian interest in family identity was manifest in membership of genealogical societies, which grew tenfold during the 1970s and 1980s.27 Historical societies also prospered. In South Australia, for instance, 36 new historical societies were established in the 1970s and a further 54 in the 1980s.28 Interest has not declined: the ‘Unlock the Past’ website lists more than 400 Australian family history societies and organisations in 2018.29 In a reflection of the post-imperial, new nationalist mood of the 1970s, Anglo-Australians began revising their traditional reluctance to discuss the convict phase of their history; the success of contemporary Australian society could be submitted as evidence that the ‘birth stain’ of convictism was no more than a temporary blot. Family historians consulted transportation records and announced proudly the discovery of convict ancestors.

The attention of family historians soon turned to their relatives from the Great War, about whom a similar bounty of records awaited. Many of the 330,000 men who served overseas, most of whom were born in the 1880s and 1890s, were dead by the 1970s; those who remained were elderly and often frail. The records of the National Library of Australia catalogue attest to the fact that increasing numbers of descendants from the 1970s took the step of publishing – often self-publishing – the war experiences of their relatives. Twenty-five books under the category of ‘personal narratives’ of the Great War were published during the 1970s, compared to fifteen the previous decade. That number grew to 44 during the 1980s, 73 during the 1990s, and 76 during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Based on the 105 personal narratives published during the 2010s, the family history phenomenon continues to wax.30

ANZAC in Family History
The family history phenomenon began when the ANZAC legend was at its lowest ebb. In the wake of widespread opposition to the Vietnam War and in the midst of controversial feminist protests on Anzac Day, many Australians came to associate the commemoration of war with its glorification. Heroic or celebratory language was frowned upon, as were the attitudes towards race, gender and empire that sustained the Great War generation and the original form of the ANZAC legend. In the words of a correspondent to the Canberra Times, Anzac Day was ‘the one day of the year for the glorification of war and the poisoning of children’s minds with war pictures and heroes’ stories’.31 The modest and introspective family histories that began appearing in the 1970s did not challenge the atmosphere of apathy and hostility towards ANZAC.

Many of the early family historians were women who were motivated by an interest in genealogy, rather than an abiding interest in the Great War. They sought to leave a legacy of information for future generations. Claire Skelton, for instance, was motivated to self-publish In My Own Shadow because she believed that her grandfather’s war diary had become ‘a family treasure and a lasting gift to his descendants’.32 Narelle Wynn recorded her grandfather’s war experiences during a trip home from Britain in 1982. After self-publishing Behind the Lines in 1991, Wynn felt confident that her grandfather’s war stories ‘were now part of the Kerr/Wynn family history’; they would ‘be handed down from one generation to the next, and the memory of these courageous men will never die’.33 On occasions, the Great War was incidental to family historians’ desire to write an affirming history of their ancestor, in which the war was but one phase. A Letter From my Father emerged from Marcia Tanswell’s investigations into her family history: ‘Since retiring to Phillip Island (Victoria) I’ve been frantically busy with historical societies, research, writing, travelling and enjoying my son, four daughters, three grand-daughters and three grandsons’.34 The book is a record of her father’s life, rather than just his experience of war. It is replete with photographic records of Eric Carroll’s school years and family life, as well as his war service. Elizabeth Elson similarly painted on a broader canvas than the Great War. Dear Annie is an illustrated history of the Taylor family, a portion of which reprints correspondence between Jack and George Watson, both of whom were killed in France, and their cousin Annie Taylor in Melbourne.35
Implicit within family histories is an intimate and inward-looking account of the war; readers witness events from the perspective of the diaries, letters and recollections of men who were most often ordinary soldiers. Accounts are often mundane or prosaic. Frank Heerey’s involvement in a failed attack on Mouquet Farm on 2 September 1916 is described summarily in his diary: ‘Large number of casualties in brigade. Fritz put a lot of big stuff down the gully through the day’.36 The attack had devastated the 52nd Battalion, which lost one third of its men to death and injury. A couple of days later, Heerey wrote: ‘Stayed all day in Albert, very quiet. Went over to find out about the boys in 62nd, no bon, several killed & missing. Played bridge during the day, very quiet’.37 Heerey’s son observed of his father’s taciturn attitude: ‘To a reader from our self-obsessed age, it is startling how brief notes of YMCA concerts, cards and just “loafing” are interspersed unremarkedly with references to heavy shelling by “Fritz” and the death of mates’.38

Apart from their tendency towards the prosaic, another defining feature of family histories is their highly idiosyncratic perspective on the Great War. The letters and diaries on which they are typically based contain very little military history. Censorship, as well as the emotional predilections of the soldiers, demanded that the letters include scant information about where soldiers were stationed, what action they were involved in and how the war was progressing. Family histories are anathema to traditional, martially-focused war history. There is little reference in family histories of what fine fighting men the Australians were, nor what marvellous victories they achieved – central tenets of the traditional ANZAC legend. Rather, family histories encourage the forging of an empathic connection between subject and reader.

Family histories of the Great War are almost universally sympathetic. The immense effort involved in transcribing letters and diaries and recording interviews, not to mention the expense of self-publication, is an act of love and dedication. The family histories that began appearing in the 1970s challenged understandings of the Great War determined by the carping elderly leaders of the Returned and Services League and the drunken old diggers disparaged in Alan Seymour’s influential play, The One Day of the Year. In the hands of family historians, the anachronistic old diggers were transformed into young men innocently caught up in a tragic situation – the young men whom Peter Weir personified as Archie and Frank in the film Gallipoli.

It is possible to discern what Michael Roper and Rachel Duffett have called ‘national frames of memory’ within Australian family histories of the Great War, though their outlines are typically faint.39 Janette Rogers felt that her ancestor’s war documents, published as For King and Country, were of national historical significance:

A decision came about to reproduce the diaries, firstly to ensure that a valuable and historic story will be further preserved and to introduce the reader to an account that will guarantee their memories of a great task done under difficult conditions by those gallant sons of Australia.40

Similarly, Monica Sinclair, the author of Dear Ad … Love Ron, believed that the stories of Great War soldiers were worth preserving because: ‘They are part of our historic literature. Their story is part of our story as a young nation concerned about values of justice, freedom and independence’.41

As historians including Alistair Thomson, Bruce Scates and Rebecca Wheatley have shown, references to the national significance of their ancestors’ war experiences do not mean that family historians are undiscerning receptacles of state propaganda.42 Monica Sinclair was full of admiration for the soldiers of the First AIF:

Men, like Dad, often at great cost to themselves for the rest of their lives, were heroes in a very real way, because they were prepared to take on what they perceived to be a serious responsibility, the defence of their country, and to live with the consequences of their decisions.43

Yet Sinclair’s characterisation of men like her father did not equate to a belief that the cause they fought for was worthwhile. Writing in 1990, she explicitly distinguished between contemporary views about the war and what young men believed at the time:

History may condemn the ‘Great War’ as the greatest and most expensive blunder of the century. Some of those who enlisted formed this opinion for themselves as they witnessed the senseless deaths of their friends on front after front. Be that as it may, I believe that this in no way detracts from the greatness of the young Australians, like Dad, who believed they acted for a noble cause and were prepared to risk their life in its pursuit.44

Julie Cattlin, who self-published The World War I Diaries of Sergeant Jim Osborn in 2010, came to revise her opposition to ANZAC commemoration through writing family history. As a university student, Cattlin marched in protest against the Vietnam War and, in common with many other baby boomers, she broadened her opposition to Vietnam into a condemnation of war in general: ‘I was incredibly anti-war’, she recalled. Cattlin began transcribing Osborn’s war diaries for her cousin and
quickly became convinced of their historical significance: ‘I felt that he was such an extraordinary man, his diary is full of such beautiful descriptions and he is so non-judgemental. I really felt that it was my duty to have his story out there’. The intense admiration that Julie Cattlin developed for Jim Osborn caused her to reconsider her attitude to the Great War. She came to believe that the hostile attitude to all aspects of war and soldiering that she held as a young woman was ignorant and arrogant: ‘I didn’t think too deeply about it. I think we were just brainwashed to hate war.’ Though her father had fought in the Second World War, she knew little about that conflict and very little about the Great War: ‘especially the Western Front, because we all heard about Gallipoli’.45

The woman who once marched in protest against the Vietnam War began marching on Anzac Day. Julie Cattlin believes that the Anzac Day march strikes a good balance between commemoration of Australian achievement and recognition of the suffering of ordinary soldiers: ‘It’s not so much about allies and enemies, but more about human beings who have been destroyed by war’. She feels that her participation in the march is a reflection of her fondness for the memory of Jim Osborn and other ordinary soldiers like him, more than any nationalistic impulse. Cattlin recoils from overt displays of nationalism, such as have become common among young Australians: ‘I don’t have an Australian flag and I hate Australia Day’, she says. She grants that her strong connection to Jim Osborn must have something to do with him being family and Australian. But somehow my love for him was due to him being an outstanding human being. His qualities really impressed me .... The smaller our world gets, the more I think of people belonging to the ‘the world’ more than I do to a country.46

By the 2000s, it is possible to discern the traces of ‘trauma culture’ leaching into the work of family historians. Lynette Oates grafted post-Holocaust and post-Vietnam insights about trauma to more traditional, nationalism-based understandings about Australian involvement in the Great War in her book about her uncle, With the Big Guns, published in 2006. Hence her dramatic conclusion that death was perhaps Uncle Ernest’s best destiny: ‘When one considers all that is now known about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder’.47

Elizabeth Whiteside also integrated psychological perspectives into her understanding of the Great War. She recorded in A Valley in France her regret that she did not read her father’s letters while he was alive: ‘There may have been a better understanding of him as a person. It may have been beneficial, perhaps even therapeutic for both of us, to have talked of those times.’ Prior to the 1990s, when insights drawn from psychological investigations into the function of trauma began to filter into popular culture, Australians might have understood that returned soldiers ‘bottled up’ their feelings; they may even have believed that repression had negative implications for ex-soldiers’ mental health. However, they would not have expressed these concepts as Elizabeth Whiteside did in 1999, when describing her father:

Like most others he had returned a changed man, tense and highly strung. The disturbing effect of war on sensitive men was very great, and the hardships and horrors experienced in the extreme cold, the mud and slush of the trenches as bloody battles raged, could not be shared with loved ones at home. They did not speak of these traumas but instead suppressed them.48

Whiteside’s observations about the psychological effects of the Great War on its participants were coupled with an emphatic opinion about the war itself: ‘The absolute futility of war comes home when research is made into the period of the 1914–1918 Great War. It has been called the world’s greatest disaster’.49

While family histories have been contaminated by discourses of nation and trauma, there was a crucial phase in the history of ANZAC 2.0 that preceded the rise of political commemoration, trauma culture and ‘trench tourism’. During this phase, the tomb of imperialist loyalty and outdated attitudes towards race and gender in which ANZAC was sealed became its chrysalis. Two factors combined to regenerate the ANZAC legend: the new interest in family history and the nostalgia induced by the passing of the Great War generation. The intimate and sympathetic tone of the family histories was reinforced by the work of Bill Gammage in The Broken Years (1974), and subsequently by Patsy Adam-Smith in The Anzacs (1978). Peter Weir’s film Gallipoli (1981) played perfectly to the sense that Australia needed a new identity and that the reimagined ANZACs could be the poster boys of this post-British nation.50 From the 1990s, ANZAC began to accumulate elements of the emerging trauma narrative, and thus found ways to resonate with many of those who were averse to its martial underpinnings. When politicians jumped on the bandwagon after 1990, the celebratory, nationalist rhetoric that had been discarded during the 1960s reappeared, albeit in more muted form. The battlefield tourism that is the luxury of prosperous Western nations provided a further boost to popular interest in ANZAC. In the eye of the Anzackery that accompanies the Great War centenary, it is important to remember that the provenance of ANZAC 2.0 lies in the family history boom that began in the 1970s. This grounding in the personal and prosaic offers some protection against the buffeting of political and commercial headwinds.

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End Notes
18. Author interview with Malcolm Fraser, 16 June 2012.
30. The category of ‘personal narratives, Australian, World War, 1914–1918’ includes books published by family descendants. There is, however, no means of distinguishing descendants from other authors.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., Foreword.
43. Monica Sinclair, Dear Ad...Love Ron, p. xi.
44. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p. 180.
50. The New Nationalist mood was not solely a top-down phenomenon, see Holbrook, Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography, pp. 121-26.

