

Candour: Stories in the words of those who served 1914-18

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Napier Waller, Hall of Memory: south window (1950 stained glass. AWM ART90410.001)

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**AUSTRALIAN
WAR MEMORIAL**

Comradeship

Ancestry

Patriotism

Chivalry

Loyalty

Resource

Candour

Curiosity



AWM ART90410.001

In the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra there are 15 stained-glass windows. Each shows a figure dressed in military uniform, and under each figure is a word which describes a quality displayed by Australians during wartime. One window features a signaller and an open flower. He represents the frank and honest way in which Australians have told the stories of their wartime experiences.

This window bears the word *Candour*.

Candour

Stories in the words of those who served 1914–18

Written by Karin Huckstepp and Carlie Walker

1914

1915

1916

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Note to the reader

Most of the events described take place during wartime. You may feel sad after reading some of them. Teachers may wish to be sensitive to those students who have parents serving overseas in war zones.

Readers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent should be aware that this book contains images of deceased Indigenous ex-servicemen.

To retain the authenticity of the individuals' accounts, some misspelt words have been included in the text.

1917

MASTER JACK SKRIPPIET
NEW COLLEGE
BEX HILL
MELBOURNE
AUSTRALIA

1918

1919

Introduction

More than 330,000 Australians served overseas during the First World War. Each one of them has a story. Some never had the chance to tell that story. Those who did, told it in their own unique way.

Many penned diaries and letters, some sketched works of art and maps, and others snapped photographs with their Kodak Vest Pocket cameras. What each individual noticed and shared was influenced not only by their job and experiences but also by their point of view, attitudes, and values. How they chose to share their story was guided by who would be reading it. Sometimes the author gave candid, honest accounts; at other times they were **censored**, or were selective in their retelling.

The following stories of Australian men and women who served in the First World War have largely been told in their own words from their diaries, postcards, and letters. Their expressions, recollections, and **vernacular** provide a window into another time and place. At times in their writing, the authors likened what they were seeing abroad to their memories of home, which caused many to reflect with nostalgia on their former life in Australia. Staff Sergeant (later Lieutenant Colonel) John Treloar wrote in his diary on 9 February 1915:

Most of us find our homeland was much dearer to us than we ever thought. Often one hears the remark, "Australia will do me".¹

While official records provide important information about historic events, primary sources like diaries, letters, and works of art enhance and deepen our understanding of what happened. These records not only show the impact of the events but also make the experiences personal and relatable, even today.

Included in some of the stories in this book are reflections by living relatives on what reading their ancestor's words means to them. Captain Thomas White's grandson Rodney noted:

Having in my hands the actual diaries and letters that [my grandfather] had written 100 years ago was very special. It is a strange sensation to handle something of significance from a long time ago. It was an everyday thing to him when he wrote it, but it has acquired a specialness with time.

It is only because of those who worked to collect and preserve the wartime records of Australian men and women that we are able to share these stories with you.

Soldiers scribble hurried letters to their loved ones at Port Melbourne pier before boarding HMAT *Ulysses* for Europe, 25 October 1916.

AWM PB1126

1914

1915

1916

“Tenderly and carefully preserved”: Lieutenant Colonel John Linton Treloar

“The Australian soldier and sailor frequently recorded in his diary or in his home-letters indications of the thoughts, hopes, and fears which were uppermost in his mind, and descriptions of his own and others’ work and actions. These papers are often the most valuable human documents, bearing evidence of supreme effort and endurance in circumstances of which, unfortunately, there is in many cases nowadays practically no other existing record.”

AWM IDRL/0092

John Linton Treloar wrote these words in 1927 while serving as the Director of the Australian War Memorial. The process of collecting, organising, and preserving Australian wartime records dominated most of John’s working life.

Born in 1894, John was raised in a bustling family home in Victoria, with parents William and Jane, and his seven brothers and sisters. While studying at Albert Park State School John discovered a love for cricket, and each year he donned the traditional whites to represent the school. After graduation he became a military staff clerk in the Department of Defence, an experience that prepared him for the important role he would take on in the First World War.

John joined the **Australian Imperial Force** (AIF) shortly after the war began in August 1914. Enlisting as a staff sergeant, he armed himself with a typewriter and completed important administrative duties for senior officers in Cairo and on Gallipoli. John documented his tasks in his diary, hoping that his writings would one day “interest those who may read them”.

18 April 1915

In the afternoon the Disembarkation Orders came out, as well as Operation Order No. 1, and by hard work we managed to finish them off just before midnight. They are the most important orders I have yet typed or helped with. I have done the same kind before for exercises etc. but this is the first time for the real thing. I wonder how our troops will fare? We have been entrusted with most important work which I hope we will carry out successfully.

25 April 1915

“The Day” for which we had waited and trained for six months had arrived. At about 5 am we could see fairly clearly the mountainous, jungle-covered country in which our troops were to force a landing, as we now knew, in the face of opposition – how great an opposition we knew not ...

Soon it came our turn to leave the ship and in a cutter we made our way almost to the shore and then had to jump into the water and wade the rest ... I will never forget the march from the landing point along the beach to where HQ were to be established. Over-burdened with various stuff besides our equipment, under fire for the first time, and reminded by killed and wounded on the beach of the seriousness of our job, we marched to the gully where HQ were to be established. There we dug some sort of shelter and started work.



John on 11 March 1916 after receiving his commission in the Australian Flying Corps.

AWM P04505.002

1917



1918



1919



Divisional Headquarters staff members wade ashore at Anzac Cove, 25 April 1915.

AWM G00903

John's job was to type reports, messages, and orders for senior officers. Why would roles like this have been necessary on Gallipoli?



12 May 1915

During the day I had the honour of typing the first despatch by the first Australian General to command the first Australian Division in the field. Some people achieve greatness! Of course I could have passed the despatch on to someone else, but I like to do such an important thing myself, as I can then in a humble way correct anything that may possibly go wrong.

On account of the plunging fire to which we have been subjected lately it has been decided to move to more secure parts. Our new position is up a considerable height and has a splendid outlook over the crowded Anzac Cove, where about forty transports and half a dozen battleships are lying. In the distance at eventide we see the most glorious sunset behind mountainous Samothrace. It is difficult in such a peaceful and delightful scene to realise that we are on real active service, but overhead bullets are almost continually "whizzing", and at frequent intervals there are bursts of shell fire.

24 May 1915

Lately the days have been very trying and my diary, for one thing, has suffered for all the last few entries have been written in some time after they occurred. Perhaps therefore the accounts in some cases may be a little out of order, though I myself think they are fairly accurate. Anyhow this "diary" is not a historical work - merely something to look back on later.¹



AWM P04505.008



AWM P04505.001

Two of John's brothers served in the First World War. Harold (left) enlisted in the Australian Flying Corps in April 1915. He was captured by Turkish troops and held as a prisoner of war until his release in November 1918. Reginald (right) enlisted in the AIF and received a Military Medal for bravery in France.



1914

1915

1916

Difficult conditions and long hours resulted in John becoming sick. He was evacuated from Gallipoli with **enteric fever** in September and returned to Australia for recuperation. On the voyage home he wrote:

10 December 1915

My last birthday was spent in Cairo, and I remember hoping then that the next one might be spent at home. I little thought I should attain 21 years of age on a transport en route for home ... In Cairo all seemed to think I was too young to be a soldier, but I claim to be one no longer – I am now only a bit of the wreckage of war.²

John's health gradually improved, and in March the following year he again set sail for Europe, this time as a lieutenant and equipment officer with No. 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps (AFC). For a self-proclaimed "home bird", John struggled to farewell his family and his sweetheart, Clarissa, for a second time:

There is always something sad in the departure of a vessel – and this increases when that vessel is a transport conveying soldiers who expect to face death. People on the Pier may smile bravely, so may the troops, but to most the hurt is there. I tried to smile, but this parting hurt much more than the first one on the Orvieto about 16 months before.³

John was soon made confidential clerk to Brigadier General Brudenell White at the 1st Anzac Corps Headquarters in France. Based at the corps' Central Registry, his job included internal communications and issuing orders to units.

By May 1917 John had proven himself to be a skilled administrator and record-keeper, and was selected to lead the new Australian War Records Section (AWRS) in London. Established by official First World War correspondent Charles Bean, the AWRS's role was to collect and organise the official records of the Australian forces and preserve them for the nation.

Charles's idea for a memorial museum in Australia soon led the AWRS to collect relics as well as documents. Soldiers were encouraged to gather objects from the battlefield and were issued with labels to fill out and attach to each artefact. Competition was encouraged among the soldiers, who became good at collecting (and sometimes pinching) souvenirs. Over the next two years the AWRS acquired some 25,000 objects. These, along with photographs, film, works of art, and other written documents, were the beginnings of the Australian War Memorial's National Collection.

Six days before the end of the war, on 5 November 1918, John married Clarissa in London. He was promoted to major in December, and the following year was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his contribution to the war. John finally returned home in July 1919.

Owing to his dedication to Australia's military and its records, John was appointed director of the Australian War Memorial in 1920. Although the building would not open for another 21 years, John worked tirelessly to ensure it had a strong collection and remained financially stable. During the 1920s he helped organise temporary exhibitions of the Memorial's growing collection in Sydney and Melbourne. These helped to raise funds for the Memorial, and gave grieving Australians the opportunity to better understand the experiences of their loved ones.

An example of a label issued to Australian servicemen by the AWRS. This one is attached to a damaged rifle oil bottle. It was later claimed that Australians used the labels a little too enthusiastically, with some being attached to bridges, buildings, and trains.

AWM RELAWM07714

The labels were made from woven cotton and coated in a thick layer of starch, which made them durable. Why was this important?

What sort of information did the soldiers need to record about the objects they collected? Why?

AWM D00115



1917



1918



1919



In 1927 John wrote to Mrs Margaret Barr, whose son Sergeant Hugh Barr was killed in action in Belgium on 13 October 1917. In it he requested she donate her son's private letters:

It is of course recognised that these documents are very precious to you, being in the nature of cherished heirlooms which, if kept in your family, cannot fail to inspire future generations with a spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice and a determination also to serve their country well. On the other hand it may perhaps be reasonably held that, if included in ... the Australian War Memorial, they will be of even greater value to Australia and the world at large, and, in the long run, more tenderly and carefully preserved.

In the end Margaret decided to donate the letters to the Memorial, and they remain preserved in the collection to this day.

AWM 1DRL/0092

Are diaries and letters reliable sources of information? Why/why not? What do they add to our understanding of the past?

Why would John have considered it so important to have diaries and letters in the Memorial's collection?

AWM P11445.002

Sergeant Hugh Barr, c. 1916. AWM H12543

AWM 1DRL/0092

John and Charles worked together to acquire private letters and diaries for the Memorial's collection. Over many years, John personally wrote to some 5,400 veterans and families, seeking donations. He saw these records as essential in telling the Australian story, and in some cases his correspondence with donors lasted for decades.

When the Second World War began in 1939, John was given leave to head up the newly established Department of Information. In a role similar to the one he held in the First World War, John took charge of the Military History and Information Section at Army Headquarters in Melbourne, overseeing the collection of relics and documents for the Memorial's collection.

The Memorial building opened in Canberra while the Second World War was still being fought, on 11 November 1941. After the war, John returned to the role of director. His dedication to the job never waned, and after years of hard work and gruelling hours he died suddenly in 1952, aged just 57. The Memorial's storage facility and the road which hugs the back of the main building are named in his honour.

William Dargie, *Group of VADs* (1942, oil on canvas, 115.9 x 100.4 x 8 cm, AWM ART22349)

Three of John and Clarissa's four children served during the Second World War. Joan, depicted here on the far right, served in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and the Australian Army Medical Women's Service. Alan served in the Second AIF, and Ian served in the Royal Australian Air Force. Ian never returned home: he was killed during a flying battle in Italy in 1943. His name is listed on the Memorial's Roll of Honour.



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“I am going to do the best for my country”: Lieutenant Thomas James Richards

Thomas James “Tom” Richards landed on Gallipoli on the morning of 25 April 1915. Despite the chaos unravelling around him, Tom managed to take seven photographs of the Anzacs arriving on the beaches. Later that evening he entered a detailed recollection of the day into six pages of his diary. Little did he know how valuable the chronicles of his wartime experiences would one day be.

Born in 1883 in Emmaville, New South Wales, Tom was the fourth of six children. The entire family moved to Charters Towers in Queensland the following year, enticed by the possibilities of fortunes to be made in the gold mines. Tom attended the local state school and later enjoyed playing Rugby Union with the Charters Towers Natives team. He was a talented young player, and it wasn't long before he represented first his state and then his country. During his later travels he played in South Africa and England, and even represented the latter. Although he retired from football in 1913, Tom remained close to the sport, reporting for various publications, including the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Tom was 31 years old when he enlisted in the AIF at the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. He was keen to join the Australian **Light Horse Regiments**, but there were no opportunities. Instead he signed on with the Army Medical Corps and the 1st Australian Field Ambulance. He left Australia with his unit in October, after just two months of training as a **stretcher-bearer**. He recorded aspects of the trip in his diary.

This moment at Anzac Cove was captured by Tom a few days after the landing.

AWM J06120

Tom Richards in his army uniform soon after being awarded the **Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in 1917.**

Image courtesy of the Tom Richards Collection, Australian Rugby Union Archives.



1917

MASTER JACK SPRINGFIELD
NEW COLLEGE
BOX HILL
MELBOURNE
AUSTRALIA

1918

1919

Civilians aboard boats in Sydney Harbour bid farewell to HMAT *Euripides*, c. 1914–18.

AWM P08286.031

19 October 1914

Many of the hundreds of boatloads of people that sailed around the Euripides today thought of nothing further or deeper than that a friend or brother was going to the war ... They finally played "God save the King", and I was fighting again to keep back the tears, as we stood lined up at attention on the top deck.

