

1918: End of the war

On the part of the troops it was a remarkable feat of physical and mental endurance to face again and yet again the stress of battle.

Sir John Monash, *The Australian victories in France in 1918* (1920)

By 1918 the world was weary but the new year brought only the prospect of further fighting. Artillery – firing shrapnel, high-explosives, gas, or smoke shells – had come to dominate the battlefield, and the large-scale use of a variety of guns had become a science. A dreadful situation was made worse when the Germans launched a massive offensive in March. The Australians were rushed from Belgium to the Somme. After exhausting journeys in trains and old London buses, and long marches on foot, they arrived to confront the advancing enemy.

The Germans were close to capturing Amiens, but the town of Villers-Bretonneux stood in the way. Hurrying into action, the diggers, with strong support from British troops, made a bold counter-attack. The Germans responded quickly, and were stopped only after days of desperate fighting. However, they were not finished, and on 24 April succeeded in capturing the town. Two Australian brigades counter-attacked, yelling as they charged over unfamiliar ground in the dark. By next morning – Anzac Day – the situation had been secured, and Villers-Bretonneux was safe in allied hands.

We knew you would fight a real fight, but we did not know that from the very beginning you would astonish the whole Continent with your valour.

Georges Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France

In June there was a major change when an Australian, Sir John Monash, took command of the Australian Corps. Short in stature but with an imposing presence and intellect, Monash led the diggers through a series of victories, starting with the battle of Hamel on 4 July. It was the first time Australian and American troops had fought side by side; the Americans were young, fresh, and eager, and the Australians were glad of the support.

From August the British Army turned to the offensive and started making important gains. Further defeats on the battlefield and acute shortages and civil disturbances at home put Germany in serious trouble, and its troops withdrew to the town of Péronne. Here, dispirited and soaked by the rain, they prepared to make a stand. The nearby hill of Mont St Quentin was a strategic defensive position, and it was vital that it be captured quickly. The task was given to the Australian 2nd Division, while the 5th Division was to take Péronne. For a while the result hung in the balance, but by 1 September the town and hill were in Australian hands.

The next step was an advance on the Hindenburg Line, and from late September the diggers were heavily engaged in breaking through the enemy's complex system of defences. Throughout these last months Australian units were low in numbers and nearing exhaustion. On 5 October they took part in their last infantry action of the war: capturing the village of Montbrehan. For the diggers, the war ended on the high note of success in battle.

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Bookings are essential for all school groups visiting the Memorial, whether choosing a facilitated program led by Memorial staff or a teacher-guided tour. A risk-assessment guide is available from the NCEIP website.

<http://www.canberraexcursions.org.au/public-liability>

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Facilitated program	Primary	Secondary	\$/head	Duration
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The past in the present	✓		\$5.50	45 min
Strange but true	✓	✓	\$5.50	45 min
We will remember them	✓	✓	\$5.50	45 min
Anzac legacy	✓		\$7.70	1 hr
Indigenous wartime service	✓		\$7.70	1 hr
Australians and the First World War		✓	\$7.70	1 hr
Australians and the world wars		✓	\$9.90	75 min

In addition to facilitated programs, the Memorial offers a specially designed school wreathmaking ceremony. For more information on all the above, go to:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/schools/programs>

They rode, very dusty and unshaved, their big hats battered and drooping.

Henry Gullett, Australian official war correspondent

Far from the Western Front, the Australian Light Horse Regiments had won acclaim on the world's oldest battlefields in the Middle East. After spending the summer in the malarial Jordan Valley, Australian troops, under the command of British General Sir Edmund Allenby, took on a leading role in the push towards Damascus. The capture of the ancient city and its liberation from Ottoman rule marked the peak of the light horsemen's wartime operations. The desert campaign had been long and arduous, fought over great distances and amid extreme temperatures, weather conditions, and terrain. The allied forces continued further into Syria, but the Ottoman army was already beaten. On 31 October the Ottoman Empire signed an armistice with Britain, bringing an end to the fighting in the Middle East.

The Old Force passed down the road to history. The dust of its march settled. The sound of its arms died. Upon a hundred battlefields the broken trees stretched their lean arms over sixty thousand of its graves.

Charles Bean, Australian official First World War historian

Less than two weeks later the war ended. In the early morning of 11 November Germany signed an Armistice with Britain and France, and at 11 am the fighting ceased. Although the formal peace treaties would not be signed until the following year, the Great War was finally over. For the Australians, what mattered now was bringing the troops home – but there were 60,000 who would never return. They lay under simple markers, from the beaches of Gallipoli to the desert outposts of Egypt and the scarred landscape of France, or remained forever missing in action.