Author
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‘To Sanctify and Hallow the Memory’: The search for Australia’s missing from World War I

Craig Deayton

The First World War cost over 60,000 Australians killed and 156,000 wounded. Little thought was given at the outset of the War to how information about casualties could be communicated quickly and sensitively to an anxious home front or the immense and lasting psychological damage that such carnage would produce. With the war over, efforts turned to a systematic attempt to find, identify and properly bury Australia’s missing war dead. Not only was this effort motivated by the moral imperative ‘To sanctify and hallow the memory’ of this sacrifice, but also with a growing awareness of the importance in healing the mental anguish that would be the lasting legacy of the First World War. This paper looks in brief at the story of the effort to ease the psychological suffering of bereaved families, an effort that though at times beset by scandal and incompetence, is one that continues for the same motives to the present day.

Introduction

On the 23rd of November 1930, the Broken Hill Barrier Miner ran a small news story above its advertisement for the Boughtman Street Cycling Club’s Dance and Euchre night titled Told Soldier Son’s Fate After 14 Years. It reported that the body of Private Henry Mahony, who had been reported missing on the 5th of August 1916, had been identified among the remains of nine Australian soldiers found in a shallow grave at Pozières. ‘The shock, after so many years of anxiety about what had happened to her eldest boy,’ reported the Barrier Miner, ‘prostrated Mrs Mahoney.’ It was news that did not go unnoticed in a country where thousands shared Margaret Mahony’s lonely vigil and for whom there were no answers to the questions that haunted them anew each day.

A hundred years on from the end of the First World War, it is perhaps a forgotten truth that for many Australians the ‘War to End Wars’ would never end. Over 18,000 Australians who fought and died in the Great War have no known grave. That there would never be a funeral for their sons, nor even a grave would be one more unthinkable reality for the bereaved to live with, and – yet more agonising for many – there would be no information beyond the bare news that their son was killed or missing.

The search for Australia’s missing war dead, and the effort to bring comfort to grieving relatives during and after the war, is one of the Great War’s lesser known stories. An effort that commenced almost as soon as the first troop transports left Australia has continued in various forms and with varying energy and success to the present day. This story is a fascinating mixture of noble intentions and outright scandal, as well as of great compassion and soulless officialdom. Despite the many failures, missteps and incompetence over the years, it remains, remarkably, pursued with solemn determination despite the clear impossibility of ever completing the task and despite the cost. The search for the missing and for the answers to some of those haunting questions is one very important way that the nation quite literally dirties its hands to give practical expression to those familiar words – lest we forget.

To say Australia was unprepared for the tidal wave of trauma about to crash on home shores as the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) entered the war in April of 1915 would be a considerable understatement. It was an unpreparedness matched in equal magnitude in the AIF itself. The shortcomings in training and planning, the terrible mistakes made in their first experience of battle and the woefully inadequate medical arrangements, all contributed to the terrible losses at Gallipoli. By December when the British and their Allies withdrew from the disastrous campaign, the Australian death toll exceeded 8,000. Despite the distracting jingoism of the press reports full of stories of Australian heroism, the stark truth could hardly be ignored by the Government. Fully one third of the Australian force committed in the campaign had become casualties. Nor was the disaster ignored in small towns and cities across the nation. As the ever-lengthening casualty lists appeared in local papers, recruitment numbers plunged.
Catastrophic though they were, the losses at Gallipoli were eclipsed in 1916 during the great Somme offensive of the summer. Shockwaves of grief and trauma radiated across Australia. Families were notified by their local clergy who received pink telegrams with news of a death in their parish calling them to this awful errand. No one expected that bodies could be returned to Australia for proper burial, but what was expected, and desperately needed, was information. How did my son die? Did he suffer? Did he have a decent burial? The pleading letters flooded into Army Headquarters. Overwhelmed by disasters like the battle of Fromelles with a casualty toll of over 5,000 in a single night, the task of answering those pleas was simply beyond the resources of an Army stretched beyond breaking point.

**Breaking the News: ‘I regret to inform you ...’**

Unofficial channels filled some of the silence that followed official notifications. Letters of condolence written to the bereaved by officers or friends of the dead were a great comfort for many. When Sergeant William Turner was killed at Dernancourt, his company commander, Captain Anderson, wrote to his mother in Hobart:

> He fell in action against terrific odds on 5/4/18. He was a man highly respected by all with whom he came in contact for his clean living and devotion to duty. In action, his men had every confidence in him and a mother would be proud to have such a son ... All deeply feel his loss and we combine in sending our sympathies to you ...”

But for many the silence was deafening and for some, maddening. Mrs Bertha Robertson made her feelings clear about her treatment following the death of her son Leslie in 1916:

> I am writing to ask you to kindly explain ... why parents have to wait such an endless time before they can hear any particulars of their sons when they are killed in action. My boy was killed at Pozieres on the 8th of August but beyond the bare notice from the Military department I have heard nothing ... It seems to me to be gross neglect ... to keep people waiting so long, there has been heaps of time for enquiries to have been made and answered ... Seeing the cruel way in which mothers are treated (it is common talk everywhere) can you wonder they are against their sons enlisting, the authorities are anxious enough to get the soldiers but once they are killed, they bother their heads no more about them.”

Whether it was felt that the usual expressions of regret and sympathy were not due to Mrs Robertson, or the officer who responded felt a tone of terse formality was the best defence, the response she received gave little satisfaction.

> With reference to your communication of 13th instant ... I have to state that all details received in connexion with the death of your son ... have been promptly transmitted to you. Confirmatory documents have come to hand but have furnished no details regarding burial ... You will be notified on receipt of advice regarding personal effects, and the parcels will be forwarded to your address.

Though Mrs Robertson’s complaints may have exasperated an overworked officer at Base Records, the far more serious consequence of her suffering and that of so many bereaved relatives showed itself in the plummeting recruitment figures and contributed to the defeat of the conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917.

**Vera Deakin and the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau: ‘We cannot express in words our gratitude for your kindness’**

One woman would commit her war work to addressing the anguish of relatives and would do more than any other Australian to bring comfort amid this avalanche of grief. Nurses aside, women rarely feature in writing about the First World War but it is nevertheless remarkable that Vera Deakin's contribution remains largely a footnote in Australia's war history. In London when the war began, Deakin returned to Australia and joined the British Red Cross to study nursing. Defying her parents, she accepted an offer from the Red Cross to travel to Cairo to help in its mission there and arrived in October of 1915 in the wake of the disastrous August offensive at Gallipoli. With thousands of Australians dead and wounded and an Army Administration overwhelmed by the task of communicating with anxious and devastated families back home, she founded the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau the day after arriving in Egypt. The Bureau’s mission was to discover information about Australian casualties and pass it back through its offices to relatives in Australia. Increasingly under siege from desperate families, the Army reluctantly tolerated Vera Deakin’s work. Staffed mainly by volunteers, the Bureau’s work exploded until it was dealing with an average of 25,000 enquiries a year.

> The case of Private Thomas Leng of the 47th Battalion was typical. He was posted as missing on 7 June 1917 at Messines. Deakin pursued the case, eventually writing to Leng’s commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Imlay seeking information:

> to date (we have) been able to gather absolutely no information about him, and the father who is
an elderly man, is breaking down under the long strain. If you could get any information at all, however vague, we think it would help him, and the fact that you had taken an interest in the matter would mean a great deal.

Imlay was about to lead his battalion into battle at Passchendaele but he, like many senior officers, knew just how important the smallest scrap of information could be. He responded with a lengthy letter, explaining that enquiries had been made of his platoon mates, but that nothing was known. His letter gave some insight into the difficulty of tracing the missing:

‘Taking into consideration the fact that it was not possible for any of our men being taken prisoner on that day and that no hospital reports have been received notifying us of his admission anywhere, it would be fairly safe in my opinion to assume that he was killed in action there, but we are chary of doing this until all reasonable hopes have proved unavailing. The statement of soldiers who see others killed cannot, I am sorry to say, or rather am glad to say, be given full value to, as they have so often proved incorrect. A shell might burst where a man was last seen yet although the eyewitnesses fancy he was killed by it, numerous cases have occurred where they have proved to be quite wrong.’

Despite those observations, Imlay believed that, given there were no reports of Leng, ‘I am afraid it is useless, hoping against hope, and perhaps it would be better to inform his parents …’

Although the official posting for Leng was ‘wounded and missing’, Vera Deakin quoted Imlay’s letter verbatim to Leng’s father. He responded in October with thanks for her efforts ‘in this, our sore trouble’, but he didn’t give up hope. ‘Trust that you may shortly be in a position to send me some favourable news …’ At war’s end, James Leng wrote again to the Red Cross, hoping that ‘something definite may be elicited from some returned soldier concerning the fate of my missing boy’. But there were no further scraps of information to ease the old man’s suffering. Leng’s name is recorded on the Menin Gate memorial to the missing at Ypres.

Sadly typical also was the anguish of Mrs Minnie Viles of Townsville who had been informed that both her sons were missing after the battle of Messines. She wrote to the Army at regular intervals, letters of increasing desperation as she waited for news. Six months of waiting ended on 16 December, when she finally received news that they had both been killed on 7 June. Cruelly, no other details were known. Almost a year after their deaths there was still no information, and she wrote to Deakin:

‘[p]erhaps you could get me some word of my darling boys, all that we know is both ‘killed in action, 7th of June 1917’. I have written again and again to the Captains of ‘A’ and ‘D’ Companies but so far no reply from anyone and really I feel sometimes as if my reason will go, for oh my boys were good boys, no mother ever had better … will you please help me and try and get some news of my dear sons.’

The Bureau pursued the case with its usual determination and eventually received news from witnesses which was sent back to Mrs Viles on 19 June 1918. Sergeant Albert Murray had seen Frank Viles blown to pieces in a support trench. Two other men were standing close to Viles when the shell landed squarely on him. ‘It was the most marvellous escape for them and for myself also’ wrote Murray. He added that of poor Frank Viles, ‘there were no remains to bury’. His brother, Private Keith Viles, was a runner and had been sent with a message on the previous day and never seen again. Despite the best efforts of the Red Cross to discover something of his fate, nothing more was known. The Red Cross reports included a grim insight into the battle from Chaplain Arthur Davidson of the 37th Battalion, something quoted widely to the bereaved of Messines.

We gathered few bodies for burial. Those of us who saw the ground know how it was. Shell after shell ploughed up every square yard of the ground and many bodies were buried by the shells that filled up holes where bodies had fallen.

Major Denis Hannay responded to the Red Cross enquiry, giving brief details of what was known of the boys’ deaths and adding that the ‘two brothers were thought a lot of by the officers, being well behaved lads and very good’. Deakin had little comfort to give their mother, but included the small eulogy from Hannay in her letter, adding rather hopefully that ‘[w]e regret to have such sad news to send, but it must be some consolation to read such a tribute from a commanding officer’.

**The Whitest of Lies: ‘He was killed instantly by shellfire ...’**

The witness reports providing information to the Red Cross about the dead or missing were often remarkably detailed and vivid, given the dearth of information about the course of the battle, the decisions of officers and observations about the war. Starkly different to the official entries in war diaries which often concealed or minimised errors, or were oblivious to the ordeal in the front line, the
Red Cross files would be an accidental treasure trove for future historians, giving the unvarnished truth about the experiences of battle and its context. Occasionally they give voice to the true horror of war and such graphic accounts of death and wounding could not simply be passed on to relatives in their entirety. Deakin had the difficult task of sanctifying the reports to spare the relatives such distressing details. Death, where it was mentioned, was often ‘instantaneous’ and either explicitly or by implication ‘painless’. The belief that a decent burial had been conducted was a comfort for many. Captain Brack’s report of Sergeant von Bibra’s death told of his buried under fire at ANZAC Ridge near Polygon Wood. ‘Shells were bursting all along the ridge during the service, but none interrupted the little party in their holy work’.10 Where no burial was possible, the relatives were often comforted with the explanation that their loved one’s body was placed in a shell hole and later buried by the shells.

War’s end did not end the questions. One month after the armistice in 1918, an English pastor wrote to the Bureau about a young English aristocrat, Gerald Levinge, serving as a private in an Australian battalion.11

He is the son of Lady Levinge (one of my parishioners) who is nearly distracted with the anxiety of knowing nothing definite, having [already] lost one son killed as well. Of course, you will understand that he is of gentle birth, but, like many others of his class, enlisted.