20 October 1914

The Euripides got under way 5.30 am and steamed down past Watson's Bay with a high wind and blinding rain ... No more forlorn spectacle could be witnessed than a crowded troopship on the first day at sea.

AWM 2DRL/0786

Arriving in Egypt in early December, Tom continued to keep a diary. Having established himself as a sports journalist before the war, he also wrote for newspapers while serving overseas, this time focusing on his wartime experiences. In an article for the *Sydney Mail* early in April 1915, he detailed a desert ride taken by a group of Anzacs:

It was with mixed feelings of wonderment and dubious expectation that our party of Australian soldiers set out from Mena Camp, mounted on camels ... After having an enjoyable tea on the desert, with a typical hazy Egyptian sunset, both fascinating and rich in colour ... The silent-footed "ships of the desert" made the solitude and dull shadows, remarkably impressive ... the quaint silhouetted figures of these uncanny-looking camels made an extraordinary picture, and when the seven of them were racing along the picture was wonderfully intensified ... the young Australians retired to their blankets, stiff and sore, but pleased beyond words with the wonders that the day had opened up to them¹

Tom continued to photograph the sights in Egypt, and hoped that his images might even "bring me a few **shillings**". At this time newspapers back home were offering payments for such pictures. When he wasn't training for his role as a stretcher-bearer, or touring Cairo, he joined in games of rugby. After three months in Egypt, Tom's next destination was to be Gallipoli. On 24 April 1915, he wrote:

To-morrow is the all-eventful day. We have our bully beef and biscuits with a full water bottle for two days or more. There is no water on the Gallipoli landing place at all, so we have to take great care of our water and fill ourselves up to the neck before landing.

1914

1915

1916

At 3.30 am the first landing parties comprising Battalions of the 1st Brigade will face the music ... At 8 am the Engineers and 1st Field Ambulance go ashore in small barges and rowing boats.

Into my overcoat I have sewn a piece of waterproof sheeting as the coats do not keep the water out very well ... I also have [a] waterproof bag to carry my notebook and camera in.

24 April 1915

I don't feel the coming danger any more than I have felt anxious the night before an international football match.

Tom in his national Rugby Union jersey. He was often known by his nickname "Rusty", especially during his football career.

Image courtesy of the collections of the State Library of New South Wales.

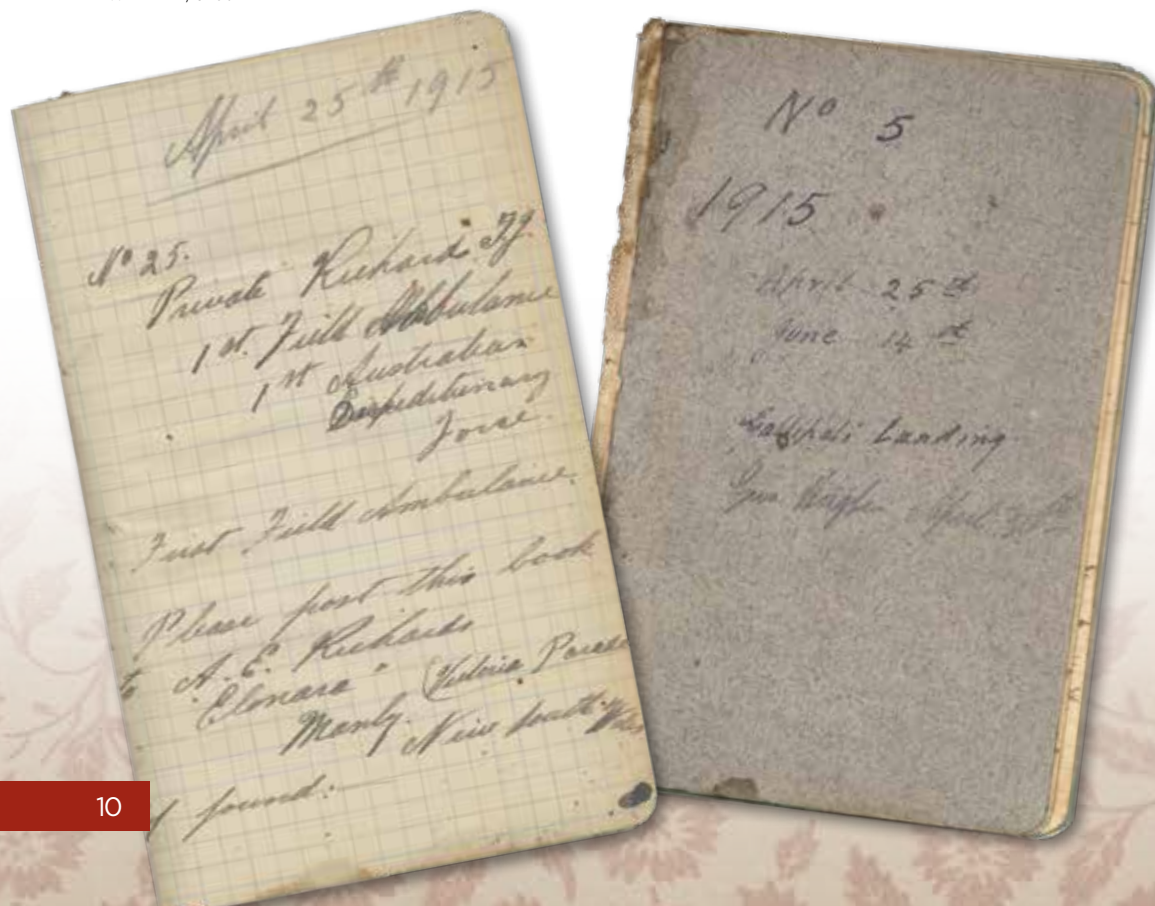


25 April 1915

No bugle call to wake us this morning but most of us were astir before the sun rose, a brilliant and pleasing red glow ... From just before daylight as we approached Gallipoli, having left Lemnos about 1 am, there was a wholesale roaring and spitting of big guns, our warships being particularly aggressive ... a shell came just over No. 13 transport and stirred up the water to a height of perhaps 60 feet, within 150 yards of us. This brought home to me the grim reality of war, but to my surprise I was not much troubled and took seven photos before landing up over our knees in water ... 20 minutes later we with stretchers were climbing the steep, rough hills looking for wounded ...

A fellow came along and asked me to go up and fix up his pal whose foot was shot. With a stretcher Watts and I went but 100 yards along the valley. The bush was too thick and the water-worn track so rough that we discarded the stretcher and proceeded on all fours up to the firing trenches ... When we got back I was pretty well finished; it was a hard job for me but truly terrible for the patient.

AWM 2DRL/0786



Tom was very descriptive in his writing. By 25 April 1915, he was already starting on his fifth journal.

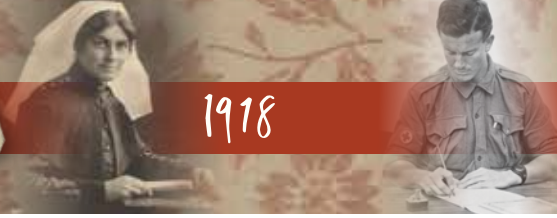
AWM 2DRL/0786

Why do you think it was important to Tom to keep a diary protected in a waterproof bag during the landing?

1917



1918



1919



Tom would have worn an armband like this to identify himself as a stretcher-bearer.

AWM REL41510



Tom took this photograph of the 1st Australian Field Ambulance transferring from HMS *Scourge* into row boats during the Gallipoli landings on 25 April 1915.

AWM J06122

As we were landing into the torpedo boat Scourge at 8.30 am a shell came just over ... This brought home to me the grim reality of war ...

AWM 2DRL/0786



For the next eight months Tom tended to the wounded on Gallipoli, adding entries to his diary when he had time.

In March 1916 Tom sailed to France on the **Western Front**, where he served for the next two years. Known for his fine leadership skills and endurance, he was promoted several times and transferred to the 1st Battalion. No longer a stretcher-bearer, as an officer his job was to lead and support his men through **infantry** actions in France and Belgium. The conditions were challenging, with freezing weather, but there were still opportunities for rugby matches that gave Tom and his friends some respite.

Soldier photography in the First World War

Thousands of AIF troops departing for overseas service took with them the mass-produced Kodak Vest Pocket camera, which was small and reasonably portable. In line with British **regulations**, soldiers were banned from carrying personal cameras at the front. There was concern that, should a camera end up in enemy hands, its images might reveal vital **intelligence**. It was also thought that taking photographs could distract troops from their duties. This rule was not strictly applied in Egypt or Gallipoli, where soldiers enthusiastically took photographs of their experiences. However, when they arrived on the Western Front, the ban on personal photography was more firmly enforced. Despite this, many continued taking snapshots of their mates and wartime experiences. Punishments of **courts-martial** or imprisonment were threatened, but there is no record of Australians being charged for using cameras while on the Western Front.



Kodak Vest Pocket Autographic Camera and case

AWM REL/11799

Why might the men have continued to use their cameras even though it was against the rules?

Why are the photographs these soldiers took so important today?

1914

1915

1916



Tom and other members of the 1st Battalion carried out work on roads in France that had been devastated by bombing.

AWM J06113

14 April 1917

I have had a party out filling the huge shell crater on the Doignies-Demicourt road. It would take weeks to fill the thing in altogether so we just dug a way around the mouth of the cavity making a decent track for the transport to pass around.

20 April 1917

It is wet and cold; we don't so much mind the cold, but it's the wet that counts against our men. To make matters worse there is no place to sleep at all. Last night the darkness was very trying when going from one post to the other ... My book (diary) of late has been starved due to the possibility of being taken prisoner and the contents being of use to them; besides this there is but little chance of writing as it takes me all day to get enough sleep to carry on the business of war over night.

AWM 2DRL/0786

An Australian takes the opportunity to rest in a dug-out in the side of a captured German trench at Bullecourt, May 1917.

AWM E00455



1917



1918



1919



Tom served alongside Corporal George "Snowy" Howell in the 1st Battalion, and the pair took part in the fierce fighting at Bullecourt in France on 6 May 1917. Tom led a bombing party on this day, and for his bravery was awarded the Military Cross.

Snowy risked his life several times while defending the Australian trenches. He received many shrapnel wounds, including one to his hand. The shrapnel also struck the fob watch he was carrying, causing it to stop at the moment the watch was hit, at 6.57 am.

After undergoing medical treatment in England, Snowy returned to Australia. In recognition of his bravery at Bullecourt, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.



AWM H19432



AWM RELAWM07900

Reflecting on the events, Tom wrote:

I can't help thinking of the savage shell-fire we have been subjected to for the past four days. How the ground fairly trembled for hours on end, it was like a lightly laden ship in a bumpy sea with the propeller jumping out with every toss.

AWM 2DRL/0786

With no end in sight, many became increasingly war-weary as fighting ground on:

28 March 1918

It is quite cold to-day and the war news is pretty bad; it is at the same time this day two years ago since we landed in France. No doubt it was celebrated in some quarters too but we did not take any notice of it here.

5 April 1918

Marching with full pack etc. up seems to be very trying now; once I used to carry twice the weight without feeling it.

AWM 2DRL/0786

Three years of harsh conditions and battle wounds meant that Tom was hospitalised several times throughout the war. He was finally invalided back to Australia with **osteoarthritis** of the spine. Writing once again for newspapers in Sydney and marrying a local girl, Tom's future looked brighter. However, his back and shoulder wounds combined with the after-effects of the **mustard gas** he had encountered in the trenches took a toll on his health. Tom died in 1935, aged 52.

1914

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1916

“Faith in the unseen”: Chaplain Walter Ernest Dexter

“The men are deeply religious now after their experiences and there is one dug-out by the road where they always sing hymns ... it sounds lovely at night.”

AWM PR00248

Born in the town of Birkenhead in England, Walter Ernest Dexter was only 14 years old when he left home to become a sailor. Walter’s adventures on the seas saw him visiting ports all around the world, including in Australia. Later enlisting in a unit raised in India known as Lumsden’s Horse, Walter served in the Boer War, where he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery.

While away at sea, Walter studied ancient languages and undertook further study to become an Anglican minister. After he was **ordained** the church sent him to Australia in 1910 to serve **parishioners** in Victoria.

In September 1914, following the outbreak of the First World War, Walter enlisted in the AIF. As one of 12 chaplains, he set sail from Melbourne on board HMAT *Orvieto* the following month, and began recording his experiences in his journal.

Walter conducted religious services on board the *Orvieto* and organised activities to keep the men occupied.

7 November 1914

Fine weather ... Smooth sea. Very hot ... obtained permission from the Captain to have men on boat deck from noon to 4.30 pm. Started our cricket competition & other sports.

Walter’s “Lumsden’s Horse” shoulder titles.

AWM REL/15672

Lumsden’s Horse was a volunteer unit of the Indian Mounted Infantry Corps, formed in 1899 by Lieutenant Colonel Dugald Mactavish Lumsden.



Walter outside his tent on Gallipoli, 1915.

AWM J05400



1917



1918



1919



Medals awarded to Walter Dexter during his military service. From left: the Distinguished Service Order, the Military Cross, the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the Queen's South Africa Medal, the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal 1914-20, and the Victory Medal with a Mentioned in Despatches oakleaf.

AWM REL/15671.001-004

HMAT *Orviato* leaves Port Melbourne pier, October 1914.

AWM G01539

Left Melbourne 3 pm, Dorrie and Mum on board the Orviato, to see me off... I watched Dorrie as far as I could & then turned away & threw myself amongst the men & endeavoured to still my mind. "Mizpah".

AWM PR00248

***Mizpah* is a Hebrew word meaning "Lord watch over me".**



Walter used this footlocker to carry his belongings during the First World War.