The cost for Australia 1914–1918

Raised: **416,809**

Served overseas: **331,781**

Died: **59,342**

Wounded: **152,171**

Taken prisoner: **4,084**

A.G. Butler, *Special Problems and Services*, Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914–1918, vol. III, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1943, p. 880.

These figures cover the period from 1914 to 1918, whereas the Roll of Honour includes those who died up until the Australian Imperial Force was formally disbanded on 31 March 1921. Can statistics measure the true cost of war? Why or why not?



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The impact and the aftermath

We came back to a changed world. The world was now going through the upheaval from war to peace, from insanity to sanity – a greater upheaval than from peace to war.

Captain Garnet Adcock, 2nd Tunnelling Company

The signing of the Armistice brought victory for the allies but little sense of triumph, for there seemed too little to show for all the dreadful loss of life. Everyone knew at least one person who had been killed in the war, often a son, husband, father, or friend. For those who returned, the shift from active service to civilian life was often hard. Many just wanted to forget their experiences, and tried to put the lost years behind them. Some couldn't, and struggled to cope with the weight of physical and mental scars. Others managed to find jobs and settled into domestic life and careers, sometimes becoming civic leaders or even reaching national prominence. Here are the stories of some Australians whose lives were forever changed by the First World War.

A loving mother

For widowed mother Hughena Hunter, the postwar years were a time of sadness. Her only two sons had died in service. Hector was killed on Gallipoli and has no known grave, while Reginald was fatally wounded on the Western Front in 1918 and buried in Vignacourt British Cemetery near Amiens. Reginald's belongings were eventually sent to his mother; his boots were still encrusted with mud from the battlefield.

Some 20 years later Hughena journeyed to France, where she was invited to lay a wreath at the unveiling of the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. On her pilgrimage to the other side of the world she also visited nearby Vignacourt. There, she gathered a handful of soil from her son's grave, and sealed it safely in an envelope. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Hughena put her own grief aside and opened her Sydney guest house to servicemen stationed far from their families.



Herbert and Ruth Foxton with their 12 grandchildren, c. December 1964. AWM P1954.001

A determined veteran

On 17 July 1918, while fighting in France, Captain Herbert Foxton was struck by an exploding shell. Rendered blind, mute, and severely wounded, he was taken to a hospital in London. Over the following months he underwent 25 faciomaxillary operations. His face was rebuilt, little by little, but his sight could not be restored. Later, transferred to another hospital in England, Herbert learned Braille, typewriting, and joinery, and in 1921 he returned to Australia to start his life anew.

Job opportunities were scarce for the former watchmaker, and so Herbert travelled back to England for further surgery. In 1925, now with partial sight in one eye, Herbert returned to Australia again, but this time he was not alone. He had met a young Irishwoman, Ruth, while studying watchmaking in Dublin before the war, and the pair had re-connected in Belfast some years later. Herbert and Ruth married in Sydney, and had four children together. Herbert lived to be 94 years old.



Young Albert and his father. Image courtesy Judy Joyce. AWM P04603.002

An enduring legacy

In spite of policies prohibiting their enlistment, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leapt at the chance to serve. Among these were four descendants of Lucy Leane, a proud Darug woman of the Cabrogal clan. The first of these to enlist was 37-year-old labourer Albert Charles Leane, but his service on the Western Front was short-lived. Captured on 20 July 1916, when the raw and untired 5th Australian Division was thrown into battle around the shell-ravaged village of Fromelles, Albert waited out the end of the war in a prisoner-of-war camp.

Brothers Albert Edmund and William Arthur Leane also served. Both teenagers when they volunteered, Albert was taken on by a pioneer battalion while William put his skills as a baker to use with the Field Bakery. Although raised in Canada, their cousin, Marion, also enlisted, joining Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service in early 1917. A trained nurse, Marion proved attentive and efficient, tending wounded troops on board crowded ambulance trains. After the war Marion moved to Trinidad with her husband, and devoted herself to sharing her medical expertise. She later received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for her outstanding leadership of the Red Cross during the Second World War.

He is all of them. And he is one of us.

The Honourable Paul Keating MP, Prime Minister of Australia



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This photograph on the cover was taken in 1919 at Adelaide Cemetery, near Villers-Bretonneux in France. In 1993 the body of an unknown Australian soldier was exhumed from this cemetery and brought home. Thousands came to pay their respects at Old Parliament House as he lay in state, and thousands more lined Anzac Parade as he was brought to his final resting place at the Australian War Memorial.

Look at the photograph on the cover: this colour patch appears on some crosses, signalling that the soldiers buried there were part of the 30th Battalion. What other words or symbols can you see?

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Front cover composite image of Adelaide Cemetery, France, made up of AWM E05925 (019) and image courtesy Kathleen Ciback (2017). Additional collection item: AWM PAU2004/15701.



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