News of Levinge, when it finally came back with the returning prisoners was very bad. Several witnesses had seen him shot through the chest and abdomen, the bullets severing his spine and paralysing him. Private Patrick Nicholson of Mackay reported Levinge ‘very badly wounded in the spine. He begged me to shoot him as he was suffering so much. There was no means of moving him’. His officer, Lieutenant Goodsall, briefly tended him, giving him some water, but reported that he was ‘in a very bad way’. Goodsall gave a second statement when he returned from a German prison camp in 1919, adding that he knew Levinge’s mother. This might have influenced him to give a much less distressing, but entirely fictitious, version of Levinge’s death. ‘He was killed instantly by shell fire … and buried in the support line. His grave is marked’.12

Although the Army tolerated Deakin’s work, it was never welcomed. In fairness, there was good reason to wait for information to be confirmed. The premature report of Sergeant John Ryan’s death at Dernancourt on 5 April 1918, had disastrous consequences. Some four weeks earlier, Ryan’s sister Margaret had written to the officer in charge of Base Records in frustration at not receiving any news of her brother through Ryan’s wife, Ethel. Margaret Ryan asked to be listed as her brother’s next of kin, claiming his wife was ‘not what she should be since her husband left …’ and expressing concern for the welfare of Ryan’s three young sons.13 The notification of her brother’s death galvanised a grief-stricken Margaret Ryan.

When I wrote you ... asking for any cabled reports to be sent me, I told you that his wife was no better than she should be. I have been to the Red Cross today and they referred me to a solicitor with the result that I intend to take the children from their mother.

Now my brother fought bravely for his country and was presented with two Military Medals and I should like these medals and whatever else he had for his children as they shall prize them in the years to come when their mother has long forgotten their Father.14

Official news that Ryan was a prisoner of war eventually reached his distressed and bewildered but much relieved wife and three sons late in 1918. He returned to Australia and, no doubt, into another kind of war, in July of 1919.

**The War Graves Detachment: ‘Raising the bodies of our dear comrades’**

Finding all of the missing from the First World War was an impossible task at the end of the war, and remains so today. However, in March 1919, the Australian War Graves Detachment was formed to begin the task. Made up largely from volunteers who saw the work as a sacred duty to fallen comrades, its role was to exhume bodies from the temporary cemeteries and mass burials that were scattered about the battlefields around Amiens and inter the dead in the newly established cemeteries of the Imperial War Graves Commission.15 The War Graves Detachment would be chiefly responsible for establishing the Australian memorial and cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux. That this was a noble and thoroughly admirable duty was unquestionably true, all the more so because of the gruesome, sickening and often backbreaking labour it involved. Private Henry Whiting was one of those who stayed behind to ‘assist with the raising of the bodies of our dear comrades [to] place them in cemeteries which we have surveyed for the purpose’.16 Whiting and his colleagues had no doubt how important it was to find and identify these missing Australians ‘as it is cruel for their peoples’ minds not to be set at rest to know that their sons have been located. Many mothers picture their sons blown to pieces and were scattered about the battlefields around Amiens and inter the dead in the newly established cemeteries of the Imperial War Graves Commission.15 The War Graves Detachment would be chiefly responsible for establishing the Australian memorial and cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux. That this was a noble and thoroughly admirable duty was unquestionably true, all the more so because of the gruesome, sickening and often backbreaking labour it involved. Private Henry Whiting was one of those who stayed behind to ‘assist with the raising of the bodies of our dear comrades [to] place them in cemeteries which we have surveyed for the purpose’.16 Whiting and his colleagues had no doubt how important it was to find and identify these missing Australians ‘as it is cruel for their peoples’ minds not to be set at rest to know that their sons have been located. Many mothers picture their sons blown to pieces and no record …’17 He also considered it a sacred duty – something that helped him and other members of the
Detachment cope with the psychological toll. ‘The men we have raised up ... have been killed 12 months and they are far from being decayed properly, so you can guess the constitution one needs. I have felt sick dozens of times’.18

The work of the War Graves Detachment continued for five months and in that time they exhumed and re-buried 5,469 men and helped to identify many of those.

Their efforts were communicated to Australians in several ways. When a loved one’s grave was located, identified and concentrated in an official IWGC cemetery, the bereaved received direct personal correspondence, including a photograph, details of the location of the grave, and the name of the closest train station.19

Their work did not go unnoticed in Australia. On the 3rd of June, they received a visit from Prime Minister Hughes on his way to the Peace Conference, accompanied by former Prime Minister Sir Joseph Cook. On Bastille Day, the French paid them a special honour in the presence of Defence Minister, Senator George Pearce.

At 11.00 one company was formed up in the hollow square at Headquarters to receive from the Mayor of Villers-Bretonneux a monument subscribed for by the inhabitants of the town in honour of the brave Australians who fell during the operations culminating in the capture of Villers-Bretonneux.20

On the 3rd of August, General and Lady Birdwood inspected the unit and they marched in full ceremonial order ‘with bayonets fixed’ to present a flag to the Bishop of Amiens which hangs in the Cathedral to this day. The brief unit diary of the War Graves Detachment ends on the day of their disbandment on the 20th of August with the news a new unit would be formed to complete the work of finding and re-burying the Australian dead of the Great War.

‘3 officers and 30 other ranks marched out to form the last remaining unit to be known as the Australian Graves Services which will remain in France for a period of two years.’21 Major John Mott M.C., former distinguished member of the 48th Battalion, escaped POW and Commanding Officer of the War Graves Detachment signed off with ‘Vive l’Australie.’

The Australian Graves Services were primarily instituted by the Australian Government for the purposes of honouring the memory of those members of the AIF whose lives had been sacrificed in war. It is the undoubted wish of the Australian Government that this work be carried out. The fields of operation covered by the Australian forces are very extensive and cemeteries must necessarily be scattered over a large area. That this work may be properly accomplished requires detached parties detailed to great distances. Supervision of these parties is difficult and no definite record of the work is readily obtained beyond the report of the party itself. Opportunities for abuse are great and unless the most rigid control and discipline is maintained this work intended to sanctify and hallow the memory of the dead must develop into a serious scandal bringing humiliation and disgrace upon the Australian Forces.

Up to the date of investigation by this Court of Inquiry, no reasonable or definite plan of carrying out the work seems to have been formed and many of the officers and men selected did not
realise the dignity and importance of their position. The appalling condition apparent in March, 1920, must come as a warning for the future guidance of those in charge, that unless immediate and drastic action is taken for proper control, this effort to honour the dead shall only be the means of bringing shame and disgrace upon the good name, fame and reputation of Australia.22

With those stinging words as an opening, the summary report went on to list 35 damning findings of fact including criminal misappropriation of property and fraud and the revelation that in many cases, little effective work was done to find and record the graves, exhume the bodies or establish cemeteries. The photographers engaged to record the work had no qualifications and experience and took few photos. A bitter enmity existed between the two senior officers of the unit, Captain Allen Kingston and Lieutenant William Lee. They were not on speaking terms and instead engaged in various attempts to smear and discredit each other. This seems to have been one of the few pursuits that they put their energy to. The findings of the report are listed with barely concealed indignation.

Women of ill-repute were notoriously and openly occupying huts with the men at the camp in Villers-Bretonneux. Drunkenness was a common and frequent occurrence among the men and no disciplinary action was taken to check it. On one occasion drunken members of the AIF returning to camp at night wantonly discharged many shots from a revolver to the imminent danger of others and no disciplinary action was taken. Captain Kingston visited Estaminets with his NCO’s [sic] and openly drank with them. One member of Lieutenant Lee’s staff openly and publicly managed and controlled Estaminets in Amiens serving drinks over the bar while wearing AIF uniform. A second member of Lieutenant Lee’s staff publicly and openly maintained an Estaminet in Amiens serving drinks over the bar while wearing AIF uniform. The assistant of the Q.M. Sergeant at Villers-Bretonneux entered into negotiations for the sale of an ambulance car to a man in Rouen for a price of 18,000 francs with the understanding that the car was to be represented as lost and the proceeds divided among two members of the AIF.23

And so it went on. Lee and Kingston were sacked and sent home in disgrace. Criminal charges were brought and court martials instigated while the remaining AIF personnel were placed on subsistence allowances and discharged as quickly as they could be replaced with civilian labour. The property was secured and the Villers-Bretonneux camp cleared and closed. The entire project was revised and the responsibility substantially transferred to the Imperial War Graves Commission.

Sanctifying and Hallowing – The current era: ‘...never forgotten, bearing an honoured name.’

Despite the scandals, the passage of time, the missing or incomplete records, and the impossibility of completing the task, the Australian Government’s commitment to find, identify and re-bury the missing Australians of the First World War remains undiminished today. Bodies of fallen soldiers from the Great War are still found with regularity as the old battlefields are built upon, during the course of archaeological digs or, as in the case of the discovery of the mass burial of Australians at Fromelles, through dogged research by civilians.24 In March of 2018, the modern version of the War Graves Detachment, the Unrecovered War Casualties Unit, conducted a search for the mass grave of 86 members of the 45th Battalion killed in the Battle of Messines. Despite the very credible evidence and unusually accurate map references recorded, the men could not be found despite a determined, well-funded and comprehensive search. This effort is part of the much larger search which, successful or not, will never end. The determination to continue that search in the face of failure and setback, to bring comfort to the bereaved and to properly honour Australia’s war dead is driven by the same noble motives that link the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau and the Australian War Graves Detachment and its progenitors with today’s Unrecovered War Casualties Unit. Doctor Brendan Nelson, director of the Australian War Memorial, perhaps summed it up best at the funeral in 2010 of Private Alan Mather whose body was found some 90 years after he fell in the battle of Messines and laid to rest with full military honours in Prowse Point cemetery.

‘It is easy from the safe distance of almost a century to look back and settle for the abstract. But this man who lies before us is real ... Here now will lie one, “never forgotten, bearing an honoured name”’.

‘Lest we forget’.25

End Notes
1. Service Record: 2728 Sergeant William Turner, NAA B2455
2. Service Record: 3424 Private Leslie Robertson, NAA B2455 Letter 13/1/17
3. Ibid.
4. No biographical note seems to leave unmentioned the fact that Deakin was the daughter of Prime Minister Alfred Deakin. Although this may have opened doors and shielded her from some of the opposition she met, it is wholly irrelevant to her remarkable achievements during the war and beyond.
5. 1DRL/0428, Private Thomas Leng, Red Cross File 1580906
6. Ibid.
7. 1DRL/0428, Corporal Francis Viles, Red Cross File 2820407
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. von Bibra papers, PR 03339
11. 1DRL/0428, Private Gerald Henry Levinge, Red Cross File 1590704
12. Ibid.
13. Service Record: 2490 Sergeant John Ryan MM, NAA B2455
14. Letter 20/2/18
15. These were chiefly in the region of Villers-Bretonneux, Proyart, Wartusee and Mareclave
16. Letter, Private Henry George Whiting AWM PR05609
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
20. AWM224 MSS611 Diary of the Australian Graves Detachment
21. Ibid.
22. NAA MP367/1 Summary – Court of Inquiry into Australian Graves Services
23. Ibid.
24. Five Australians were recovered near Zonnebeke in Belgium in 2006 during the laying of new gas mains. Private Alan Mather was recovered in 2008 during archaeological work on the Messines battlefield and the remains of 250 British and Australians killed at Fromelles were recovered from mass graves at Fromelles in 2009 thanks to the research of Lambis Englezos.
25. Australian Embassy, Belgium, Luxembourg and Mission to the European Union and NATO. Address by Dr. Brendan Nelson, Ambassador of Australia at the reinternment of Private Alan James Mather, Prowse Point Cemetery, Hainaut Province, 22 July 2010

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Author
Craig Deayton has been a secondary school teacher for 35 years, a Principal in four colleges for the past 24 years and is currently the Principal of Guilford Young College in Hobart. He graduated from the University of Tasmania in 1983 with a Bachelor’s degree in History, holds a Master’s degree in Educational Administration from the Australian Catholic University and has taught History, English, Religious Education and Literacy in many different school settings across K-12. In 2015, he was named ACEL’s Eminent Educator of the Year. He is also a military historian and the author of three books on the First World War - Battle Scarred: The 47th Battalion in the First World War (Big Sky, 2011), At Any Price: The Anzacs in the Battle of Messines (Big Sky, 2017) and The Battle of Messines (Army History Campaign Series, 2017). In 2018, he assisted the work of the Unrecovered War Casualties Unit in their project to find and recover missing Australian soldiers from the Battle of Messines. He lives in Hobart with Tracey and their four children, Patrick, Dominic, Michael and Annie.