AWM REL/15679



1914

1915

1916

Among those on board HMAT *Orvieto* was the commander of the AIF, Major General William Throsby Bridges. As they sailed further from home into the dangerous waters of the Pacific, Walter reflected on the ship's fragility:

8 November 1914

Approaching the Cocos Islands we are at the most dangerous part of our journey ... Though the trip feels like a pleasure trip ... at any moment it may turn to tragedy & one knows that ours would be one of the first ships to go ... For on board the Orvieto are all the heads of various departments.

AWM PR00248

HMAT *Orvieto* and HMAS *Sydney* were in the first convoy of ships to leave Albany in Western Australia on 1 November 1914. On 9 November *Sydney* encountered the German cruiser SMS *Emden*. A battle between the two ships ensued and the German vessel was eventually beached on the nearby Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Survivors from the *Emden* were taken prisoner and divided among the convoy of Australian ships. German commander Captain Karl von Muller was assigned to HMAT *Orvieto*. Walter visited the commander several times during the latter's imprisonment on the ship.

9 November 1914

Captain von Muller is tall & slim, about six feet & pale complexion, slightly bald with a very quiet manner. He speaks English fluently. It was my privilege as Chaplain to have access to him & the other prisoners ... I grew to like von Muller very much ... we yarned away ... He is the kind of man I would like for a chief officer ... I hope to meet later on in England or Germany.

AWM PR00248



Captain Karl von Muller. Commanding officer of SMS *Emden*, 1914.

AWM 305444

AWM EN0228

John Treloar was one of those who travelled on the *Orvieto*, and wrote the following after one of Walter's services:

15 November 1914

This morning Captain Dexter spoke to us about Faith in the Unseen. It was one of the most beautiful church services one could attend. We were away on the deck in the cool morning air, and in the distance were the great mountains reminding one of the many passages in the Bible in which they are referred to ... The address was very fine all present seemed to listen intently. Always after our services we sing the National Anthem and then the band plays us away from the parade.¹

Walter conducts a service known as a "church parade" on board HMAT *Orvieto*.

AWM PS0124



1917



1918



1919



Walter proceeded along with the other Anzacs to Cairo, where he quickly became known for his resourcefulness. Scrounging whatever he might need to help the men, he was soon known as the “Pinching Padre”.

9 December 1914

Flying around after tables for my church tent. The tent has been given by Mr. Schuler, correspondent for the Melbourne Age ... Got tables from Mena House Hotel which has been turned into a military hospital.

AWM PR00248

Months of training and touring in Egypt followed until the Gallipoli landings of 25 April 1915. As the men arrived on the beaches, Walter remained on a nearby hospital ship, helping the wounded.

26 April 1915

I had wanted to go ashore with my boys &, about a week ago the Major had said I could although divisional orders had said Padres were to go ashore with the transport wagons. These would not go ashore for three or four days ... I felt awfully upset about it, to think of my boys going into action & me not there ...

I formed a dressing station ... I wanted to bubble & cry & take them in my arms & soothe them for their nerves were all racked as well as their actual wounds. Instead I joked with them & made them laugh ... The grateful looks on their faces as the wounds were freshly dressed were something to remember ... During the day six men died, but I knew nothing about it as I was too busy attending to the living.

23 May 1915

*At 7 am held **Communion** service in a little gully ... one feels that the beautiful service drew them nearer to God than they have ever been before. Bullets were whistling over our heads all the time.*

AWM PR00248



This Communion set was used by Walter for religious services during the First World War.

AWM REL34239

Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, May 1915. AWM C00668

Chaplains in the Australian army

The Royal Australian Army Chaplains' Department was formed in 1913, a year before the outbreak of the First World War. Representatives from the Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches were invited to join the unit. During the war, chaplains were assigned to serve either as long as they were needed or as “voyage-only” chaplains who would accompany the troopships to Egypt or England. While a few had previous military experience or cadet training, most were unfamiliar with military life and were provided no formal training on enlistment. Instead, most of their skills were gained “on the job”.

Australian Army Chaplains' Department collar badge.

AWM REL28753



Walter carried this Bible during his service to assist him in his role as a chaplain.

AWM PR87/159



1914

1915

1916

Once Walter was given permission to join his men on Anzac Cove, a dug-out on the side of a hill became his new home. He remained there until the evacuation in December. Conditions were difficult, but supporting the troops both spiritually and practically distracted him from the challenges. As well as running church services and providing medical help, Walter coordinated the burials for soldiers who had died and carefully mapped out the cemeteries. Since then, Walter's records have helped many families and officials to locate the graves of Australians who died on Gallipoli during the First World War.

Even though the conditions on Gallipoli were difficult and his job was often heartbreaking, Walter managed to find beauty in his surroundings:

23 May 1915

Everything has been so peaceful today & now, at the close, the skylark is singing overhead & another bird across the gully is whistling heartily. Where we are now seems to be one of the most beautiful spots on earth. The gully reminds me of nothing so much as a Gippsland Gully without the big trees & ferns ... Early morning when breakfast is cooking & smoke rising alongside each dugout, the scene is enchanting & the scent of the burning scrub smells like our dear old campfires on the Gippsland roads ... I have only to close my eyes & enjoy the smell when the rattle of rifles soon undeceives me.

AWM PR00248

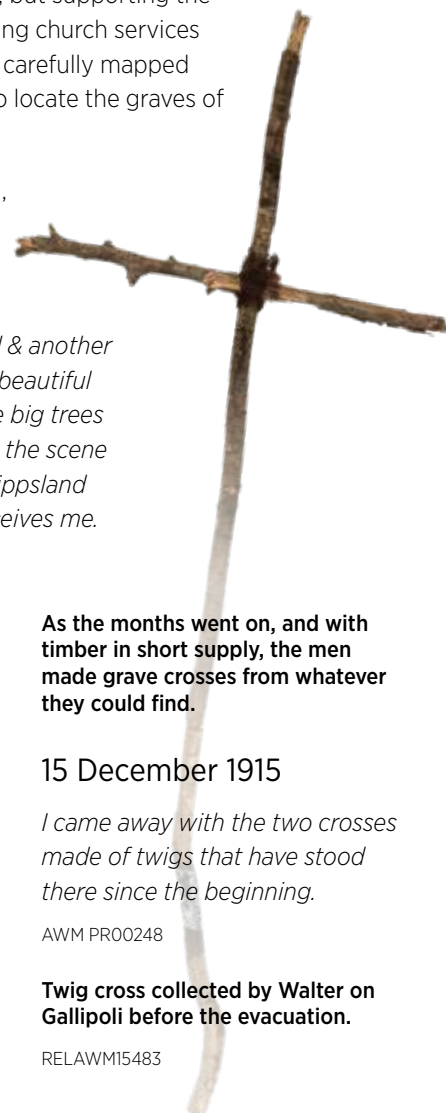
Before leaving Anzac Cove and the many Australians who had been laid to rest, Walter carefully carried out one more task for those left behind.

16 December 1915

I went up the gullies & through the cemeteries scattering Silver Wattle seed. If we have to leave here I intend that a bit of Australia shall be here. I soaked the seed for about 20 hours & they seem to be well & thriving.

AWM PR00248

After the withdrawal from Gallipoli, Walter returned to Egypt with the troops as they prepared for relocation to Europe. During this time, Walter's wife, Dora (also known as "Dorrie" or "Dosh"), arrived in Egypt with their young son, Billie. The family travelled to France, with Dorrie and Billie later moving to England and remaining there until after the war. Walter was able to spend time with his young family during periods of leave, and these moments provided him relief from the battlefields of the Western Front.



As the months went on, and with timber in short supply, the men made grave crosses from whatever they could find.

15 December 1915

I came away with the two crosses made of twigs that have stood there since the beginning.

AWM PR00248

Twig cross collected by Walter on Gallipoli before the evacuation.

RELAWM15483

In 1915 Australian soldiers on Gallipoli created *The Anzac book*. Through verse, prose, and art, the men communicated the reality of their experiences in wartime.

One poem, titled *A little sprig of wattle*, referred to the welcome gift of gum leaves or wattle received by soldiers in letters from loved ones in Australia.

On 11 August 1915 Walter wrote:

Hip Hurrah! Got a letter, June 29th and a bit of wattle.

AWM PR00248

The Anzac book, written and illustrated on Gallipoli by the men of Anzac, was published in 1916 by Cassell and Company.

Why might family members in Australia have added a piece of wattle to these letters?



1917

MASTER JACK SKRIPPIET
NEW COLLEGE
BEX HILL
MELBOURNE
AUSTRALIA

1918

1919

Chaplain Walter Dexter's daughter, Lady Geraldine Currie, transcribed her father's diaries and published them in the book *The Pinching Padre*. Lady Currie recently reflected on how reading her father's diaries helped her gain a better understanding of him.

I did not know the man who is revealed through these diaries at all, as I was born years after the end of the War when he was in his fifties, so there was a big generation gap between us ... I was just beginning to realise what an extraordinary man he was and what an adventurous life he had led when he died - before we were able to talk seriously together ...

I now know Walter Ernest Dexter much better after having transcribed his day-to-day entries from 1914 to 1918 ... I have an enormous respect for all he achieved and am very proud to have been able to call him "Dad".

25 April 1916

We arrived at Marseilles at 5 pm, but stayed on board till next day & went ashore at 4 pm. Wednesday, 26th, caught the 7 pm train to Paris.

AWM PR00248

Life changed considerably for Walter when he arrived in France. On Gallipoli he had lived alongside his men, but in France the officers and chaplains were often billeted in towns away from the front line. While Walter missed being with the troops, he understood the importance of remaining safe so that he could continue supporting them.

30 April 1916

My room is on the top floor and the place is lit by electric light ... The firing line is 12 or 15 miles from here but one can occasionally hear the sounds of the guns.

24 July 1916

Things were fairly quiet in the morning but a big number of wounded continually stream through ... The coffee stall is going strong, and all the men appreciate it. Night and day hot coffee is ready and I am trying to get soup etc.

AWM PR00248

After the signing of the **Armistice** in November 1918, almost 200,000 soldiers needed to return home to Australia. Walter stayed on in England to assist with the **repatriation** of the troops.

By 1920 Walter and Dorrie had welcomed three more sons, and the family of six returned to Australia on board HMAT *Orvietto*; the same ship Walter had travelled on at the beginning of the war. Walter became the most highly decorated Australian chaplain of the war. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his service on Gallipoli, and the Military Cross for his actions in the battlefields and his dedication to the welfare of the troops.

Some 15 years after the war, Walter spoke at an event about the protocols for Anzac Day ceremonies. Despite being a deeply spiritual man, he felt that there should not be a focus on any one religion at commemorations. He explained that during the war chaplains from different faiths shared a common goal of supporting the troops, and told a story of when a Roman Catholic priest arrived on Gallipoli to assist him:

I allotted him with his sphere of work with the following words - "Padre, you take the right half, I'll take the left. If anyone wants me specially you can let me know and I will do the same for you". As far as I can remember I don't think either of us was called for ... In the heat and flies of Gallipoli and the mud of the Somme at Passchendaele, in shell holes or any old corner, we did not ask what "ism" you belonged to when we prayed together.

AWM PR00248

1914

1915

1916

“Such a long time in captivity”: Captain Thomas Walter White

24 July 1918

“It was 4.15 am before the train started and I felt as I leaned out of the window and watched the town and the castellated rock of Afion disappearing in the blue haze of the dawn, almost as happy in spite of the hour as if I knew that I was leaving for home. I had spent 2 years and 4 months there and I sincerely hoped that I should not have to return to spend any further days of captivity there.”

AWM 2DRL/0766

Thomas Walter White, known affectionately as “Tommy”, grew up in a time of war. Born in north Melbourne in April 1888, he was 11 years old when the first Victorian contingent set sail for the Boer War in South Africa. A cadet himself, Tommy took on the role of bugler in the hopes of joining the war effort. The conflict ended a few days before his 14th birthday, which was the minimum age for enlistment.

An enthusiastic sportsman, Tommy often participated in running, cycling, and boxing competitions. He also joined his brothers Charles and Percy on the cricket pitch among Moreland’s summer wildflowers, and on the muddy football field in winter. As a young man, Tommy helped his parents, Charles and Emily, in the family store in Melbourne and, like thousands of other young Australian men, joined the **Militia**.

In August 1914 news of the First World War spread across Australia. Tommy, with his years of military training, was selected for the AFC. After basic training, he was sent along with three other officers and 50 men to assist the British push towards Baghdad in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). The unit was known as the Mesopotamian Half-Flight, and their job was to undertake bombing and **reconnaissance** amid a harsh climate of wind and sand. This was not an easy task. Tommy’s engine failed five times within a month. He and his observer, Captain Francis Yeats-Brown, had been fortunate to escape each time. On Friday 13 November 1915, however, during a mission to isolate Baghdad by destroying the telegraph lines running north to west, they were not so lucky:

I landed with some speed and as there was a light-ground breeze behind me I saw that I would run into the wires, and tried to turn near the end of my run, but my lower left plane unfortunately struck a telegraph pole, knocking it down, and badly smashing the plane ... We were 60 miles from home, and could only either put up a fight or ... give ourselves up to the Turks, but we started the engine, Yeats-Brown swinging the propeller ... As the machine was unflyable and the ground only fit for taxi-ing on the place where I had landed, I got out and was immediately attacked by Arabs.

AWM 2DRL/0766

Tommy training on the Bristol Boxkite at the Central Flying School in Point Cook, Victoria, c. 1915. He was one of the first Australian officers to train as a pilot.

AWM DAAV00006A

1917



1918



1919



After their capture, the men were taken on a gruelling journey across territory controlled by the Ottoman Empire, eventually arriving at a prison camp at Afion Kara Hissar on 23 March 1916. The prisoners arrived tired, hungry, and weak from illness. Kept with other **allied** prisoners in houses in the town, they were closely watched and could receive severe punishments at any time. Letters and diaries were censored, and their rooms were often searched. Tommy kept his small diary hidden in various places to prevent it being seized:

On the afternoon of Sept. 28th [1916] under the pretext of having orders read to us, we were assembled in the yard in rear of our houses and were then told that our rooms were to be searched and that we were to remain in the yard until this was done. There was no chance to retain any written matter that we valued ... I had fortunately taken my diary from my box and put it in my pocket, as I had a faint suspicion that something of the kind was anticipated, then fearing a personal search hid it under some timber in the yard.