Christmas Island
below us
rock plummets to depths
we cannot hold true
while all else thrusts skyward
with the violence of uprising
we sit on this delicate
formation of faults
that quakes and quivers
with change and witness
life wanting life –
with each red claw
the wind breathes
back to the sea
with each turtle’s lumber
up the slow sand
speaks an ancient will
to continue
like each new boat
buoyed and heavy with hope
just one dance;
the grace of the willing.

From the collection The Sky Runs Right Through Us, published by UWAP, February 2018.

RENEE PETTITT-SCHIPP,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
One of the most remarkable developments in Australian intellectual life in the 21st century has been the militarisation of Australian history. The evidence is all around us. In 1901, the new federation inherited from the six colonies their engagement in the war in South Africa. In 2001, the war was widely and enthusiastically commemorated and in official speeches the troops who fought on the Veldt were honoured for being 'the fathers of the Anzacs'. But the cavalcade of commemoration marched and gathered momentum with centenary celebrations for the Great War. They still continue and will climax with already planned events to commemorate Armistice Day in November.

Australia has not been unique in commemorating the First World War. What has been striking is the massive public expenditure committed by both Federal and State governments culminating in the establishment of the $100 million Monash Museum in Northern France at a time when Australian museums, galleries and libraries are struggling to survive. But money has been lavished on innumerable public war projects over the last ten years. Books and curriculum material have been subsidised, films commissioned and research projects funded. Monuments have been re-furbished all over the country and new ones commissioned. Neglected avenues of trees have been re-planted. Scholarships have been established and tours of old battlefields arranged and subsidised. Particular attention has been devoted to children. Primary and secondary schools have been targeted with free, professionally developed aids for teachers.

The Department of Veteran’s Affairs and the Australian War Memorial have been central to this promotion of the historical pre-eminence of the country’s experience of war. It has been a project uncritically supported by both sides of politics. It is certainly unprecedented in Australian history and it would seem unmatched in comparable democratic societies. Criticism has been easily contained. The particular slant of official propaganda has been sanctified by the sacrifice of our countrymen and women who died and suffered in our wars. Scepticism about the unbridled commemoration could be cast as a case of unconscionable disrespect. The whole project has been a remarkably successful campaign in the broader culture wars all the more so because its underlying motivation has been so skilfully cloaked in sanctimony.

John Howard played a key role in the historiographical putsch. Along with fellow conservatives he was deeply disturbed by the revisionist history of the last decades of the 20th century and in particular the new and radical emphasis on indigenous history. He talked frequently about his hostility to ‘black armband’ history which he believed made young Australians ashamed of their nation’s past. He adopted a strongly partisan stand in the so-called history wars of 2002-03 and provided personal patronage to the leading conservative protagonist Keith Windschuttle. The Mabo case of 1992 alarmed many conservatives partly because its radical re-casting of Australian jurisprudence was so unexpected and it led on to the even more surprising Wik case in 1996. It seemed as though the new revisionist history had invaded the High Court itself with startling consequences underlined by the views of Justices Deane and Gaudron in their shared Mabo opinion that the relations with the Aborigines had left a legacy of unutterable shame.

With the reputation of those erstwhile heroes of Australian historical writing – the explorers and pioneers – seriously compromised, the Anzac legend proved an invaluable tool to re-direct the nation’s historical gaze to the heroism displayed in overseas wars. Killing Turks and Germans was far more tolerable than shooting down Aborigines out on the ragged frontiers of settlement and could be wrapped in the time-honoured robes of military glory. But the result has been a serious distortion of our history which will be with us for years to come. A whole generation has been subjected to a pervasive exercise in state-inspired propaganda which has resulted in exaggeration on the one hand and serious neglect on the other. The revivified cult of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli provides us with abundant evidence of these two developments.
Anyone who has had any contact with this generation of school children will have heard the substance of the official message. Leading the way is the ubiquitous assertion that the nation was ‘made’ on the beaches and hills of Gallipoli. This may seem persuasive to anyone without any broad knowledge of national history. But it is truly an extraordinary claim. It represents a survival of ideas current in the late 19th and early 20th century, but deeply discredited by the Great War itself, that nations are born in war. The same idea was often heard in New South Wales in 1885 at the time of the adventure in the Sudan. It was repeated in dozens of speeches during the Boer War when contingents left for South Africa and again when they returned. How many births can any nation experience? More to the point is that it is a particularly pernicious doctrine suggesting that countries need war to achieve maturity and that killing is a necessary rite of passage for both men and nations. Do any other nations still embrace this doctrine which was central to the ideology of both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany?

But of equal concern is the way in which the Anzac legend profoundly distorts our history. What did the Australia of 1913 lack which was provided by the exploits of young men who invaded the Ottoman Empire to further British strategic objectives they knew little about? What we have is an extraordinary promotion of military endeavour ahead of the achievements of civilian life. The work of thousands of men and women across generations was not as important as that brief interlude on the other side of the world. This simply won’t do. The young Australian federation was one of the most successful societies in the world. It was one of the wealthiest and one of the fairest. It had stable institutions and almost universal literacy. It was, along with New Zealand, the most democratic nation anywhere with universal adult franchise and a powerful labour movement strongly represented in the seven parliaments which had, together, pioneered an inspiring array of progressive social and economic reforms. Whatever on earth had the young warriors added to this picture by bayonetting other young men who were defending their country?

The officially inspired and funded militarisation of our history favours war more than peace, places the military before the civil and the imperial ahead of the national. War history is inescapably imperial history despite a tendency of popular war historians to leave out the often crucial importance of British strategy and logistics in most Australian battles during the First World War. The home front is usually left out of much military history. It’s all about what happened on the other side of the world. Australia must surely be unique in that the implication implicit in the cavalcade of commemoration is that our most important achievements happened somewhere else. This was illustrated by the upsurge of commemorative enthusiasm late in 2017 concerning the Battle of Beersheba. A new Light Horse Museum was opened in Beersheba by the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, watched by the Leader of the Opposition and other prominent Australians. At the time of the battle Australia was being convulsed by the second conscription referendum which was held a few weeks later. However, the referendum centenary passed without any official notice whatsoever. The failure to celebrate this great story was a telling illustration of the priorities of the current generation of our political leaders. A nation putting to the people one of the most significant questions of the time. Men and women voting and rejecting conscription. It was utterly unique, radically democratic and inimitably Australian. It was far more noteworthy than battle field honours on the Western Front.

The Australian reaction to Beersheba illustrated many aspects of the ongoing carnival of commemoration. The focus has been on particular battles. Characteristically the role of other, allied countries, has been overlooked. It would have been easy, for instance, to assume that the Light Horse won Beersheba all on their own. There were few references to the important role of the New Zealander army or of the even more significant contribution of British infantry and artillery. Time and time again popular accounts of the war overplay the achievements of the Australians. Again and again the focus is on how the local boys fought not why they fought. There has been almost no public discussion of whether it was in Australia’s national interest to be involved at all. There has been no assessment of the great cost of the war and whether Australia’s enormous sacrifice was worth it. Such assessment was impossible in the years following the war. It should have been an essential ingredient of any reconsideration a century later.

The meagre discussion of the results of the war in Australia are invariably misleading. We have heard that it united Australians when the true result was the exact reverse. Class and religious divisions were exacerbated. It did not foster national pride. It deepened the dependence on Empire and reverence for the British monarchy. Regional dissatisfaction with the federation flourished in the post-war period. Western Australia voted by a two to one majority to secede and become again a crown colony. Only one electorate opted for the federation. Australia gave a lot for the Empire and got little in return. This points to the larger tragedy. Australia in 1901 had everything needed for national independence. It chose to remain tied to an Empire already in relative decline and suffered accordingly.

There are deeper concerns with Australia’s remembrance of the First World War. All too often commemoration slips into celebration of the prowess of our soldiers and our commanders. The passing praise they received at the
time is endlessly replayed. It is as if we are still living in the immediate aftermath of a victorious war. And that is very odd. How can anyone take pride in contributing to such an unparalleled disaster? The war was a catastrophe for Europe from which it could never fully recover. The prestige of European civilisation itself was smashed beyond recall. The seeds of the even greater catastrophes in the 1930s and 1940s were already sown when the Australian Prime Minister returned in triumph from Europe at the end of the war to tell the nation that the achievements of the soldiers had assured the safety of a white Australia which was as secure as it was on the day when it was first adopted in 1901.

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Parting Glass,  
*after Gabriela Mistral*

for M., asylum seeker and friend, who attempted to take his own life at North West Point Detention Centre  
Christmas Island, 2011.

the act is simple enough  
remove lid from bottle  
pour into plastic cup  
pour like rain at midnight  
a river’s sheen by firelight  
your childhood framed in puddles  
like a dream

the liquid claims light like  
a jungle newly varnished  
bright fishing boats in moonlight, until  
ocean deep with dawn  
like a prayer

lift the vessel high  
to all you’ve ever known  
close those eyes  
to lovers and glances  
music and dancers  
beautiful hunger  
shiver of sky

and in that moment  
when rim meets  
your mouth  
relinquish  
outstretched arms, eyes  
of nieces  
pull of letters  
your own face  
then swallow  
there will be searing  
like villages blazing  
plumes from boats  
wire and want  
ablaze  
gulp  
at new dark freedom  
promise of oblivion, after pain  
when this world sways  
leave the afterglow  
without your name.


RENEE PETTITT-SCHIPP,  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Haunting

on our island, the young girl's ghost  
curls beneath the nightscape  

by the toilets, the young girl's ghost  
has some in tears  

on our island, what's by the toilets  
stops men leaving their rooms  
on our island, by the toilets  
a tiny ghost  

on our island, behind the wire  
between the guards the Afghans see  
a girl's ghost by the toilets  
her unwet tears  

men will not leave  
their cramped and rotting dorms  
cannot stand to hear the sound  
of her suffering.


RENEE PETTITT-SCHIPP,  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
The Great War: One family’s history

MARIAN SIMMS

Tracing one generation of soldiers within one extended family during WWI shows the impact by the sheer number affected within one extended family who were present at major battles, notably the Gallipoli campaign and the Sinai campaign – including the Beersheba charge in October 1917. There was also the sheer horror of the Western Front, with missing bodies and unknown graves. Poignant too is the number of family members who were present at the same battle. Brothers reporting home on the quick and brave deaths of their brothers. Fathers searching for details – of lost revolvers and lost bodies. Of the 15 lives reported on here, nearly all were from country Australia or had immediate rural roots while most were of Protestant background and had enlisted relatively early. Six of these soldiers, although culturally Scottish or Anglo-Irish, were of Jamaican ancestry. Genealogy and family stories provide deeper insights into war service. Family correspondence indicates the bonds between brothers. These also provide richer insights about the ethnic background of a group of soldiers that challenge assumptions regarding the ‘whiteness’ and ‘Britishness’ of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

This article discusses Australia’s experience in World War One (WW1) – known as the Great War– from a family history perspective. While the use of military records for family history has been widely promulgated – the State Library of Victoria (2015) being notable in this regard – the use of such records can equally provide granular and rich insights into family connections in active service and at home.1 Family history perspectives can also illustrate patterns around ethnicity and faith amongst those that enlisted and those that stayed behind. For example, Ann Curthoys (2018) has recently outlined the value of family history in understanding the legacy of British slavery in Australian history.

This article uses both family history and military records to examine the family and service connections between six men and a further nine of their cousins from their wider Anglo-Irish family who served with distinction in WWI. Thus, family history can provide insights into the connections between brothers who served together, case studies of sets of brothers who served sequentially and of cousins who were serving in the same place. We know that 2,800 Australian brothers perished in WW1 and that Australia had no official policy of removing surviving siblings (see Queensland Government 2014). Little has been published about cousins. This family history also provides novel insights into the mixed-race background of this group of WWI soldiers who were apparently unaware of their Jamaican-Scottish origins.

This project stemmed from longer-term research into my maternal grandfather’s family history. His name was Alexander Francis Jones, and when he died suddenly and prematurely, he had passed on little of his family history.2 Alex Jones was married with two young children and another ‘due’ when war was declared. His parents, George Jones and Ann Caroline Mollison, were Australian born — according to his birth certificate. George was of Anglo-Irish background and Ann was of Jamaican-Scottish ancestry, although knowledge of this Jamaican heritage was lost or had disappeared by the late nineteenth century and has only recently been rediscovered.

This article is divided into four main sections from the perspective of Alexander Jones: section one discusses his two brothers ‘Tom’ and ‘Bill’; section two discusses his first cousins, brothers Silas and Charles King, Frances King and Percival Jones, the grandsons of Sarah Carey; section three outlines the histories of his second cousins, brothers ‘Dick’ and ‘Syd’, Don, and brothers Donald and Francis, the grandsons of Margaret Carey – Sarah’s younger sister; and section four covers his four Mollison cousins, brothers ‘Geordie’, David, Arthur and John, the grandsons of James Mollison who were born in Jamaica and educated in Aberdeen.

The Jones Brothers

Alex’s younger brother, John Thomas ‘Tom’ Jones, enlisted on 18 August 1914, joined the 8th battalion and
was part of the ‘second’ landing at Gallipoli on 25 April (Winter 1994). Tom joined from Gippsland. He was stocky: 5 feet 8 inches and 168lbs, with a chest expansion of 40 inches, and was from a staunch Methodist farming family. Tom had black hair, grey eyes and a ‘fresh’ complexion. It was well-known in the family that he went on to train in Egypt. He brought home a splendid photograph of himself with a scenic Egyptian background and several pieces of enamelled Egyptian jewellery – one of which was eventually passed down to me.

Tom returned home on 12 April, 1916 as a permanent invalid with his vision severely impaired leading to eventual blindness. His medical file is over 400 pages, as claims for his blindness being a war injury and for subsequent cardiac problems were repeatedly rejected by the Repatriation Commission, although the former was supported by the doctor initially assessing Tom’s severe vision problems (see National Archives of Australia, Repatriation Records B73 1915-1946). With the help of the Australian Blinded Soldiers’ Association this claim was finally recognised, and his subsequent health issues were also dealt with by the Commission after many representations and much correspondence. He died on 15 March, 1946 in his mid-fifties, his appearance described as ‘elderly’ and ‘thin’.

Tom did marry – Ellen Streets – from an old Tasmanian family and they had three daughters and a son, all living for a time with his parents George and Caroline Jones on their Gippsland farm. Their son Kenneth ‘Ken’ John enlisted for World War Two (WWII) and one daughter married a man who died in New Guinea in 1943.

Alex and Tom’s younger brother, William ‘Bill’ George Jones, enlisted in March 1917 – possibly prompted by the defeat of the first conscription referendum of October 1916 or by his brother’s plight. He was shorter than his brother at 5 feet four and a half inches, also of stocky build and dark haired with a ‘dark’ complexion and brown eyes. Bill was appointed to the 4th Light Horse out of Seymour and departed Melbourne on 10 May, 1917. He suffered from repeated bouts of diarrhoea/dysentery and had multiple short visits to hospital in Egypt. While no roll was taken at the Beersheba charge, researchers have calculated that he was likely present in the charge on 31 October 1917 (Australian Light Horse Association, n.d.). He died at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital in 1963 aged 70. Like Tom, Bill lived with his parents on his return, and at one stage sought replacement war medals having lost his on the family farm. According to family stories he married and had two children but was troubled by a drinking problem.

The Jones and King Cousins

The Jones brothers’ first cousins on their father George’s side also served; Percival Claude Jones (son of Joseph and Ellen Jones), brothers Silas Henry and Charles Frances King (sons of Frances and Margaret King) and Frances Henry King (son of Plunkett and Selina King). Silas, Charles and Percival were originally from the Bruthen district in South-East Gippsland, Victoria. Frances worked at a drapery store in Richmond, Melbourne. The Kings were well above average height and were medium to solid build, with fair skin, blue-grey eyes and brown hair.
Silas successfully enlisted in July 1915 after a previous rejection (undated) due to poor teeth and ‘spine’. His cousin Frances similarly was rejected on his first attempt – also due to his teeth, and was subsequently accepted in January, 1916. Silas served for over 12 months. In August 1916 he suffered Gun Shot Wounds (GSW) to the face, neck, chest and elbow. Silas and Charles had unblemished war records. Sadly, Silas was killed on 11 March 1917 and is buried at Bull’s Road cemetery in the Somme.

Charles Frances was strangely luckier than his brother Silas. His GSW was classed as ‘severe’ taking him to hospital in the UK for seven weeks in September 1918 and out of the war. He was wounded on the St Quentin Road, France on the eve of the bloody battle of Mont St Quentin. He survived the war only to die suddenly in May 1919, aged 25.5 Charles and Silas were listed as Roman Catholic presumably due to his mother Margaret Maude Cusack being of Irish-Catholic ancestry.

Frances Henry King successfully enlisted on 15 January, 1916. He arrived in France on 4 February 2017 as a member of the 16/22 Battalion reinforcements, and suffered a series of illnesses and hospital admissions culminating with influenza on the point of embarkation home in 1919. He returned, to marriage in 1922 and a subsequent family of two daughters, moving from Numurkah in country Victoria then to Melbourne. He enlisted again for World War Two. Frances was a Methodist and his mother Selina Frampton was Australian-born of English background. Frances had been his grandmother, Sarah Carey’s, favourite and she made him her sole heir to her property in Numurkah when she died in 1905, thus setting him up to support a wife and family (see Victoria, Wills and Probate – 1906). He lived to the age of 84.

The other first cousin was Percival Claude Jones, the grandson of Sarah Carey from her second marriage to Thomas Jones in 1864, and the son of Joseph James Jones and Ellen ‘Nellie’ Coffey. This branch of the Jones family was raised Catholic, likely due to Ellen’s Irish-Catholic ancestry.

Percival enlisted in March 1915 at a recruiting drive in Bruthen, a small town near the family farm in Swift’s Creek, Gippsland and completed the formalities at the Sturt Street Depot, Melbourne in April. He was tall, of medium to solid build with brown hair, and medium complexion with blue eyes. He arrived in the Dardanelles as part of the 7th Reinforcements for the 6th Battalion around September 1915 and suffered from recurrent dysentery and colitis. Percival arrived in France in March 1916. During the Battle of the Somme in June he was arrested for ‘Drunkenness on line of March in the field’.

During November 1916 and again in February 1917 (at ‘High Court Wood’ – presumably High Wood) he was arrested and tried for being absent without leave (AWOL) – downgraded from ‘desertion’, which was technically a capital crime but was not enforced by the Australian leadership against its volunteer army (see AWM). During his second AWOL stint Percival remained absent for nearly four months. He was sentenced to 12 months prison without hard labour and served the final part of his sentence in a Southampton (UK) hospital with dysentery. He was then transferred to Bulford Military hospital (UK) ‘dangerously ill’ with pneumonia. He was also diagnosed with heart problems – arrhythmia – and arthritis. Returning to Australia in February 1919, he received a medical discharge in April 1919. Percival died in April 1922 and was buried at Bairnsdale cemetery on 26 April, 1922 aged only 30.

The Jones’s Second Cousins

The Jones’s brothers second cousins served also. The Joneses were part of a large Anglo-Irish family: the four young Carey sisters had migrated from County Rush in the early 1850s and each had married early and settled in country Victoria.6 Sarah, the eldest married John King, and finding herself widowed with several young sons, quickly remarried to Thomas Jones and had four more sons. Six of Sarah’s grandsons served overseas, of whom, one was killed in action in France, one died of influenza just after the war, another was blinded, two were at the Gallipoli landing, and one in the 4th Light Horse Regiment was likely present at the Beersheba charge. Sarah Carey’s younger sister Margaret Carey had five grandsons who served and sadly four were killed overseas on active service with only one returning. The other sisters, Elizabeth and Hannah, had smaller families and their children were born in the 1870s.

Two of Margaret’s grandsons were in the 6th LHR, and were at Gallipoli, and then in the Sinai desert campaign where they were killed. Another served in the 4th LHR, and further two died on the Western Front. Two were sons of her daughter Hannah Crozier (who had died of pneumonia in 1902) and husband Thomas Crozier – brothers Sydney ‘Syd’ Thomas and Richard ‘Dick’ Walters Crozier of the 6th Light Horse who died in August 1918 and March 1916, respectively. Their first cousins Plunkett James Donald ‘Don’ Needham and Donald Ernest Needham died on the Western Front in 1917 and 1918, respectively.

The Crozier brothers had enlisted relatively early at around the same time. Syd signed up on 12 January, 1915 after Dick’s enlistment on 10 January. After his initial appointment to the 12th LHR Syd switched to his brother Dick’s 6th LHR in October 1915. Syd was a slight young man of nineteen and around 126 pounds and five feet
five inches, fair skinned, blue-eyed with dark brown hair at enlistment. Dick was 23 years old and bigger at five feet nine and 142 pounds.7

Both were at Gallipoli with the 6th LHR: Dick was shot in the neck and shoulder in November 1915 – ‘I stopped one’ – and promised to bring home the bullet for younger brother Stan who had remained at home on the family farm near Henty, NSW. Dick was transferred to the Army hospital at Malta and discharged as ‘Fit for Active Service’ in January 1916.8 Dick’s active service in the Sinai lasted seven months before he was fatally cut down by a Turkish machine gun at Bir-et-Maler, Egypt, on the first day of the battle of Romani, 4 August 1916. His younger brother Sydney ‘Syd’ wrote home to his father:

You will have the bad news before this. Do not take it too bad Dad. I was with Dick to the last. We were riding over a little hill and a machine gun got on to us. He said he was hit and rode a few yards and fell off his horse ... I know he would give his life for the cause again if it was wanted.

Romani was the 6th LHR’s first major engagement after Gallipoli.

According to The Border Mail and Riverina Times (2 December 1918: 1)9, Thomas Crozier ‘received word from Victoria Barracks’ that his surviving son Syd, previously reported as missing, had ‘died of wounds' while a Prisoner of War (POW) of Turkish forces. An account of the incident provided by another prisoner – Private R Clarke – reached AIF Headquarters in late August 1918:

Syria, April 13th, 1918. As I told you in a previous note I was taken prisoner at Amond (sic), about 50 miles from Jerusalem. My Squadron was dismounted, and had to advance over fairly open country to try to take a Turkish Machine Gun position. We were under heavy fire, and our men kept dropping out wounded as we advanced, and by the time we got to about fifty yards off the place we were to take, there were very few of us left. We were ordered to fix bayonets, and go on ... All was quiet, as none of the men had reached the objective. The Turks captured us ... One of my mates Syd Crozier died that night.

Syd had died on 29th March at Ammon, Jordan. The raid – a joint British/ANZAC Mounted Division – had failed in its main objective to cut Turkish/German communication lines, and a withdrawal was ordered on 30 March.

Syd has no known grave and his name is listed on the war memorial at Al Basrah, Iraq. Although a POW, his effects were returned to Australian HQ Cairo on 16 April, 1918 although not his remains. There was correspondence regarding a missing revolver which was said to be owned by Trooper Crozier. Curiously his brother’s ‘kit’ was not returned – presumably it remained with him.

The Crozier brothers largely confirm the idealistic view of the Light Horsemen as depicted by Gullett (1937: 58) in his seventh volume of Australia’s Official History of WWI: ‘pioneers, or children of pioneers, born to and practised in country life, natural horsemen and expert riflemen.’ They were grandchildren of pioneers.

Two of their Needham first cousins – Donald James ‘Don’ Needham and Donald Ernest Needham – served in the AIF on the Western Front. A third, Francis Bernard Needham was in the 4th LHR.10 Don was assigned to the 6th Battalion (12th Reinforcements) and after enlisting in September 1915 he arrived in France on 21 March 1917. He had two months of recurrent stomach illness before going Missing in Action (MIA) in Belgium on 20 October, revised to Killed in Action (KIA) on 14 December 1917 after an official commission of inquiry, with a revised date of 4 October. Writing to Don’s father, Plunkett Needham of ‘Daplimupla’, Victoria (South Gippsland) on 3 June 1921, the AIF Base Records Office advised that Don had no final resting place – he was ‘believed to have been killed near Passchendaele (sic) Ridge’. Plunkett replied that he’d been told by a Private Wallace that Don had been seen lying on the ground wounded for three days but knew nothing of what had happened to the body. Don Needham’s name is listed on the famous Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres, Belgium.