AWM 2DRL/0766

Tommy lived for a time as a prisoner of war in the house centre left, known as "Australia House", in Afion Kara Hissar.

AWM A02258

On July 10th [1917] Luscombe and I moved to our new quarters ... our house is almost entirely an Australian one, consisting of 6 officers.

AWM 2DRL/0766

Tommy (middle, front row) with six other Australian prisoners of war at Afion Kara Hissar, c. 1917–18: (back row, left to right) Lieutenant Leslie Luscombe, Lieutenant Stanley Jordan, Lieutenant William Elston and Captain James Brown (front row, left to right) Lieutenant Claude Henry Vautin, and John Treloar's brother Lieutenant Harold William Treloar.

AWM A02265

Why would it have been important for Australian prisoners of war to stick together?



While he was a prisoner of war, Tommy hid his tiny diary in a variety of places, including in his puttees, coat, hat, a cigarette box, and even in the soles of his boots.

AWM RELAWM07913; AWM RELAWM08188

AWM 2DRL/0766



1917



1918



1919



Australian Flying Corps (AFC)

When Thomas began his flying instruction in 1914, military aviation was in its experimental stages. At Point Cook's Central Flying School there were just two flying instructors and a few rickety training aircraft: the rudimentary beginnings of the AFC. Later, four squadrons were formed and trained for service in the Middle East and on the Western Front. The aircraft provided to squadrons arriving in London in late 1916 and 1917 were much more advanced, and the men were given eight months of training.

Tommy reflected in 1917:

I felt confident that I had left for the front too early, for one of the pupils, Lt Sheldin, who went through the Flying School in the batch after I did, was already a Squadron Commander ... I must confess that I felt rather out of date when I heard of the new machines that had been brought out.

AWM 2DRL/0766

During the war 460 officers and 2,234 other ranks served in the AFC, and 178 lost their lives. The AFC paved the way for the establishment of the Royal Australian Air Force and more developments in civil aviation.



Pilot's embroidered wings, Australian Flying Corps

AWM REL32621

Like others in the camp, Tommy often thought about escaping, and in preparation learnt Russian and Turkish from fellow prisoners. In mid-1918 he heard that there was a chance of escape through Constantinople on a Russian ship, and an opportunity soon arrived through a **prisoner exchange**. Priority for the program was given to the most sick or wounded. Tommy pretended to be ill and was taken to a hospital in Constantinople in July 1918:

*The acting (usually in a comic part) that I had done at Afion served me in good stead ... Col. Baines told me afterwards that he could hardly constrain himself when I entered, for I feigned deafness and ignorance of French ... next day after an examination of my eyes I was **passed out**, I was highly amused, as were all the others for I had a great bit of fun and certainly increased rather than prejudiced my chances.*

AWM 2DRL/0766

Tommy and an English prisoner, Allan Bott of the Royal Air Force, made arrangements on the black market to flee on the Ukrainian ship *Batoum*. But first they had to escape their guards:

*... by the strangest bit of good fortune I have ever known we got our opportunity, for the train whilst on a **viaduct** shortly after leaving the station crashed into another train going the same way ... I thought it an excellent moment to escape and called to Bott. He answered with a "Righto White" and pushing along the carriage I quickly changed my cap for a grey felt hat that I kept rolled up in my inside pocket, pulled off my collar and tie and pinned up my coat lapel ... The **postas** realised my intention as soon as I had moved and as I jumped from the second carriage he was just behind me ... visions of much longed for liberty made me move at my utmost speed ...*

I rushed into a house that had its front door open. Two old women who were washing clothes screamed as I entered, but I put my finger on my lips and rushed through to the back. After the posta had passed, one of the women came through and I pointed to a small cupboard there. She opened so as to block the doorway and I quickly went into this hiding place. It was hot and stuffy but was very welcome. A young Greek woman who spoke French appeared shortly afterwards. I told her why I had entered her house so unceremoniously and hoped she would forgive me, she said she would do everything in her power to help me.

AWM 2DRL/0766

1914

1915

1916

Tommy in the clothes he bought to escape from Turkey.

AWM A02261

*I decided to buy a disguise ... I bought a **fez** and a rather dilapidated chesterfield coat. I also clipped my moustache and covered the scars on my head with some black boot polish then I set off with the small boy of the house as my guide to my rendezvous at [Galata].*

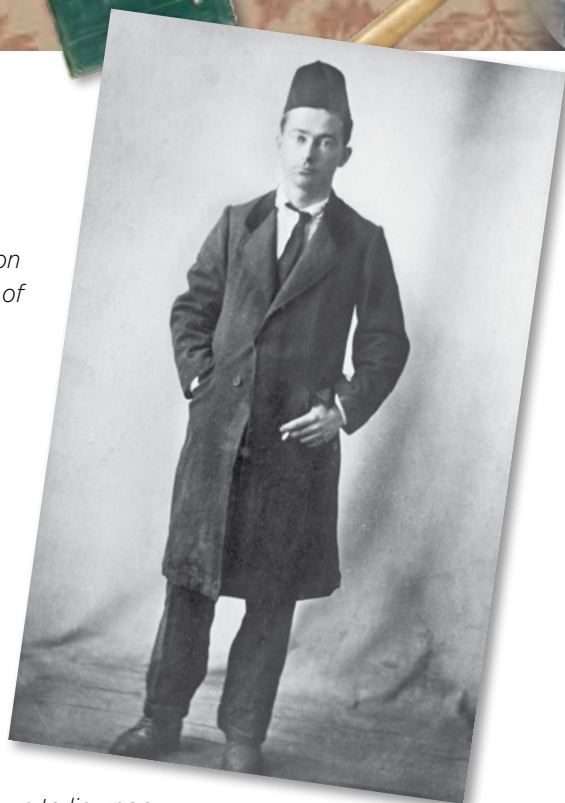
AWM 2DRL/0766

Are personal accounts from the past reliable sources of information? Why/why not?

Tommy purchased a disguise from the family and set off. He and Alan eventually found each other and made it to the *Batoum*. They had to hide on the ship for 33 days before it left the harbour, and to avoid being found they often had to crouch in the vessel's dark underbelly:

It was impossible to sit erect, the air was foul, and we found it exceedingly uncomfortable in our scanty clothes lying on the quickly saturated piece of sacking that we had dragged along with us to lie upon. Not a ray of light penetrated anywhere, the walls were caked with mud and slime and we could hear the constant lapping of water at either end where bilge water and the drippings from the pumps leaked in ... Six times we were hidden in this tank because of some alarm or other the longest occasion being for 13 hours.

AWM 2DRL/0766



When they reached Odessa the men were given Russian passports to assist them on the rest of their journey. They eventually reached Salonica, and while they were awaiting transport to London the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, and finally the Great War was over. It had been nearly three years since Tommy had first been captured. He was the only Australian to successfully escape from a Turkish prisoner-of-war camp. For his contribution to the war, Tommy was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and was mentioned in reports for valuable services while in captivity.

During his imprisonment Tommy wrote letters to a young Australian woman, Vera Deakin, founder of the Australian Wounded and Missing Inquiry Bureau for the Red Cross. He provided her with information on the welfare of Australian prisoners of war. The two finally met in London in December 1918, and three weeks later they were engaged. The pair married in Melbourne in 1920 and had four daughters. Tommy later wrote about his experiences in the First World War in a book titled *Guests of the unspeakable*, which he dedicated to Vera.



AWM H19278

Vera (above) wrote to Tommy while he was a prisoner of war, and before they even met. On 11 April 1918 she wrote:

I am so glad you have been receiving some of your parcels and I hope the few interests you are able to enjoy keep you from feeling the time too unutterably long ... If at any time I can be of service to you please let me know ... With the very best of wishes to you all, especially the Australians.

AWM 1DRL/0428

Is it important to preserve sources from the past? If so, which ones, and why? How might museums, libraries, and even families determine which sources are significant?

1917



1918



1919



Having witnessed the horror of war firsthand, Tommy vowed to become a politician to ensure that nothing like what he had seen would happen in Australia. He entered federal politics in 1929, and served with the Citizen Air Force as a squadron leader in England during the Second World War. In 1952 Tommy was awarded the Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE). He died five years later, aged 69.

Tommy with Flying Officer F.A. Sewell during the Second World War.

AWM P02172.003

After his experiences in the First World War, why might Tommy have volunteered to serve in the Second World War?



Tommy White's grandson and great-grandson viewed his and Vera's diaries recently at the Australian War Memorial. Here are their reflections:

To be able to read about my great-grandfather's wartime experiences in his own words is an invaluable way of connecting with the adversity that his generation faced. This is even more amazing considering that when he enlisted he was only three years older than I am now. Thomas Walter White's accounts of life as a WW1 prisoner of war are alien, shocking, and genuinely eye-opening to me. Vera was as equally exceptional person as her husband, especially given what she had to work with in terms of social standards for women. Over 400,000 men enlisted, but there were 4.6 million other people in Australia, none of whom could escape the impact of the war.

Oscar, Tommy's great-grandson

My grandfather, Tommy White, died when I was only three. I don't remember him. We heard the stories of his war service and captivity through my mother and aunts and my grandmother Vera, and I have read the book he wrote about his First World War experiences. But having in my hands the actual diaries and letters that he had written 100 years ago was very special. It is a strange sensation to handle something of significance from a long time ago. It was an everyday thing to him when he wrote it, but it has acquired a specialness with time and with what

happened to it after it was written. Would he have imagined that it would be read by his grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the wider public 100 years later?

Rodney, Tommy's grandson



Rodney (foreground) with his brother Peter and Grandmother Vera, London, 1956.

Image courtesy Rodney Sharp

What do these reflections by Tommy's descendants reveal about the impact of sources from the past on those living today?

How have your ancestors impacted you through objects? You may wish to express this in a poem, artwork, diary entry, or letter.

Why might Rodney say that Tommy's diary has acquired "a specialness" over time?

1914

1915

1916

“An early morning sketch”: Lieutenant George Courtney Benson

George Courtney Benson was born in Collingwood, Victoria, in 1886 to Richard and Mary Benson. Known as “Courtney”, he studied Fine Arts at the National Gallery Art School in Victoria from 1903.

Despite objections from his parents, Courtney followed his interest in art and began working for *The Bulletin* magazine in Sydney. He later returned to Melbourne and worked a number of different jobs, including design and drawing cartoons for an advertising agency. Courtney enlisted in the AIF soon after the First World War began, noting his occupation as “designer”. From that moment, he was a soldier and part of the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade. Courtney continued to draw and paint throughout the war.

While on Gallipoli in 1915, Courtney drew **panoramic** sketches which clearly showed Australian and enemy trench positions. These detailed reconnaissance drawings were highly sought after by commanders for planning attacks. In a letter written to friends early in the war, he wrote:

It has been my duty (& good fortune) to note the enemy's territory from points all round the lines, which one day will be of some at least, historical interest.

AWM PR88/177

The months of fighting which followed the Gallipoli landings were costly, with little progress made in the Anzacs' push inland. There were thousands of **casualties**. On 6 July 1915 Courtney wrote:

I guess that the horrors and wretchedness of warfare are really felt more acutely there than they are here at present thru the lists of casualties being published daily, and the presence of the poor folk who are left to mourn the ones who died here or whom they will see again maimed and worse than dead.

AWM PR88/177

Courtney working on a sketch in France in October 1918.

AWM P10689.009.003

Metal watercolour paint box

REL/03408.002



1917



1918



1919



George Courtney Benson, *Not titled [reconnaissance sketch]* (1915, pencil on paper, 10.5 x 25.5 cm, AWM ART03605.012.004)

Courtney is believed to have used his reconnaissance sketches as a reference some years later when he painted scenes of the Gallipoli peninsula.



George Courtney Benson, *Anzac* (c. 1918, watercolour on paper, 33 x 49.8 cm, AWM ART03598)

Poor sanitation, unclean water, and meagre rations led to gruelling conditions in the trenches. Courtney faced this adversity with humour as he described the details of his trench “home”:

For furnishing there's a cupboard – a hole made in the wall and a box stuck into it. Table? Why yes – a piece of biscuit box resting on a biscuit tin and for a chair, a water tin. Four shell cases make a fine fire place and for a dresser to carry the “crockery”, a forked stick in the ground outside.

AWM PR88/177

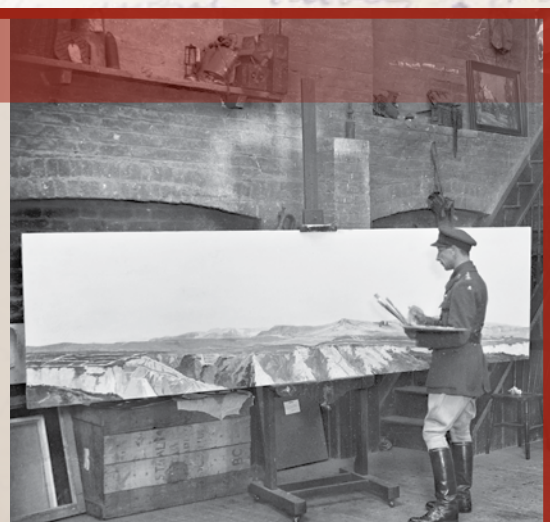
Did you know?

Courtney was one of five soldier artists in the AIF selected by official war correspondent Charles Bean to be attached to the AWRS in 1918. They were engaged to record perspectives of the war.