Donald Ernest Needham enlisted in July 1915 from country Nathalia (near Shepparton), Victoria and joined the 7th Battalion, spending around 15 months in and out of hospital with dysentery, until he was severely gassed in January 1918 in France then shot in the thigh. He was sent to musketry school in May and was KIA on 11 August. His effects – comprising a ‘wallet, notebook, razor, letters, knife, 3 coins, 2 wound stripes’ – were shipped home to his mother Isabella Needham in Numurkah (Victoria). Donald is memorialised at the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, in the Somme, France and has no known grave.

Donald’s younger brother Francis Bernard enlisted in July 1916 and was appointed to the 4th LHR at Seymour – disembarking at Suez, and staying on in Egypt until March 1919. He is listed as a member of ‘A’ Squadron at the Beersheba Charge (ALHA- n.d.). Francis returned home, married, raised a family and lived a long life.

The Mollison Cousins
My grandfather Alexander Francis’s cousins on his mother’s side also served. His mother’s maiden name
was Mollison, and her uncle John Mollison was late to marry. He and his wife, Ellen Medwick, produced four sons between 1890 and 1894. John and Ellen died early, in 1903 and 1911 respectively. Brothers George ‘Geordie’ Medwick, Arthur Cecil, David William and John Alexander all enlisted. Their sister Ruby was next of kin – illustrating the ties between the brothers and their sisters. Geordie was the first of the four brothers to enlist on 19 August 1914, joining ‘A’ Company of the 6th Battalion, probably being part of the second wave to land on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 – alongside his second cousin Tom Jones. Geordie received a severe GSW on 11 May 1915 at Gallipoli – probably during the 6th Battalion’s assault on Krithia – and was transferred to a hospital ship and then to London. The GSW had fractured his left thigh. He was invalided home and granted a weekly pension of three pounds. Geordie and his wife Florence lived into their eighties. Their son, Jonathan Medwick Mollison, served in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in WWII.

Geordie’s brother, David William, enlisted on 25 April, 1916 in Melbourne – presumably the choice of date was symbolic. David was assigned to the 119th Howitzer Battalion as a Howitzer Battery Driver. The Battalion trained in the UK and went to France early in 1917 as reinforcements to the 4th ‘A’ Division Ammunition Column. There were no injuries or illnesses and only a minor infringement, and David returned safely to his wife, Phoebe Turner, whom he had married after enlistment and before embarkation. David was almost 80 when he died in 1969.

The third brother, Arthur Cecil, enlisted on 1 June 1916 and was eventually assigned to the 53rd Battalion when battalions were re-formed due to high casualties. He signed up in Cootamundra. Embarking on 18 March, 1916 the 53rd Battalion was part of the Somme offensive when on 19 July, 1916 Arthur was taken by the Germans as a POW during the ‘disastrous’ battle of Fromelles. He was eventually taken to Schneidemuhl Camp near Posen in what was then Northern Prussia and is now Poland. The POW camp included mainly UK and Russian soldiers with a small group of Australians. Arthur returned home, married, produced four daughters and lived a long life.

The fourth brother, John Alexander, was only 18 when he enlisted on 13 April, 1917 and as a trainee teacher required the permission of the Victorian Director of Education. A thin lad of just 114 pounds and five feet five inches he saw active duty in France, but suffered no injuries, illnesses or infringements. He married Susan Andrew in 1925 and taught at a number of Victorian country schools. John joined the RAAF in WWII like his second cousin Jonathan. He also survived WWII and had a long marriage with a family.

The descriptions of the Mollison brothers on their service forms became clues to another family puzzle. They had either black hair, or dark brown curly hair with fresh, medium or dark complexions. Detailed shipping records for their grandparents’ migration to Australia from Aberdeen in 1841 had indicated their Presbyterian grandfather, James Alexander Mollison, was born in Jamaica and was sent to Aberdeen at the age of seven, and was baptised. Their grandmother Janet ‘Jessie’ Brown was from Aberdeenshire farming stock. Photographs of some of their Mollison cousins and only aunt indicate what is often known as a ‘Creole’ appearance. DNA testing of around ten of James known 5th and 6th generation descendants indicates North African/Sub-Saharan African and Amerindian ancestry.

The four Mollison brothers were thus soldiers of mixed-race ancestry (although culturally Scottish), as were their second cousins Tom and Bill Jones, the sons of Caroline Ann Mollison, although they had adopted their Anglo-Irish father’s religion. The Jamaican origins of the family were earlier either lost or were deliberately obscured, as the ‘In Memoriam’ notice for James Alexander (and his wife Jessie), inserted by his third son George in the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) on 10 March, 1886 (and in the Sydney Evening News of 9 March, 1886) and especially George’s own marriage announcement in the SMH on 22 December 1881, emphasising James’s Aberdeen origins and loyalties and not mentioning his Jamaican birth.

Barry Higman’s (1976: 35) research indicates that there was some direct migration of mixed-race West Indians to Australia during the gold rushes of the 1850s, but only in the past few years has evidence emerged of indirect migration from the West Indies to Australia and other colonies via the UK during the first half of the 1800s. These migrants, like James Mollison, were probably ‘elite brown boys and girls ... sent to England or Scotland’ by their West Indies plantation-owning Scottish fathers (Hall 2018:3).

Conclusions

Of the fifteen lives reported here, nearly all were from the country or had immediate country roots. Most were of Protestant background and had enlisted relatively early.

Sarah Carey – my grandfather’s grandmother – lost one grandson in Flanders and two died soon after the war following protracted illness; a fourth was blinded. Her sister Margaret lost four grandsons, and a fifth returned. Sarah and Margaret had grandsons at Gallipoli, and each had a grandson at Beersheba. The Western Front cut a swath through their families: Bull’s Road, Passchendaele, Mont St Quentin, Villers-Bretonneux and the Menin Gate are part of their family history.
Sarah’s Anglo-Irish family intermarried into a staunch Presbyterian Scottish family that turned out to be part of the ‘Black Highlander’ community (Rollyson 1995: 3), with mixed race ancestry. (The Black Highlanders were the Scottish highlanders of Mediterranean appearance in the 18th and 19th centuries.) This branch sent six young men – two sets of brothers – into the war and all returned. They were the grandparents and great grandparents of James and Jessie Mollison – in James’s case of Jamaica via Aberdeen.

Acknowledgements: I am grateful for the advice of my mother’s cousin Betty Farrell in writing the section on the Jones brothers, to my mother’s cousin Colin Fletcher for his general advice and encouragement and to my cousin Cheryl Donald for providing a photograph of her grandfather Tom Jones. This article is dedicated to the 15 men in this article and their families and to members of my extended family particularly William Crawford (Polygon Wood) and Albert Hawkins (the Somme).

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Australia Marriage Index (1788-1950).
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End Notes
1. Unless otherwise indicated all military information and family correspondence is drawn from the service records and repatriation records of the 15 soldiers discussed in this article.
2. Joneses are hard to track and his death certificate, filled in by a shocked and grieving family, had several important mistakes and was at odds with other family stories I was gathering.
3. The second wave of 2,500 men were disembarked from 7 destroyers and came ashore in lifeboats in addition to the 12 tows used by the first wave. A lifeboat is in the Australian War Memorial. See Winter (1994)
4. Ken married Thelma Jacka, the daughter of Albert Jacka, the recipient of Australia’s first Victoria Cross in the Gallipoli campaign.
5. As part of an RSL initiative, Charles Frances was found to be eligible for an official War Grave, and I was contacted through my ancestry family tree to sign the application as one of the nearest relatives. This formal recognition for Charles will be achieved almost a century after his death.
6. Her father Plunkett had lost much of his inheritance – including a substantial home – Blacklands and lands in County Rush Ireland after a protracted legal dispute brought by his older brother. Around this time his daughters migrated to Geelong and Port Phillip, Victoria.
7. Dick’s collection of photographs shows life behind the lines and includes several photographs of himself and younger brother Syd. See the Australian War Memorial: search the collection Richard Crozier: https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1304660
8. Dick and Syd’s letters home to their family were published in the local newspaper and are also available in the Australian War Memorial: https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C93162
10. The Needhams were first cousins of Elsie Needham who in April 1917 married John Curtin, an ardent anti-conscription campaigner and future Prime Minister. The Joneses were her second cousins.

Author
Professor Marian Simms has published extensively in political science and governance. She has held senior academic positions in Australia and New Zealand including chairs in History and Political Studies at Otago and Deakin Universities and was an Executive Director of the Australian Research Council from 2011 to 2016. This article is based on research undertaken into the experiences of her family in WW1.

Photograph Bronwyn Stevens.
Two pounds, ten shillings and six pence (AUS$4.50), plus ten shillings (AUS$0.90) for my recently born mother, was my grandmother’s weekly war widow’s pension – the compensation for a death that destroyed her future hopes for a normal family life. Having survived over three years in the trenches and newly married, my grandfather, age 33, was shot dead by a sniper near Poperinghe, Belgium in the last months of the war. He left a legacy of poverty and deprivation for my pregnant grandmother in an England without a national health service or any other social benefits. Helped by her parents, she managed to bring up my mother, put her through a convent education during the Depression, then secretarial school and into the arms of an appeasing Britain trying not to gear for another conflict. In WWII, my mother drove a fire tender in blitzed London before meeting my father, a kind man who insisted on my grandmother accompanying them to their new home where she lived until he died.

My mother took my grandmother once to Belgium, her only overseas journey, to see my grandfather’s grave, one in a long line standing at attention, with a rose bush in front of each stone. Many years later when my grandmother wished to join him, bureaucracy forbade the depositing of her ashes on a Commonwealth War Grave. This needless and cruel instruction was, of course, ignored and they were reunited, at last – both nourishing the immaculately pruned rose bush. Nine Elms, the cemetery in the Belgian flat lands where they now lay, and where a ten-foot high bump was considered a military advantage and given some exotic name, conjured a restful English countryside as opposed to the tortured landscape that continues to yield munitions, badges and bones.

On my first visit to Belgium, I did not know where my grandfather was buried – just his name and rank, so rang the Commonwealth War Graves Commission thinking it would be an easy task to find him. But there were hundreds of Thompsons to wade through – yet again giving scale to the slaughter. In this one cemetery alone, there were five.

For my grandmother to live through that loss and another war some twenty years later took a fortitude that included an unwillingness to talk about the topic lest it recall the horror of the black-bordered telegram and the decades of anxiety that followed it. His medals and bayonet were enough of a reminder. Widowed at 23, she nevertheless made it to 89, having never remarried, telling me when I asked why, ‘You can only ever love one man in your life’. Those were the days. When I look at my grandmother’s photos, it is hard to compare the post-WWI social deprivation and the post-WWII golden age, free of conscription with the supporting welfare state in which we live. However, the current ethnic hatreds, societal polarisation and an increase in Western militarism makes one wonder just how beneficial these past sacrifices were.

As a teenager, living near London’s ‘swinging’ Kings Road, I often used to see the immaculate red-uniformed and bemedaled pensioners, stiffly walking in pairs near the Chelsea Hospital where they lived – some had even fought in the Boer War. They were given respect and few ever approached them, but one day I did and was invited back to a room for tea and biscuits. Their eyes and memories were sharp and quick to disabuse me of any heroic romanticism – trench foot, trench mouth, lice and mud for breakfast, dinner and tea. Now the Hospital caters for service personnel from later wars in an endless replay for those perhaps wishing to forget, but never being able to do so.

After the War That Didn’t End All Wars, the fallen are commemorated and their lives are lost in the mist of history – but for the military survivors, their families and their descendants, the fallout continues to this day.

Author
After arriving in Australia on the cutter, Kadoona, Michael Buky took on the refit of a schooner-rigged 1930s Baltic Trader while completing a politics degree at the University of the Sunshine Coast. He currently lives in rural Tasmania alongside various endangered species, numerous dairy cows and lots of mud. Michael is the joint editor of this issue. As well as gaining first class honour’s in international relations Michael has joint edited another issue of Social Alternatives. He has published articles on small ships and terrorism and the curtailment of civil liberties in the US Patriot Act.
Top left: Second Lieutenant Charles Thompson.  
Bottom left: Winifred Thompson (née Hawthorn).  
Bottom: Extract from Nine Elms Cemetery Record, Belgium.
World War I hovered as a faint shadow in the background of my childhood. Unlike my school friends whose fathers had served in WWII, my father had been in WWI. Every year our family went to the city to watch our father march in the ANZAC parade before returning home while he caught up with his wartime compatriots. Armistice Day (now Remembrance Day) was also a day for solemn reflection. A lot of my father’s spare time was occupied by activities related to his membership of the Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airman's Imperial League (renamed Returned Services League). In the period after both wars the Victorian RSL provided support for injured veterans and the widows and children of those killed as well as a place for returned service personnel to meet with others who had shared the horrific experience of war. He also regularly attended meetings of the Thirteenth Light Horse Association.

Like most returned service personnel my father rarely spoke of the war except to tell a few ‘amusing anecdotes’. Once he was riding down a sunken road when the big guns started up and his horse bolted – towards enemy lines. Another time he declined an offer of a joy flight and the plane crashed on take-off leaving the pilot intact but the front passenger seat crumpled. He carried the effects of a serious bullet wound to his right thigh throughout his lifetime, but the only time he alluded to his wounding to us was to say there was competition among the officers for his excellent horse when he was evacuated to England. Songs from WWI such as ‘It’s a long way to Tipperary’ and ‘Mademoiselle from Armentières’ (only the respectable first verse) were familiar to me having heard them whistled or sung in the garden.

It was many years before I came to understand the full horror of that war – a war which left more than 17 million dead, six million missing and even more wounded. A war in which tens of thousands were killed and wounded in numerous battles over small strips of muddy, devastated landscape. In which humans were shelled, shot, gassed, drowned in mud and had their precious horses shot to pieces on the battlefield. The casualty figures are so large they are impossible to grasp. It is even more recently that I have started to discover the details of my father’s war and understand how these facts related to my father’s life after the war, the stories I heard at home and my childhood experiences.

Trooper LS Stevens joined up in early 1915, aged eighteen. Being a boy originally from the bush, the Light Horse was his objective and he was assigned to the 13th Light Horse Regiment raised at Broadmeadows in March, 1915. He served first in Egypt and then was deployed to the Western Front. In France and Belgium the Light Horse regiments were broken up and their troops deployed to provide divisional support to the infantry divisions. They were later reunited as the 1 ANZAC Cavalry Regiment (Australian War Memorial). While scope for cavalry activities was limited on the Western Front there were still many duties to be performed by troopers on horseback. These included traffic control, rear area security, reconnaissance and forward patrol, despatch and communication and prisoner escort. Light horse machine gunners were also employed in an anti-aircraft role and troopers were seconded to infantry units for particular battles (Royal NSW Lancers, Australian War Memorial).

The 13th Light Horse, in their roles of divisional support as 1 ANZAC Cavalry and when deployed to infantry units, were involved in many of the major battles on the Western Front including Fromelles, Bapaume, Bullecourt, Ypres and Passchendaele. In the days preceding 26 September 1917, the 5th Australian Division and those supporting them were involved in preparations for the battle to take the ridge above Polygon Wood from German forces. British and ANZAC forces came forward ‘under intense daily German artillery bombardment of the approach area’. There was ‘a significant German attack on 25 September ... at some cost to Australian units’ (DVAANZAC Portal). Charles Bean described the action of 25 September for the Sydney Morning Herald. ‘All day long there has been taking place in Polygon Wood ... such a struggle as certainly equals in fierceness the terrible hopeless fighting in which this wood was lost over two years ago’ (Bean). The full-scale battle launched
on 26 of September was successful in the objective of taking the German positions but at a horrific cost of 5770 Australian casualties.

Troops from the 13th Light Horse, now 1 ANZAC Corps, went on to fight at Passchendaele, Villiers Bretonneux, Mt St Quentin and the battle of Hamel. But for Trooper Stevens, the war had ended in the fierce fighting on the 25th of September before the Battle of Polygon Wood where he received an incapacitating wound. He was initially evacuated to the 3rd Canadian Clearing Station and on 5 October, 1917 he was transferred to hospital in England. Like so many Australian families, his parents received an alarming and uninformative form letter advising them that their son had been wounded. It was another fifteen days on 26 October before the notification that he had been admitted to hospital with a severe gunshot wound was dispatched to his anxious parents. They received four more form letters advising them that their son was improving, progressing favourably and on
7 February 1918, convalescent. He was discharged from hospital on 15 January and attached to the No 2 Depot Weymouth before leaving for Australia on 10 April. There was one final entry relating to his time in the UK - fined a day’s wages for being absent without leave on 29 March (NAA: B24550).

After the war my father returned to work in Melbourne. He was unemployed during the depression before gaining employment at Gaston Brothers, Kensington, manufacturers of agricultural machinery. He cared for his elderly parents after they fell ill until their death. He then married Mary Richardson and had two children, Lyndon James and myself. During the second World War Gaston Brothers was involved in munitions manufacture. Lyndon was also an air raid warden. He was over seventy when he retired from Gaston Brothers. He died in 1972 aged seventy-six. Although he rarely talked about World War 1, its shadow was never entirely absent.

References


Author
Bronwyn Stevens retired from the University of the Sunshine Coast in 2017 where she taught Politics and International Relations including topics on war and the defence of Australia. She studied history courses in both her honours and her MA (IR). Before that she taught History and English to junior and senior high school students including the literature and history of WW1. She often took students to the Australian War Memorial which she believes should be both a place to honour those who served, died or were injured in war and a memorial to the total folly of war.
Reflection on World War I, Hypocrisy and David Olusoga’s *The World’s War: Forgotten soldiers of empire*

**Patrick Weller**

The lieutenant tried to rally his men. In despair he appealed to God: ‘The hour has come when I have to trust each and every one of you … I shall go first and you must follow me … We shall meet up again on the front line, Go forward with God’. A young runner took him at his word, sped off shouting ‘Praised be the Lord Jesus Christ’ and collapsed, mortally wounded (citation from Sheldon cited in Ham 2016: 260).

That story came alive as we walked along the reflective trail through Polygon Wood, just outside Ypres on the centenary of the battle in September 2017, as part of the Australian Government’s commemoration of the Australian contribution to World War I. Of course Polygon Wood has now regrown; it is no longer the cratered mud and splintered trees through which the British and Australian forces had advanced before dawn. But it was significant because this was the battlefield on which a relative was wounded. ‘Life was a lottery’, he had said years later when looking for a name on the wall containing the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial: ‘Where’s Steve Lade? [the lieutenant in charge of the group]; the shell that wounded me killed him’.

The walk through the woods was a grim reminder of the war on the Western Front. The distances were small; the casualties appalling; over 15,000 allies were killed, wounded or missing on that day alone. When we arrived at the site of the cemetery and the Fifth Division memorial where the official services were to be held, it was still not yet dawn. The graves extended row by row, many so young, so far from home. Then we heard a chaplain intone: ‘O God, who art a God of peace’. The absurdity of the proposition should surely have been obvious. We were in a cemetery filled by the casualties of a war in which the principal participants were six Christian nations. By the time of that battle they had been killing each other in the name of the same God for three years.

World War I can be regarded as the epitome of Western civilisation where nationalism and patriotism were the driving motives behind the slaughter. The war destroyed the old world, left a vacuum that was to be filled by fascist, communist and nazi regimes. We should praise the benefits of that civilisation: the music, the culture, the literature, the great cities, but still ask how did it come to this, how did civilised Christian nations drop the veneer of civilisation and the core beliefs of their religion to fight and kill the soldiers of other Christian nations for four long and bloody years?

We know of the commitments of the core European belligerents. We know too of the willingness of Britain’s settler dominions to join the fight ‘to the last man and the last shilling’. The battle sites of Vimy Ridge, Villers-Bretonneux, Hamel and St Quentin became historical symbols where these dominion settlers fought.

But we are relearning a little more of those who were dragged into a conflict as a consequence of their colonial status. Suddenly the experience becomes even more complex, even more difficult to understand. Other faiths, other cultures, other continents were involved in the European war too. David Olusoga’s *The World’s War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* adds to the traditional story of war fought by Europeans on European soil by providing accounts of those other groups whose involvement has been subordinated to the dominant narrative. The ‘experiences, the sacrifices and the stories of 4 million non-European, non-white peoples who have remained in the shadows for much too long’ (424). The book and the television series of the same name were part of the BBC season of programming and research commemorating WWI. The book is assiduously researched using diaries, interviews, published accounts and remaining artefacts – bullets engraved with dragons, an Arabic arch with an inscription from the Koran, a Chinese cemetery. The book was awarded World War One Book of the Year for 2015.

Olusoga argues that WWI was the first true world war – ‘the first in which peoples and nations from across the globe fought and laboured alongside one another’ (15).
This included the troops of the Indian army who reached Europe by the winter of 1914. At the time, their arrival was welcomed. The Times reported on the enthusiastic welcome their triumphal procession received. They were quickly thrown into the winter battles, even though initially hopelessly underprepared and equipped. They fought at the capture of Neuve Chapelle. Of the 11,652 allied casualties 4047 were from the Indian regiments. Sir John French cabled the Viceroy of India: ‘the Indian troops fought with great gallantry and marked success at Neuve Chapelle’ (81). Fifteen thousand Indians were treated at Indian military hospitals in England. Olusoga also tells of the fortunes of two brothers, Mir Dast and Mir Mast. One wins the Victoria Cross, the other deserts to the Germans.

Also from the sub-continent came the Gurkhas of Nepal, over 90,000 of whom served on many fronts. 20,000 were wounded and 2,000 gallantry awards gained (Ghurkha Brigade 2014).

Among those troops air-brushed out of mainstream British history of the war, Olusoga notes, were the Nigerian Regiments and other African troops. A million Africans carried and fought for the British army in Africa. The British West Indian Regiment (BWIR) sent 16,000 men to fight. Initially West Indians were discouraged from signing up until the BWIR was formed. They were initially segregated and given labouring jobs but were later to serve in combat roles in Africa. The 42,000 African Americans in the US forces suffered segregation and minimal visibility. The Siamese Expeditionary force entered the war and arrived in France in 1918. As an elite force of professionals from an independent country they received respect but they too vanished from the mainstream record. Of all the forgotten nationalities who participated in the war, Olusoga believes the 140,000 Chinese Labour Corps were the most forgotten despite the fact that 40,000 of them never returned.

From the French African colonies came La Force Noire. The Tirailleurs Sénégalais were but the first of the colonial troops. The French had decided which of their colonial subjects were the most warlike soldiers, classifying whole tribes as more or less suitable. They recruited extensively from the more suitable and then used them as shock troops on the grounds, they were brave, simple and aggressive, but not disciplined enough for defensive operations. As the war progressed, the Tirailleurs were dying in their thousands. By 1917, they were deliberately used as cannon fodder explicitly to reduce French casualties. ‘I would prefer that ten blacks are killed rather than one Frenchman’, declared the French president (Clemenceau cited on p.195).

The British and colonial governments had opposed arming their African subjects, afraid that it might lead to trouble later and that watching the British struggling to survive might reduce the respect in which the British race should be held in their colonies. This position prevailed and African troops were not sent to the Western Front despite advocates, including Winston Churchill, proposing they should be. The Indian army was different. The British, like the French, also decided that some groups, the Sikhs and the Gurkhas from Nepal in particular, were warlike while others were not. They recruited almost entirely from a few areas though that was expanded as the war dragged on and casualties increased.

The Germans, in response to the bad press their actions in Belgium had evoked, sought to display their enemy in a bad light by disparaging the use of coloured troops. They sent a memorandum of protest to the British and French governments objecting to their deployment. ‘Ghurkhas, Sikhs and Pathans, Sepoys, Turcos, Goums, Moroccans and Senegalese fill the English and French lines from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier’ (185). They complained that the African soldiers’ ‘savagery and cruelty are a disgrace to the methods of warfare of the 20th century’. They protested that ‘the spirit of international agreements … made it a duty of civilized peoples to lessen the inherent evils of warfare’ and to ‘serve the interest of humanity and the ever-progressing demands of civilization’ (186). Using colonial soldiers was against the rules – not fair and proper! Bring on the gas, as long as it was administered by Europeans!

For most Europeans and residents of the former dominions and the USA the participation of these coloured and non-European troops has not been well known. Olusoga argues that this was the result of a process of calculated amnesia when Britain and the US engaged in the ‘process of airbrushing the service and sacrifice of non-white people out of their national narratives of war, whether in the histories or in the memorials’ (416). This began with the victory parades. In France, troops from the white dominions and the US marched but none of the African American troops were included. In London, no one from the British West Indies Regiment or the Nigerian regiment marched. The Indian forces were an exception. Intensive searches for the dead occurred in Europe and equality in death for all who fought and died was proclaimed. But in Africa, only British troops were sought for individual burial.