AWM D00630

Courtney works on *Anzac looking south* at a studio in London in 1919. This painting is now held in the Australian War Memorial's collection.

How might the perspective of a soldier-artist be different to that of a civilian artist?



1914

1915

1916

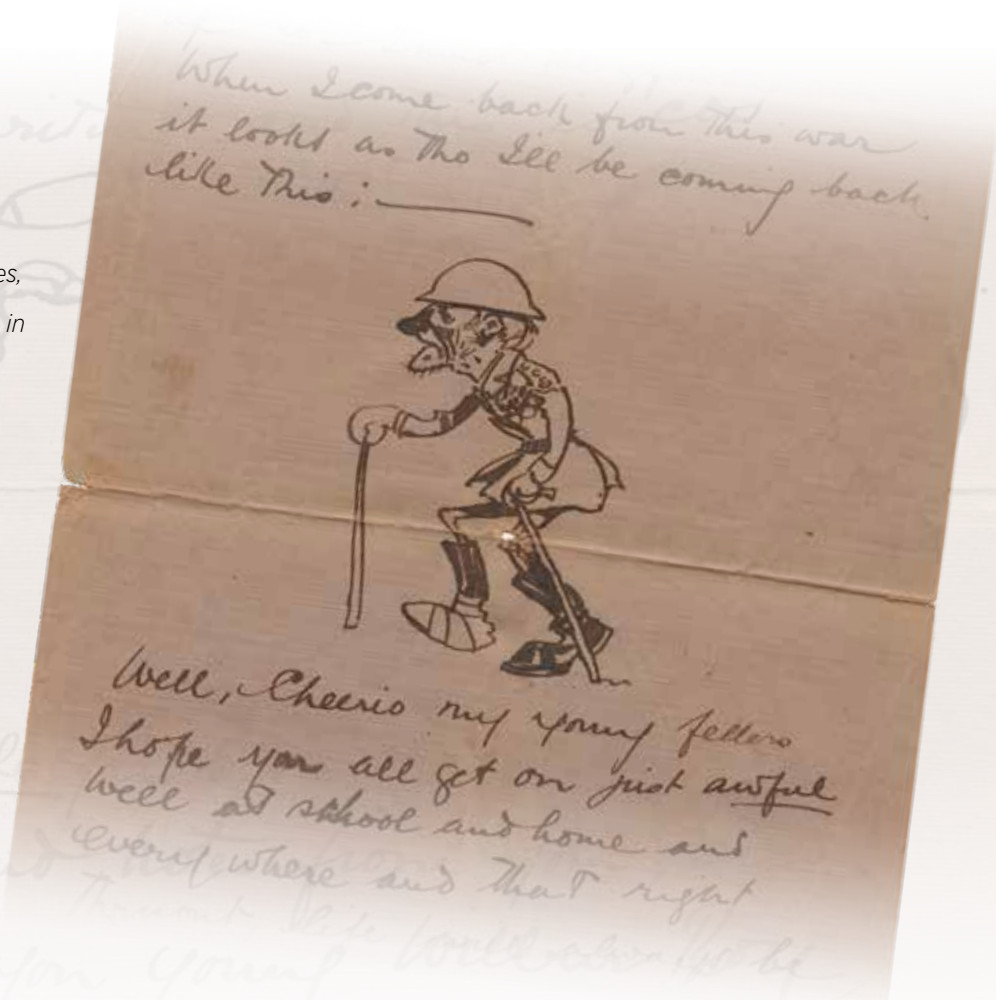
Like many others, Courtney fell ill as disease and sickness quickly spread across the Gallipoli peninsula. Suffering from dysentery, he was transferred to a hospital ship in September 1915, and was later transported to a hospital in England to recuperate. Courtney resumed active service in France the following year. He undertook further training and rose through the ranks to second lieutenant in March 1918. However, he still made time to regularly work on his art and to keep in touch with those closest to him in Australia:

France
24 June 1916

My dear nephews and nieces and peoples,
I can't write you separate letters 'cos I'm in the war again ...

And Mavis ... when I last saw you, you were a tiny thing with silvery hair ... now you're big enough to write letters to me - and all the spellin's right too and the writin's so good - why it just strikes me that if you're growing up so - I must be growing old. When I come back from this war it looks as tho' I'll be coming back like this:

AWM PR06111



When Courtney wrote to family and friends, he often included cartoons in his letters.

Righto! Have just torn a sheet of my diary book out.

AWM PR88/177

He drew this cartoon mid-way through a letter to friends to show that he was running short of paper, followed by:

Why might Courtney have included drawings in his letters to family and friends?

1917



1918



1919



Shell shock

By 1918 the First World War had pushed on with enormous cost to human life, and devastation of the French and Belgian countryside. Powerful weaponry pounded the region and soldiers often returned from these battlefields with symptoms like tremors, **amnesia**, fear, and dizziness. The cause was thought to be physical head trauma from the constant explosions, and these symptoms became known collectively as “shell shock”. Despite this, an increasing number of soldiers presented with the symptoms but without obvious head wounds. Medical staff were puzzled. Eventually, doctors recognised that simply being present in the battlefield environment could cause not only physical but also psychological trauma. The diagnosis of “shell shock” was later given to soldiers who had experienced severe emotional distress.



George Courtney Benson, *Shell-shocked trees* (1918, pencil on paper, 19.2 x 20.7 cm, AWM ART03605.042.003)

Why might Courtney have named this drawing after a medical condition related to soldiers? How might this work relate to the experiences of those who served?

In May 1918, after two years serving on the Western Front, Courtney was appointed as an official artist to the AWRS. In June he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and worked in the design of camouflage. Artists like Courtney created colour patterns to help disguise technology such as tanks and weapons on the battlefields. Courtney remained in England for another year after the Armistice, recording and painting significant events of the war. He later served in the Second World War, enlisting with the Militia and helping to create camouflage patterns for the war effort.

George Courtney Benson, *Scrapbook leaf with two sketches and inscriptions* (c. 1916, watercolour on paper, overall: 45.5 x 28.8 cm, AWM ART03605.023)

The top painting features a house used as the 4th Division Headquarters in 1916.

The lower watercolour shows the ruins of the Bois-Grenier church in France.

Both works were painted in 1916. Why might Courtney have placed these two very different scenes from France on the same page?



1914

1915

1916

“Will tell you *apres la guerre* [after the war]”: Sergeant Ernest George Chudleigh

From a young age Ernest Chudleigh, or “Ern” to his family and friends, understood animals. Born in 1896 in the small country town of Bigga in New South Wales, he grew up helping his dad on the family’s sheep farm. He left home to study at Hurlstone Agricultural High School, near Campbelltown, then at Hawkesbury Agriculture College (HAC). There, as part of his diploma, he studied veterinary science and practice.

When the First World War began in August 1914, Ern was 18 years old and just completing his studies. He graduated fourth in his class and enlisted for service with the AIF. At the time there were few university-trained and professionally recognised veterinarians available for overseas service, and Ern and many of his college mates were recruited into the Australian Army Veterinary Corps (AAVC).

Ern was the eldest in his family, and before leaving Australia on board HMAT *Ajana*, he farewelled his parents, Charles and Annie, and his seven younger brothers and sisters. Ern promised to write home every chance he got. These excerpts from his letters sent between 1914 and 1918 provide a candid description of his wartime experiences.



Ern's Rising Sun collar badge and “Australia” shoulder title, which he wore on his uniform throughout the war.

AWM REL36566; AWM REL36564



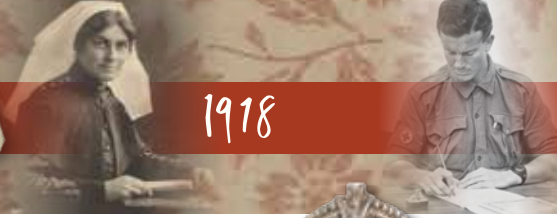
Ern in his AIF uniform, c. 1914-18.

AWM P05735.001

1917



1918



1919



18 December 1914

Dear Mother and Father,

There was great cheering and singing when we left the wharf this morning ... I am alright and so are all the College fellows ... I don't know where we are going yet. Sealed orders, perhaps Egypt.

At sea

23 December 1914

*We get very good meals ... We sleep in hammocks ... During the day we have to work, some have to feed and water the horses, others attend to the sick ones, some drill. I have a good job with the **Quarter-master**, fixing up equipment.*

Mena Camp, Cairo

26 February 1915

Mena Camp is at the Pyramids ... We are camped in pure sand, no vegetation whatever ... This is a great camp. 3 large Picture Shows, dozens of canteens and shops ... I had the first bath for about 3 weeks the other day ... We have no showers here, there is only one tap for the whole Section. We are getting very good meals now. Bread and jam is the mainstay. Meat, boiled and roasted potatoes, cabbage and cauliflower, cheese, pickles, eggs, sugar (very little) condensed milk (less), prunes and rice sometimes ... Plenty of stew and of course tea.



Annie wore this Female Relatives' Badge while Ern was serving during the First World War. These were issued to the nearest female relative of soldiers, nurses, and medical staff who served abroad.

AWM REL36563

Why might women have worn these badges?

Heliopolis, Egypt

24 April 1915

Don't talk about dust storms for you have no idea of what they are like. I have a big box to get in when we have another. I hope your monthly Socials will be a success ... It is all very well to say we are getting along alright but my word there are times when we have to envy those who do not care to enlist for King and Country. It does not seem fair in a way.

9 May 1915

You have heard all about the Australians at the Dardanelles and I suppose a great deal more than we hear ... we have to wait till we get the Sydney papers before we learn any news.

Some of the wounded Australians have been brought here and are in the Heliopolis Palace Hotel. Some of the College fellows are back wounded and there are rumours that others have been killed ... The 1st L.H. Field Ambulance went away last night ... We hope to follow soon ...

Ern (right) with Private Alfred Allanson, 1915.

AWM P05735.002

Mena Camp

14 March 1915

Dear Father and Mother,

Well, as I said, I got my photo taken at the Sphinx, with a mate of mine, Alf. Allanson (A.D.A) an old Hurlstone and also H.A.C. boy. ... Sometimes when it's windy here we can't see the Pyramids for the sand which blows up.

AWM PR03811

The Memorial has many of these postcards in its collection. Why might so many Australians have had their picture taken in front of the Sphinx?

1914

1915

1916

One of Ern's letters, written on 14 March 1915, about the challenges of writing and receiving letters during the war:

It seems strange to get letters wishing one a Merry Xmas during March. You see the letters get delayed, I suppose mine are the same. Your letters are not censored, are mine?

AWM PR03811

The purpose of censorship in the First World War was to remove information from letters which could be valuable if found by the other side. What sort of details might have been censored in these letters?

Heliopolis, Egypt 25 July 1915

I got a shift last week from the Pharmacy and now am a dresser. The Capt. asked me if I would like a change for a while at some outdoor work and I said I would not mind ... I am glad he shifted me because it was pretty hot and constant work in the Pharmacy and now being out on the lines dressing I see all the cases and method of treatment.

23 October 1915

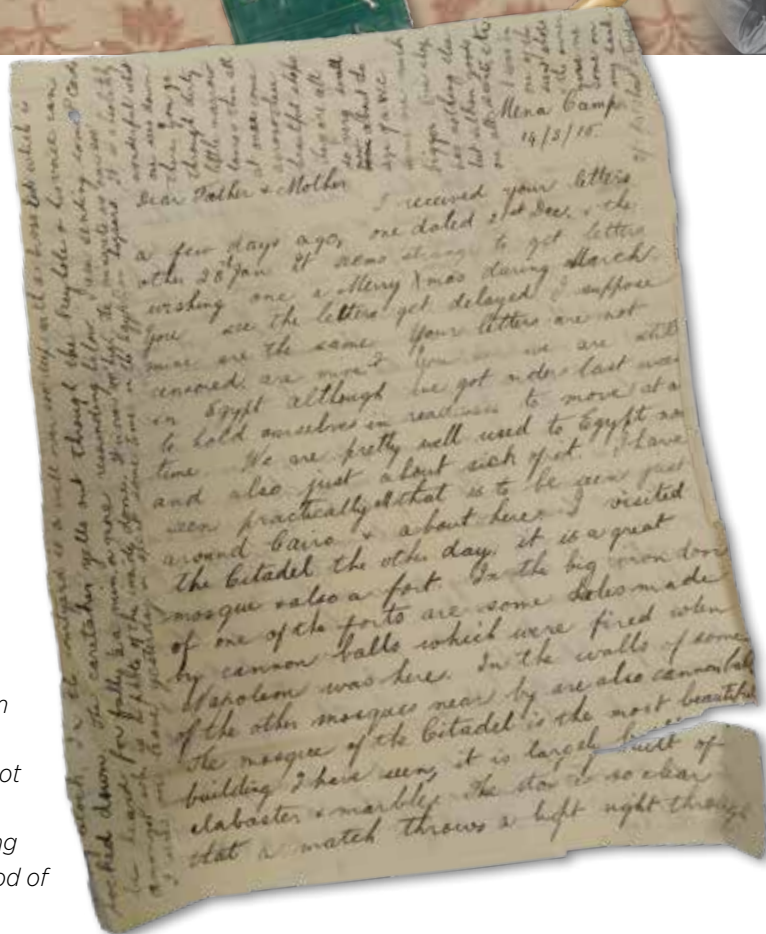
I believe the Corps of old men left Australia sometime last month for here, so they should arrive soon ... Father, you say, wants to come, don't let him go. There are plenty of young fellows who are much more fit, he is too old now. No, father, you stay at home. I am quite enough and have been away nearly a year now so consider I have done my bit. Don't worry about me for goodness sake, I would not like it. But for goodness sake Father don't you think of coming. The war is not nearly over yet and it is hard to say what will happen, so don't you leave.

2 December 1915

I was very pleased to hear that Father was not in the Army after all. I think it is just as well ... The life here is not of the best I tell you and I don't know what it is on the Peninsula.