The forgotten soldiers are not just a European story. In Australia, the government ordered that indigenous Australians were not to be recruited. Gradually they evaded this prohibition, enlisting with their friends under false names or with the connivance of recruiting officers at times, as long as they were ‘white enough’. They served with distinction but were often appallingly treated when
they returned to Australia. The numbers are imprecise but perhaps 1000 served on the Western Front, brave but almost erased from the story (Moreman 2017; Mara 2017).

The value of Olusoga’s account is that both the use of colonial soldiers and the attitude to them is vividly portrayed. They were forgotten because the battles in Africa and Asia were seen as less important. The battles in Europe were predominantly between white Christian countries. That was civilised. Use of black troops was not. The stunning hypocrisy befuddles the mind a century later. It is a story we all should know.

Oh, and that runner who died praising Jesus Christ? He was a German. The bullets at Polygon Wood were Allied, possibly Australian. In whose name?

References

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The Politics of Entry

Coming in the back door
like you could wait politely at the front one.
Coming in the back door
like survival was a party, you’re just not invited.
Yet in all this facelessness
there is the coming from;
coming from a landscape in shadow
where rape is tactical, procedural, political
hold the daughter still
plant your flag in that dark place,
force the life out of her eyes until she
is pregnant with the violence of it.
Let despair grow round
and firm and hungry.
We say; the welcome mat,
red carpet, flood gates open
when all you see is light
from darkness
a door ajar

From the collection The Sky Runs Right Through Us, published by UWAP. February 2018.

Renee Pettitt-Schip, Western Australia
Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Australian literature was generally limited to the nationalist poetry and stories of writers like Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson, and approved by the nationalist project of The Bulletin magazine. This is important not only for the way it underpins our understanding of Australian cultural discourses in general, but for the ways in which these inform literary value. Decades ago, Susan Sheridan argued that these cultural discourses depend on other (often gendered) binary oppositions, such as ‘outside (the bush or the city) vs inside (the domestic, the home),’ ‘Australian nationalist vs British colonial vigour’, and ‘action vs emotion’. What this means is that writers like Ada Cambridge and Rosa Praed ‘were denigrated as “Anglo-Australian,” “lady-novelists” whose cosmopolitan romances were considered derivative, commercial, frivolous and irrelevant to the new national literary tradition’. This dominant mode of thinking still influences the patterns of literary theory and criticism in the study of Australian literature today, so that these preoccupations with identity in Australian culture are necessarily coming full circle. While it is true that the 1970s and 1980s saw dominant attention being paid to feminist revisionism, uncovering ‘lost’ women and reinstating them into a literary canon, if Claiming Space for Australian Women’s Writing is any indication, this project seems to have emerged again as one of eminent importance.

This collection’s task, Bill Ashcroft asserts in its Foreword, is precisely to consider how women’s writing might be seen to intervene in the nationalist project of the Australian literary tradition, how it occupies space ‘around, beneath, between the structures of the national myth’ (x). More than this, Ashcroft adds, if Australian men’s writing has been associated with the work of the nation, then Australian women’s writing is concerned with the transnational space (x). That the introduction is written by Ashcroft, a prominent scholar of postcolonial literatures, is telling: the space for women’s writing, the collection implies, is one which crosses, rather than respects, boundaries and borders. It is in this respect that Claiming Space for Australian Women’s Writing might be seen to make its most significant contribution: the last of its four sections (‘Breaking the Silence: Self and Identity’, ‘A Space of Her Own’, ‘Scripting the Body and Sexuality’, and ‘From the Margins: Longing and Belonging’) is focused on the thematic and formal innovations of work concerned with race, indigeneity, migration and transnational writing.

Central to its purpose, then, is to attend to the ways in which ‘Australian women writers have crossed canonical, cultural and racial boundaries in search of identity and meaning’ (4). Thus, there is particular attention paid to minor or marginalised writers (for example, Georgiana Molloy and Barbara Hanrahan) and genres (suburban fiction, travel narratives), as well as more well-known authors of both fiction and non-fiction (Germaine Greer, Judith Wright, Kate Grenville, Helen Garner). Those border crossings are not just limited to the work’s content, moreover, but extend to its authors. Although the collection contains research by some of the most prominent critics in Australian literary studies, such as Sheridan, Raymond Evans, Jessica White, and Anne Brewster, it also includes the work of critics outside of Australia, such as the collection’s editors, Devaleena Das and Sanjukta Dasgupta, as well as Sanghamitra Dalal and Sibendu Chakraborty.

Claiming Space for Australian Women’s Writing is a comprehensive and ambitious work, opening up more questions and avenues for research than it answers – but it is precisely for the way in which it reinvigorates the conversation about women’s writing in Australia that this book should be commended.

Author
Jessica Gildersleeve is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Southern Queensland. Her research addresses the relationships between literature, ethics, and affect, and her recent publications include Christos Tsiolkas: The Utopian Vision (2017), Don’t Look Now (2017), and Memory and the Wars on Terror: Australian and British Perspectives (ed., with Richard Gehmann, 2017).

End Notes

Song Keepers

People are so fragile
It makes me scared for their safety
& then when they change the world
My heart overflows with giants’ tears

MALACHI DOYLE,
KYNETON, VIC
The shower pipes rattle with running water. My father, or ‘Snapper’ as the blokes down at the surf club call him, is seated on a plastic chair; head bowed as I work the sponge across his constellation of callouses. There is silence between us. Snapper watches the chemical water churn as I study the condensation forming on the glass enclosure — the dripping trails of moisture remind me of paintings I have seen on the roofs of caves up North. In a state of half-dreaming, I dry my father and am thankful for the fog across the mirror.

*  

It is a calm morning. Amber is on the veranda, smoking a cigarette and looking out over the backyard. She arrived in the middle of the night and spent the early hours helping me clean. The house smells of eucalyptus and chemicals — that sickening antiseptic odour that permeates from hospital waiting rooms. A smell we have all begun to know too well.

‘Where’s Dad?’

I tell Amber he is inside, sitting by the tele. I stand and watch as she blows smoke into the air. It seems unimaginable that we used to share a flat in Fitzroy. We were way out of our depths back then — salt-water children in the big city. We went to the same movie theatre every fortnight. They projected French films onto a large rusty wall of corrugated iron.

‘I’m heading to the markets,’ I tell Amber. ‘The carer is here until midday and I have some groceries to get.’

We walk in silence until we reach the school grounds. The farmers market is bustling with families. We buy two takeaway coffees and wander through the rows of stalls. Fruit and vegetables are lined up on fold-out tables. I pick out some sweet potato and tell Amber that I will make a curry when we get home. I don’t even know if she is staying the night.

After a while, the quieter stalls begin to pack up and utes are reversed in behind the marquees. Amber walks out onto the school grounds. She is lost a lot of weight recently but her movements are strong and gentle — just like her mother. She gives me her hand.

‘C’mon, let’s go for a walk.’

*  

It’s busy down at the river mouth. Families are set up in the small pockets of beach that hem the river and a group of young boys are fishing off the coffee rock. We walk along the man-made wall — the one surfers have protested against for months as acres of forest are quietly bulldozed just inland.

‘A bit clearer than the Yarra,’ I say, remembering our long walks along the Southbank as undergrads. It was funny to think that if you followed that water out into the bay it would eventually lead to where we grew up. I missed home when I was studying, mostly when those cold winds blew up from the South, stirring the Cherry Blossoms in our street.

‘How did the university feel about you taking leave?’

‘They were fine,’ I reply, lying. 

We were half-way through a multi-million dollar project up in the Territory. It needed to be finished in the new year if there was any chance of extending the wetlands agreement. We’d been working for months in the heat, gathering evidence and taking samples. I can’t tell Amber how hard it was walking away from it all. I know, however, that she understands — it’s not like I had a choice anyway. As we approach the end of the rock wall we sit down on a bench overlooking the river.

Amber pulls her knees to her chest and watches the fresh water churn. We look out from the edge of the groin where the river is forced into salt water. Just before the ocean begins, there is a brackish space where everything is in stasis. The flow of the river is halted and the world seems to be bogged down — paused, as if in deep contemplation. The schools of...
fish hesitate, waiting for the turbulence to settle before setting off as a bright fabric of scales and memory.

‘I’ve always loved coming here,’ says Amber, breaking the silence.

I smile and continue to watch the water lapping back on itself. We used to come home over the long weekends. Dad would bring the dogs down onto the beach and we would all swim in the shore-break. We were never allowed in until we had lessons at the local pool. Even after we became strong swimmers Dad taught us meticulously about flash rips and currents. It was hard to imagine all of the layers and shifting trails of water below the surface. I guess there are things your eyes just can’t see. You can never really gauge the changes — not even Snapper, and he spent years as a clubbie. He taught us how to read the surface and to move with the current if we ever got ourselves into trouble. On those afternoons, after a day at the beach, big clouds moved in from the North and on the walk home you could feel the day’s heat, its final vestige, trapped in the bitumen.

‘I wonder what it’s like,’ says Amber. ‘I hope he can’t see how scared I am.’

‘You know,’ I reply. ‘In a strange way I’m glad Mum never had to see Dad in this state. But I always wondered if she knew; if she had read the early signs.’

‘So, what are we going to do?’

I just stare at the river mouth. For a moment I imagine Snapper out there — swimming freestyle and propelling himself forward — his muscles aching and his body turning — where all of that life surges forth and the world becomes heavy, with salt.

Author

Ryan Delaney is a HDR student from The University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD. He is interested in the intersection between masculinity and nature in contemporary Australian literature. He was highly commended at the 2018 Queensland State Library Young Writer’s Award and the Fellowship of Australian Writers WA’s Stuart Hadow Short Story Prize.

Bells

At some time in the 80s
angels were fashionable.
One must keep up to date
though Armageddon seems to be a perennial favourite.

I have a home, someone loves me.
Thereby chipping away
at the rockface of peace
find my howls bear a hint of caramel.

My problem persists despite the quinoa & spices,
this human jalopy is destined for the dump.
Some friends have beat me there already. The inequity
of my plenty in a world where boats replace hope.
Windows of war are always open
freezing air blasts out into a warming world.

There are a handful of devils, more frequently
there are those too-human accessories to each warcrime.
No god that can be sensed barring a few great songs
& sunshine is still free even if it gives out cancers.

I won’t pick’n’choose
the map of existence can kill or keep
but the territory is tiny.
Give me the lot.

LES WICKS
MORTDALE, NSW
Vale Professor Ralph Summy

It is with immense sadness that we report the loss of Ralph Summy who passed away on Saturday 27th October 2018, aged 89. Ralph was a founding member of Social Alternatives and was a driving force behind the editorial collective for more than three decades. Indeed, our international reputation was built on his passion and commitment to politics, international relations and the arts. Professor Summy was a leading scholar in Peace and Conflict studies. He was the founding professor of the University of Queensland’s Peace and Conflict Studies Centre and Director of the Matsunaga Institute for Peace at the University of Hawai‘i. He was honoured as an ‘Agent of Peace’ on the 2017 International Day of Peace. Ralph continued to provide advice and support to the journal after leaving the editorial collective as a member of the Advisory Board but had struggled for the past three years with Parkinson’s disease. We remember Ralph as a man of great dignity, moral standing and good humour. His passion for peace and justice, his intellectual generosity and inspiring activism are the legacy he leaves to Social Alternatives.

Agape in its Old World

The news spread to Africa, Europa, the eastern continents, and far north;
To the legions of peacebuilders, dedicated in their efforts for nonviolence;
One of the old leaders, champion Ralph Summy, died from illness in distant Australia.
Soon the tributes were carried by fleet-footed messengers on air, land and sea:
He was the veteran of many campaigns, and brought new strategies for victory;
A bright companion in the taverns, lover of repartee, moderate in language,
Affectionate to his wife, proud of his children and grandchildren;
And always an example of agape, even adding it to his signature.

John Synott
Memorials of War

Buttes New British Cemetery, one of many Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries in France and Belgium. Of the 2108 buried here 1677 remain unidentified. Photograph Bronwyn Stevens.

Langemark Military Cemetery Belgium where 44,000 German war dead are now buried. Photograph Bronwyn Stevens.
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