29 January 1916

I suppose you know by now that Gallipoli has been evacuated. The evacuation was completed about Christmas i.e. of Anzac and Suvla, [Cape] Helles was evacuated later.



Egypt 23 March 1916

We left Heliopolis about a fortnight ago for Ismailia on the canal. There we fixed up our camp and stayed for a week under proper active service conditions - Bully and Biscuits. One morning some of us got a terrible shock. Orders came through from the Head that we were to be Sgts from the 7th of March. We were then allotted to different units of the 1st Div. to work under the direction of the V.O. I suppose you know by now that we are to go to France ... so if you don't get this letter you may not get one for a considerable time.

Ern (second from left) with other servicemen in a dug-out on the Western Front.

AWM P05735.005



1917



1918



1919



The Australian Army Veterinary Corps badge, worn on the shoulder of the uniform.

AWM REL35422

The Australian Army Veterinary Corps (AAVC) was established in 1909. Its role was to provide medical care for the army's horses, whose contribution was vital to allied successes in the First World War. On the Western Front, some horse breeds were used to transport soldiers, while other, stronger breeds moved ambulances and supplies. These included ammunition and field guns, and their transport could require as many as six to 12 horses. Like the men and women who served on the Western Front, horses endured freezing, muddy conditions, minimal rations, exhaustion, and disease, and were often killed or wounded. AAVC members were attached to infantry



H. Septimus Power, *Bringing up the ammunition, Flanders, Autumn 1917* (1920, oil on canvas, 153 x 244.5 cm, AWM ART03333).

battalions and artillery batteries in order to tend to the horses, providing immediate first aid and other medical care.

After the war General Sir John Monash wrote:

No department of the Australian Imperial Force in France rendered more essential and devoted service than the Australian Army Veterinary Corps.¹

Somewhere in France

18 August 1916

*When we first went into action at — we had very comfortable **billets**. They were at farm houses and we were **A.1**, but since this offensive has started we have been on the move all the time. We carry one blanket and waterproof sheet and greatcoat each and what we stand in with a change of socks. Very often we have had to go a week or even more without having a bath ... We live in dug-outs which keep all the rain out, but when in rest we only have a waterproof sheet to keep the rain off.*

5 January 1917

*Did you notice that in my letters I never wished you a Merry Xmas and Happy New Year. I forgot all about it till it was too late. I had as Merry a Xmas and Happy New Year as was possible under the circumstances. I do not wish to have another like it. Where we are now the mud is terrible, up over your knees in places, always wet. It is **tres bon** I don't think. A Merry Xmas. Impossible.*

France

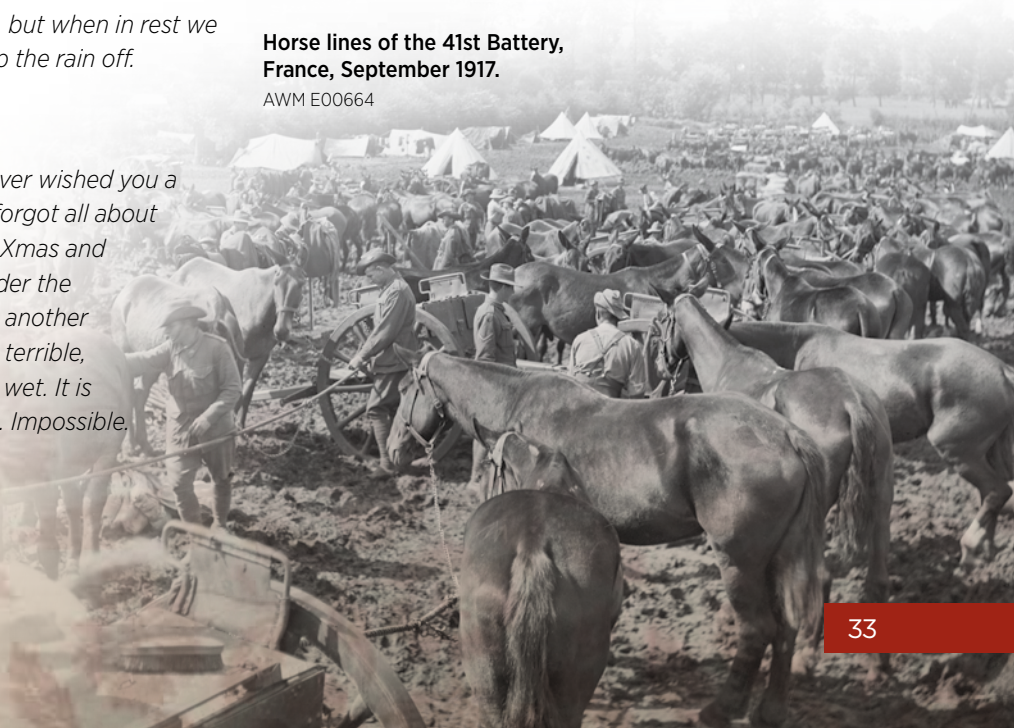
18 February 1917

*Ulcerative Cellulitis ... is giving a lot of trouble among our horses ... It generally occurs about the heels and **fetlocks** and sometimes higher. Constant standing in the filthy mud brings it on ... It also has a temperature, hence the ordinary name, "Mud Fever" as it is sometimes called ... We send the worst ones to hospital and keep the others.*

AWM PR03811

Horse lines of the 41st Battery, France, September 1917.

AWM E00664



1914

1915

1916

18 February 1917

You talk about it being cold. Why, it is never cold in Australia. For about a month here the temperature was anything from freezing point to 16 degrees below freezing, and even colder than that. Everything was frozen in the morning. You had a job to get into your boots, they were frozen stiff. After washing your hair would freeze. All eatables were frozen hard ...

Queenwood, Eastbourne, UK

10 April 1917

My long awaited leave has at last come. I left Boulogne on the 5th and got to London the same day from Folkestone. It is no wonder the Germans want to get to England, it is the prettiest place I have ever seen, better even I think than the South of France. I have 10 days leave but it is much too short considering that I have been at it nearly 2½ years now.

Somewhere in Belgium

3 August 1917

You will have heard by this time of the Great Offensive which has just begun in Flanders. I hope it will end the War, but it is a great deal to hope for ... We have a good many casualties ... We have lost a good many horses as well – 12 killed and 10 wounded on the day we advanced ... I was through it and don't want any more.

Somewhere in France

6 October 1917

You made some remark in one of your letters about me being in hospital three times last year, as a matter of fact I was but didn't want to worry you with the fact. I was admitted with Trench Fever, as it is called, some new kind of Influenza. I was in hospital for about a fortnight and away from my unit a month ... But don't worry about the little things like that, if anything does happen to me you will know in a very short space of time.

3 December 1917

How do you think the new vote on conscription will go? If they would promise definitely to send all 1914 men home for rest, I think they would get very substantial support.

Belgium

14 May 1918

Of course I can't tell you too much, but we have had it a bit exciting lately. Will tell you "apres la guerre" [after the war] ...

I had a game of football two days ago, with our battery against the Engineers, we came off best ... A few shells near us but no damage was done to the players ... You see there is even time for a game under the existing circumstances.

16 June 1918

Perhaps it would be just as well to acquaint you with the fact that I have been awarded the Military Medal.

AWM PR03811

Ern and seven others were awarded the Military Medal (MM) for their actions on 28–29 April 1918. The recommendation read:

*The enemy opened a heavy shell-fire on the 102nd Battery Wagon Lines. These **N.C.Os** ... showed great courage and devotion to duty in rescuing two men from under a tree, which had fallen on four men killing two. The further shelling set fire to a dump of ammunition, which spread to the stables. They then turned their attention to the extinguishing of the fire, and afterwards to the release and withdrawal of the horses and other Government property. They showed great courage and determination throughout.*

AWM28 2/61

Ern was also Mentioned in Despatches for rendering first aid to wounded animals during operations on 31 July and 1 August 1917.

Why were animals considered to be so important to the AIF?



AWM REL36555.001

1917



1918



1919

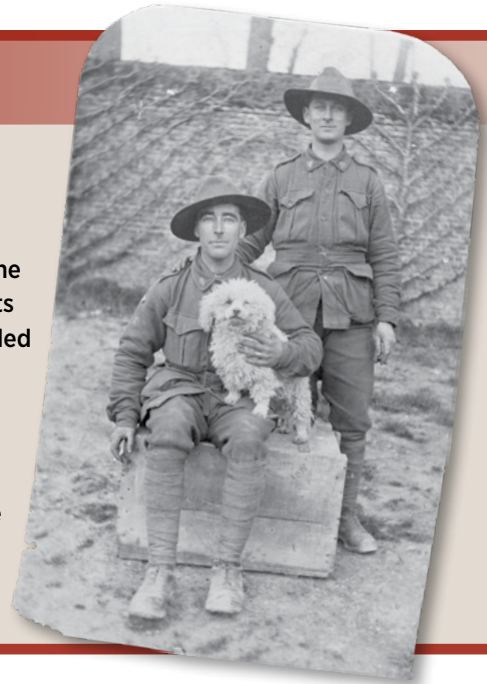


Did you know?

Horses weren't the only animals to serve during the First World War. Donkeys and camels were used to carry supplies, pigeons and dogs carried messages, and canaries were used to detect poisonous gases in tunnels. Dogs and cats also hunted rats in the trenches. Many of these and other animals were adopted as pets or mascots, and one of the most important roles the animals filled was providing companionship amid the tragedy of war.¹

Private Frederick Whitcher and Private William Martin of the 50th Battalion with their mascot, a stray poodle adopted by the unit. Although the men were instructed to leave their mascots behind at the end of the war, Frederick, who was a member of the battalion's band, hid the little dog in his drum and found him a home in England.

AWM P05920.001



4 September 1918

*There have been great things doing here this last three or four weeks, and if we can only keep going for a while longer, it will be **tres bon** ...*

There has been more talk of the 1914 crowd going home again and lists have been taken etc. but nothing much doing. A few married men have gone but none from our Battery yet ...

Must close now. Hope you are all O.K.

Love to all,

Ern

AWM PR03811

The rumour Ern had heard about the men who had enlisted in 1914 being allowed to return home on leave was true. He set sail for Australia in October 1918. After almost a month at sea he sailed into Sydney Harbour on 8 November. Three days later, the guns fell silent and the Great War was finally over.

After the war, the 102nd Howitzer Battery formed an association. For many years after the war its members met each Anzac Day to catch up and march together. Ern, wearing a light-coloured suit, marches behind the banner.

AWM PR03811

Ern returned to his home town, and began work as a sheep farmer. In July 1929 he married a local girl, Esther "Essie" Marks. The couple settled on a property in Bigga and had four children. Ern served again during the Second World War, as a lieutenant with the Volunteer Defence Corps. He survived the conflict, and died on 1 November 1966, aged 80. After Ern's death his son, Noel, took care of his dad's letters, carefully transcribing and binding them into a book, which he donated to the Australian War Memorial in 2007.



1914

1915

1916

“Nobody knows where and what we are to do”:

Able Bodied Driver Laurie John Smee

Laurie John Smee was born in South Australia on 5 December 1890. Having spent his childhood years in seaside towns like Victor Harbor and Semaphore, it is unsurprising that Laurie was drawn to a career in the navy. In 1909 he headed to England and joined the Royal Navy. Having sailed back to Australia in 1913 aboard the SS *Cambrian*, he chose to remain in his country of birth, and discharged from the Royal Navy.

Laurie’s dedication to life on the ocean remained as he continued working on ships along the Australian coast. Early in 1915, aged 23, his life took another turn as he enlisted with the Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train (RANBT) for service overseas.

The RANBT was originally set up to help on the Western Front in Europe, where Australian forces needed bridges to be quickly assembled in order to safely cross rivers and canals. The RANBT was expecting to work mainly with horses, so before leaving Australia Laurie developed his riding skills at the Fawkner Park training camp in Melbourne. However, the unit was instead diverted to Suvla Bay on Gallipoli, where it undertook tasks from **pier** construction to assisting with the supply of water to the troops. Despite having limited training in these areas, Laurie and the other members of the RANBT were skilled at finding simple solutions to the job at hand. They could use only what was available, and became known for their ability to improvise, calling on their practical experience and their understanding of some basic principles of engineering.

Laurie set sail on the SS *Port Macquarie* on 4 June 1915. Over the next two years and 36 days he kept a diary, recording the events unfolding around him.

14 July 1915

Arrived at Suez and remained until the 17th when we proceeded through the canal which was very interesting as all along its banks, English, Colonial and Indian Camps were to be seen which showed one that at last the time had come when we were in the war zone.

AWM PR04710

British and Indian troops camp along the Suez Canal, Egypt, December 1914.

AWM C02553

Laurie Smee, 1915

AWM PR04710.ADD2

Brass hat badge for the Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train

AWM REL22450.002



1917



1918



1919



18 July 1915

We sailed at 6 pm for Lemnos, Grecian Island and will enter events later on but I will mention in passing that we were in the middle of the danger zone and on guard duty but parading the decks with full equipment on – also 50 rounds in the event of a submarine being sighted.

All hands slept alongside their respective lifeboats, with rifles bandoleers and full water bottles all of which we had to take into the boats if necessary.

21 July 1915

Arrived Lemnos ... we found the harbour full of vessels of all kinds ... Roughly speaking there were 200 ships at anchor ... Australian and Imperial including French regiments were to be seen. There were 4 hospital ships.

24 July 1915

We received orders to proceed to Imbros ... arrived 25 Sunday ... to our surprise ... the Naval Landing Officer came on board [and] the first thing that he asked was "Where are you from. What are you, and who ordered you to come here" ... it seems that since we left Australia we are dead mystery to all concerned, and the only thing that gives other ships an inkling of our brigade is the naval bugle calls.

26 July 1915

We woke up to the fact that we were right on the war zone as we could see distinctly the troops fighting ashore, [and] heliographs were to be seen flashing out signals ashore.

27 July 1915

The hands turned out at 5 am and commenced to unload the wagons and pontoon. I might mention in passing that even now nobody knows where and what we are to do. As far as one can gather the future plan is to land a few pontoons.

This is a map of our possession in the Gulf of Grecian Archipelago showing Lemnos and Imbros.

AWM PR04710

Why would Laurie have drawn maps in his diary? Who was he drawing them for?



Men at Broadmeadows camp, Victoria, train to use a heliograph for signalling.

Heliographs were used to send messages by reflecting sunlight with a mirror. A shutter allowed the beam to be turned on and off in order to send Morse code signals.

AWM DAOD1405



1914

1915

1916

30 July 1915

The Train started to erect the pontoon bridging under the command of Major Reid ... In the evening we, i.e. my three chums and myself had a delicious supper consisting of 2 eggs each, ¼ loaf bread after our bath.

6 August 1915

Hands called at 5 am and breakfasted at 6.30 and started to float the pontoon and trestle gear out to the SS Itria (Aberdeen). We had a jolly good time pulling pontoons with rafts in tow all day ... packed up at 11.10 am and the ship tripped her anchor at 3.30 am for the Peninsula of Gallipoli.

7 August 1915

I awoke at 4.30 to find the ship nearing the real war zone in Suvla Bay. When I say near, I mean active, and active it is - Troop Ships, Hospital Ships and Cruisers are all in activity ... we breakfasted at 7 am which consisted of tinned meat, tea (good) and 2 biscuits.

19 August 1915

Today is one of the worst days that we have experienced in Turkey - the wind is cool with clouds of dust which makes everything and everyone uncomfortable.

2 September 1915

A freak night attack took place by Turkish troops tonight which filled the air with smoke and light ... I was sitting in my dugout writing up my log when ... a tremendous bombardment started.

6 September 1915

This has been a sorrowful day ... We had 3 injured and one CPO killed outright (256 CPO Edward Charles Perkins). It was a pitiful sight for one to see ... I am run down with cold sweats and nauseous attacks.

AWM P04710



Members of the 1st Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train. Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Edward Charles Perkins is in the back row, second from right.

AWM P06855.001



AWM PR04710

This cloth pouch was used by Laurie to store his diary, and was stowed inside his haversack.

17 August 1915

I was issuing galvanised iron when at 12.10 I smelt something burning, and on looking around saw my dug-out on fire ... a chum rushed in and grabbed my tunic, bandoleer and haversack ... I was very glad because this log book was in my haversack.

Why were Laurie's written words so important to him?

8 September 1915

I had my first bath today for a month and a shave which makes me look quite the thing.

25 September 1915

We worked on the bridge from 7 pm last night until 3 am this morning ... We are about to leave for service on a new landing which is being built on Little West beach.

1917



1918



1919



27 September 1915

*Tonight we had to go around to the Hospital Pontoon pier and float it ashore which was a nice job – up to our necks in water with bolts and tresses flying in all directions ... but we did our bit and returned to camp just in time to witness a Turkish attack on our **flanks** ... caused by a soldier in our trench who started to play the bagpipes.*

16 November 1915

The weather is cold ... A general rumour is floating throughout the camp that we are leaving here before the end of the month for Egypt for a rest. Winter clothing is being issued to all hands.

28 November 1915

This is the day that we are supposed to be making a shift but so far we can't see much signs of shifting.

29 November 1915

The weather is bitterly cold ... the rain fell in torrents and on top of that came the snow ... the first, second and reserve trenches are overflowing with water.

30 November 1915

Well one wonders what is to come next. This is Tuesday 30 Nov and we have been here since 8 Aug. 4 months and 8 days & even now there is not one place of shelter ... nor is there a soup kitchen or tea.

19 December 1915

We pitched our camp at 9.30 pm last night and enjoyed a good night's sleep after 16 weeks of uneasiness ... This is the last night for the Australians on the Gallipoli Peninsula as they are evacuating as fast as possible.

Did you know?

The term "train" in Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train refers to the horse-drawn wagons that were assembled like a train to transport timber and building equipment.

Sailors like Laurie serving in the RANBT were known as "drivers" to represent their role as wagon drivers.

Imbros

25 December 1915

This is a day of all days as one would think but alas there is something missing and many things lacking. Up til now we have not had our billy cans nor a gift of any kind from Australia ... 2.00 pm hands fall in for a surprise muster ... our billys had arrived from the South Australian folks ... much appreciated by all ...

The hands amused themselves playing football today and the hospitals had sports on for the patients ... it was a sight worth seeing what with the nurses, doctors, orderlies and patients lined up ... This is about literally the rottenest Christmas I have ever spent.

AWM PR04710

Troops leave a pier constructed by the RANBT during the first stage of evacuation, Suvla Bay, Gallipoli, December 1915.

Laurie was one of 50 men from the RANBT who maintained the wharf for the evacuation of Gallipoli. These men were the last Australians to leave the peninsula, at 4.30am on 20 December 1915.

AWM P11165.024.001



1914

1915

1916

Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train (RANBT)

Most members of the RANBT had been part of the Royal Australian Naval Brigade. As a reserve force, they were ready to serve their country when needed. The commanding officer of the RANBT, Lieutenant Commander Leighton Seymour Bracegirdle, encouraged tradesmen such as carpenters, plumbers, mechanics, and draughtsmen to join, as he needed a range of skills for the tasks ahead.

While the main tasks of the unit were to build bridges and piers, it was also called upon for any jobs that needed engineering knowhow and innovative problem-solving to keep up supplies to the fighting men. For instance, when faced with the challenge of supplying water to thousands of soldiers ashore, the RANBT set up a flexible water pipeline to move fresh water from containers on ships to large tanks on shore. This removed the need

Colour patch for the Royal Australian Navy Bridging Train, 1915.

AWM RELAWM07941.049



for men to transport water in small containers, a task that often placed them in the line of enemy fire.

In March 1917 the unit **disbanded**, and members were given the choice to join other services or units or to return home. Whatever the men chose, there remained a sense of camaraderie among them. On Anzac Day in 1930 members of the RANBT formed an association and later arranged yearly reunions. The date set for the annual event was 3 June, when the RANBT had officially boarded the SS *Port Macquarie* in 1915.

2 January 1916

After two hours' walk over hill and dale we arrived at the baths where we (6 in all) had a lovely hot bath.

AWM PR04710

Many of the men serving overseas wrote about visiting the mineral springs. Why might they have considered it a significant part of their wartime experience?

Thermal mineral springs on the Greek island of Lemnos, c. 1915. These springs were built by the ancient Greeks, and with the naturally occurring warm water were believed to have healing properties.

AWM C01431

17 January 1916

We sail at 8.00 am tomorrow.

21 January 1916

We had a rather cold journey through the desert and arrived at Ismailia at 6.00 am ... breakfast in the train which comprised of tea made from steam from the engine and biscuits. After breakfast we prepared to leave for the camp which was 2 miles from the station and is on the edge of the Little Bitter Lake which makes it very interesting for us as we can watch the shipping and in such a position that we can plainly see the Indian trenches on the Canal.

28 January 1916

We are the same as usual except for the food which is getting less every day. Bread 4lbs for 90 men per day, no milk and a scarcity of vegetables.

1917



1918



1919



Did you know?

The RANBT built pontoons, which were like small boats. These were joined and anchored together, with a walkway placed on top to form a quickly constructed bridge. The pontoons were made in workshops on Cockatoo Island in Sydney.

Pontoons in use as a bridge on Kangaroo Beach, Suvla Bay, August 1915.



AWM P11155.001.001

3 June 1916

We have been away from Australia 12 months today and as far as I can see the Train isn't a bit more settled. Discontent rules everyone but still seamen are in general like that when kept ashore for any length of time.

1 January 1917

This has been a sad day for us all as one of our comrades [Robert Armstrong] who has been missing since XMAS night was found in the Canal this morning ... [We also] buried ABD [Keith] Jarvis who had been lingering for some time. Weather cold, wet and miserable. Food good.

27 March 1917

Today has been absolutely the best for the Train since we left Australia. The CO Bracegirdle left us for Australia ... Mr Read read out orders ... stating that the transfers were open for the following - LH [Light Horse], Infantry, Engineers, Artillery and the unit was to be re-named the Australian Naval and Military Engineers ... which we had an option of remaining in and that the remainder were to return to Australia.

1 April 1917

Owing to the small company of men wishing to transfer ... guarantee was given that the Artillery [and] Infantry would go direct to England or France and the remaining would be returned to Australia to be discharged.

1 July 1917

Passed Cape Leeuwin 3.30 pm weather moderate wind westerly tucker still splendid. Arrived Port Melbourne 8th July.

Here endeth the lesson and a lesson too.

Disembarked from HMAT Bulla A43.

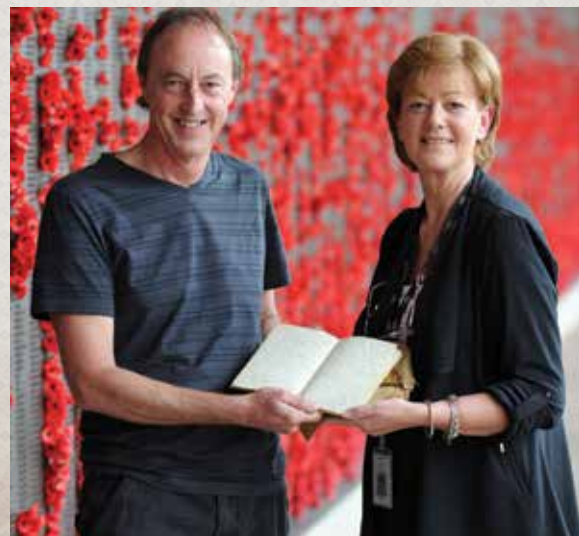
AWM PR04710

When the RANBT disbanded in 1917, Laurie chose to be discharged and return to Australia. Settling in South

Australia, he married Florence May Langham in 1920 and the couple had a son, Jack, in 1922. Laurie died in May 1955 at the age of 64. In the late 1980s Jack's son, Martin (Marty), was given his grandfather's diary. Marty then set about transcribing; not an easy task given the small handwriting and military terminology. The diary, along with the transcribed bound book, was donated to the Australian War Memorial in April 2012.

In 2012 Marty Smee visited the Australian War Memorial to hand over his grandfather's diary. At the time he reflected on the importance of Laurie's words and what the diary meant to him personally.

I have no memories of my Grandfather - he died when I was young, and so the diary is my main connection to him. Reading through the diary you find him to be an unselfish man, who rarely talked about himself.



Marty Smee with curator Kerrie Leech, Australian War Memorial, 18 April 2012.

(Image courtesy Defence Navy News)

1914

1915

1916

“From your soldier friend”: Lance Corporal Charles Tednee Blackman

29 October 1917

“So far we haven’t seen any better places than Australia. France is beautiful but it rains too much ... the clouds here never need to thunder, the guns do all the thundering and the splashes they make is just like lightning. They make more noise than those thunderstorms you have in Australia. I would rather be in a thunderstorm than a battle.”

AWM PR01679

Charles Tednee Blackman was born in Queensland to Emily Deshong, a Waka Waka woman, and Thomas Blackman, a Goreng Goreng man. Known as “Charley”, he became a highly regarded farm hand on the property, “Illeura” at Biggenden, owned by Mr John Salter. In August 1915, at the age of 19, Charley enlisted in the AIF, and over the next three and a half years he regularly wrote home to family and friends, including John, whom he referred to respectfully as “Mr Salter”. In his letters, Charley candidly discussed his experiences of the **front line**, training, and leave.



Charley's are the only known letters in the Memorial's collection written by an Aboriginal Australian serviceman in the First World War.

Why might this be the case? What can these letters add to our understanding of this period in Australia's history?

Charley on leave in England.

AWM PR01679

1917

1918

1919



Charley was not the only member of his family to serve in the war. His two older brothers followed him to the AIF. Thomas joined up in December 1916. Alfred Blackman (front row, second from left) enlisted the following month, but died of wounds just nine months later in October 1917, while serving with the 41st Battalion in France.

AWM2016.120.10

After arriving on the Western Front, Charley served in France with the 9th Battalion. In 1916, on a postcard thanking Mr Salter for the gift of a warm scarf, Charley added:

I only wish I could parcel myself home now ... I have been very lucky ... Pozières was terrible, but I'll return.

AWM PR01679

During the battle of Pozières some 6,800 Australians were killed or died of wounds over a period of seven weeks.

Charley was hospitalised in France in 1918 after being exposed to gas in the trenches near Ypres in Belgium. Despite the challenges he faced while serving overseas, Charley's letters repeatedly showed concern for the welfare of his loved ones in Australia. In a letter that year he wrote:

Hoping to find you all in the best of health and many future happiness goodbye till we meet again.

AWM PR01679

Charley returned to Australia in June 1919 and was medically discharged soon after, owing to the lingering effects of gas. He went to work for a while on the Illeura farm with John. However, like many who returned home after the First World War, the trauma of his experiences never left him and Charley spent his later years in solitude.

The 9th Battalion was one of the earliest battalions raised for the AIF and the first formed in Queensland. Its original members departed Australia for Egypt in September 1914 and were among the first to land on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

After the allied forces evacuated the peninsula, the 9th Battalion continued on to the Western Front. Its first major battle was at Pozières in France. Involvement in many other battles followed, including fighting at Ypres and Amiens. By the war's end, 1,094 men of the 9th Battalion had died and a further 2,422 had been wounded.



Colour patch for the 9th Battalion, AIF.

AWM RELAWM07941.082

1914

1915

1916

“Yours lovingly”: Private Robert Mackellar and Sister Frances Mackellar

Somewhere in France
26 July 1916

“My dear Mother,

I have just received my marching orders and go to join my battalion, things seem to be pretty lively up there so if anything should happen to me Uncle Frank and Archie Male will see to the squaring up of all my business, but then of course I am quite sure I will be alright.”

AWM PR03194

So began a letter written by Robert “Robin” Mackellar just days before going into battle on the Western Front.

Robin and his big sister Frances (or “Fay”) were the eldest children of Alexander and Edith Mackellar from the small Queensland town of Bauple. The family were fruit growers and pioneers in sugarcane farming, and they owned the largest individual plantation in the area. Fay and Robin grew up on the family’s farm with their younger siblings Gladys, Mary (known as “Mollie”), Duncan, and Roger. While Fay helped her mother run the homestead, “Cowal”, Robin worked in the orchard or on the farm, often hidden among the tall green stalks of sugarcane. His help was particularly crucial after his father’s death in 1909.

As a young man, Robin travelled widely, and was working as a **pearler** in Broome when the First World War broke out. Following in the footsteps of his Uncle Charles, who had served during the Boer War, Robin joined the 28th Battalion, AIF, in December 1915. Two months later he sailed from Australian shores for overseas service. During the long voyage he wrote a letter to his brother:

Robin Mackellar, c. 1915–16.

AWM H06475

Fay Mackellar, c. 1917–19.

AWM P11241.001

Fay and Robin’s legacy carried on to their great nephews. David Mackellar followed in Fay’s footsteps, becoming a nurse, and James Mackellar joined the Australian Army.

Silver Rising Sun badge worn by nurses of the Australian Army Nursing Service.

AWM REL30251



1917



1918



1919



21 February 1916

Dear Duncan,

We left Fremantle about a week ago and expect to have another couple of weeks at sea with probably a call at one or two ports en route but as to the present we know nothing definite as to where we are going although we all imagine we know quite well.

You will see mother's letter and I have told her all the news I am just writing you a line to remind you it is your duty to stay at home until it becomes absolutely necessary that everybody should go.

Mother cannot do without you and I will do my best to do both our shares if I get there but I think it is quite possible that the war will be over in another six or eight months. Tell Gladys I will write to her when we get to our destination.

AWM PRO3194

Despite his promises to write, Robin soon fell ill with bronchitis, and months passed by before his family heard from him. Finally, a letter came for Edith dated 26 July 1916, written as Robin was leaving to join his battalion at Pozières in France:

I do not know just what to say, news is very scarce and beyond saying that I am quite well and pleased to get away to what I came for and that I will write as often as possible there is little to say ... You can let Fay and Mollie know I have gone into the firing line the order has come suddenly so have had no time to write to them all.

Love to all

Your [affectionate] son

Robin Mackellar

AWM PRO3194

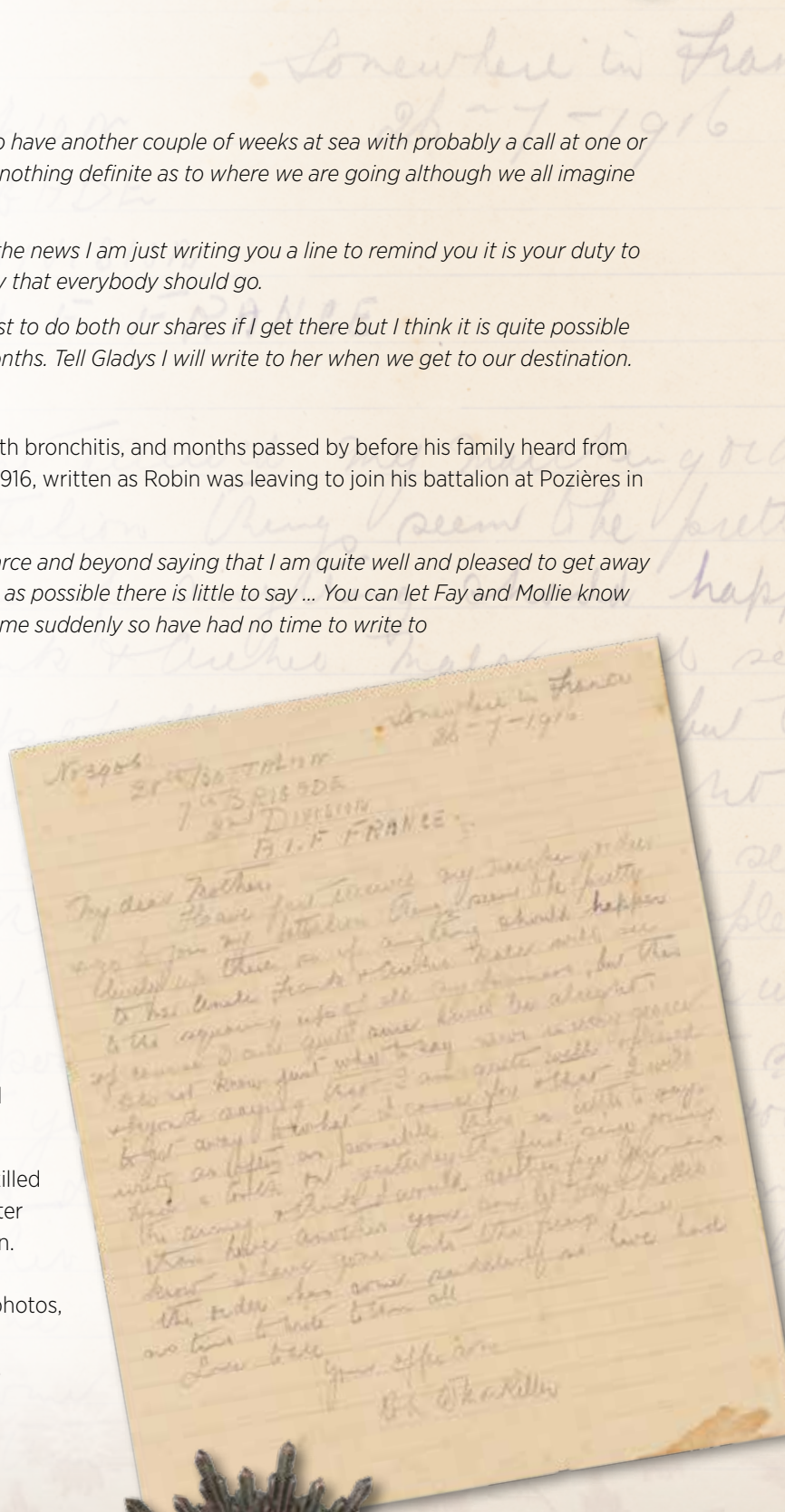
This was the last letter Edith received from Robin. She was soon notified that he had been reported missing in action. For six months, this was the only official news she received. Two letters she had written to Robin were returned undelivered, the envelopes marked with confusing scraps of information written on them: "missing", "wounded Hospital France", "deceased", and "not with unit".

Finally, Edith received word that Robin had been killed in action at Pozières on 29 July 1916, three days after he had written to her. No further details were given. In the following months she received his personal effects, which included a tin gift box, notebooks, photos, letters, and cards. Desperate to find out what had happened, Edith wrote to the Base Records office.

Robin's last hastily written letter to Edith was looked after by members of the Mackellar family for 87 years before being donated to the Australian War Memorial in 2003.

AWM PRO3194

Do you have any treasures in your family that have been passed down through the generations? What do they tell you about your ancestors and the world in which they lived?



Rising Sun badge worn by members of the Australian Imperial Force.

AWM REL41672

1914

1915

1916

The small French village of Pozières was destroyed during heavy fighting in July 1916. In just three days the 1st Australian Division suffered 5,000 casualties. Many of those who died, including Robin, were never found.

The losses at Pozières motivated official war correspondent Charles Bean to plan for a war memorial museum to be built in Australia. He collected the first relics for the Australian War Memorial at Pozières.

Like thousands of other Australian families whose loved ones have unknown graves, the Mackellar family never fully recovered from not knowing what happened to Robin. Why do you think Charles Bean felt it was so important for a national war memorial to be built in Australia?



Frank Crozier, *Bombardment of Pozières, July 1916* (1918, oil on canvas, 106.2 x 191.5 cm, AWM ART00240).

Meanwhile, Fay had enlisted with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS). Donning a grey ward dress and white veil, she boarded RMS *Khiva* on 26 May 1917 and set sail from Sydney, bound for the 34th Welsh General Hospital in India. She was one of 500 AANS nurses who served in India, treating hundreds of Turkish prisoners of war and wounded British troops. Many of the nurses were disappointed that they were not located where they felt they were needed most, and were unable to nurse the Australian “boys”. Fay painted a picture of her life at the hospital in a series of letters written to her mother between 1917 and 1918.

Deolali via Bombay

6 August 1917

Dear Mother,

We have about 1500 patients and expect more, two hundred came in two days last week besides odd ones from the Garrison regiment. Most of our boys are very nice – poor kids, they get a rough time of it ...

They are afraid we are going to have a drought so now we must be careful of the water and we are not to have baths – Fancy and I have been having four or five a day.

26 July 1918

The days just fly by and I don't seem to have much time for writing at present I am in the ear, nose and throat ward and it keeps us going especially doing the eyes ...

A little boy friend of mine an officer nineteen left for England Tuesday night poor little kid he was a dear boy – and we all loved him. I hope he gets home safely.

September 1918

*We have been having a terrible time lately with the **influenza**. I have lost nine patients – is it not awful and today an outbreak of **Cholera**. I don't know what we are going to do. I have worked 15 hours one day and nine the next for over a month now and some of the sisters are working twelve hours every day. I have been splendid lately luckily – as more than half the sisters on the staff are ill.*

1917



1918



1919



Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS)

More than 2,000 women served overseas in the AANS during the First World War. It was formed in 1903 as part of the Australian Army Medical Corps, and its members were volunteers from both the nursing service and the civilian workforce. They had to be unmarried, aged between 25 and 40, well-educated, and trained in nursing.

During the First World War, AANS nurses served in hospitals and on hospital ships and trains in a number of locations from Britain to India, including France and Belgium, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. By war's end, 22 nurses had died as a result of their service. Some 388 nurses received awards for their contribution during the war, including seven who were awarded the Military Medal for bravery and devotion to duty under fire.¹



Embroidered AANS badge

AWM REL39044

The Mess room and sisters' quarters of No. 34 Welsh General Hospital in Deolali, India, c. 1917.

AWM P00562.175

*Well it would be impossible to describe this place to you. As I could never imagine it myself ... The bungalows themselves consist of long low buildings ... made of stone and just a couple of steps off the ground ... The only lights we have are lanterns ... and the only way of boiling water etc is with **primus stoves** – fancy seventy four patients in each ward and two little primus to boil all the water and make any special foods for the sick ones.*

AWM PR03194

Why would the hospital have been so difficult for Fay to describe to her mother?



1914

1915

1916

3 November 1918

I neglected you for a few weeks I hope you do not worry. We have had a rotten time for the last two months. Influenza broke out amongst the troops and it took a very bad form. It is like a nightmare now to me and have never seen so many sick people at once before and it has been an unheard of thing to have the death toll we had. I lost five in 25 hours, real strong fine looking men. I suppose you will see in the papers the death of one of our Sisters. We had to all go to the funeral ... I had never seen a military funeral before much less been at one and I hate to hear a gun go off now worse than ever ...

I have three Australian boys in the ward dear kids and it has made me feel frightfully home sick the last few days ... Well love to the family

Yours lovingly, Fay

AWM PR03194

Eight days after Fay wrote this letter, the war ended. However, the nurses' work was far from over. Fay was transferred to England, where she worked for the next year, nursing wounded and ill men who were waiting to return home. She was promoted to the rank of sister, and eventually returned to Australia in December 1919.

When Fay returned to Queensland, Edith had received no new information about Robin. An inquiry into his death revealed little, and ultimately he was presumed dead. His body was never found, and he is remembered at the Australian National Memorial in Villers-Bretonneux, along with more than 10,700 other Australians who died in France and have no known grave.

Edith never gave up trying to find out what happened to Robin. She is believed to have written her last letter to base records just before her death in 1945, 27 years after the war ended. Robin's name was eventually carved alongside Edith's on the Mackellar family's tombstone in Bauple.

After the war Fay continued to practice nursing, taking up a position with the Bush Nursing Service and assisting people in Queensland's remote communities during emergencies. She also provided advice which locals otherwise may not have had access to on midwifery and child health. Fay often regaled her family with stories of her work in the Bush Nursing Service, but never spoke about her wartime experiences.

From 1945 until her death in 1973 Fay was the matriarch of the Mackellar family. In 1928 Duncan and his wife, Vida, had a daughter and called her Mary Fay Mackellar in honour of her aunt. As time passed, Mary became the custodian of many of the family's precious belongings. Before she died she donated Fay and Robin's letters and photographs to the Australian War Memorial, so that their story could be told.

Did you know?

During the fighting at Villers-Bretonneux in France on 25 April 1918 the boys' school *Ecole de Garçons* was destroyed, along with much of the town. Villers-Bretonneux held significance for many Australians who had lost loved ones there, so Australian teachers and school children decided to help rebuild the school. The Victorian Department of Education donated £12,000 and schools across the country ran a Penny Drive to raise funds. The new school, named Victoria College, was opened in 1926 and the words *N'oublions l'Australie* [Do not forget Australia] were inscribed in the school hall. The school is just down the road from the Villers-Bretonneux memorial where Robin Mackellar is commemorated.



The "Do not forget Australia" sign remains on the exterior of Victoria College today.

Students of Victoria College gather for its official opening on 12 December 1926.

VA 3098 (Image courtesy Department of Education).

1917



1918



1919



(Left) Fay (back row, second from left) and Staff Nurse Ruby Jacka (front row second from right) with some of their patients of No. 1 Australian General Hospital at Sutton Veny, England, 18 April 1919.

(Right) A tea party hosted by nurses of No. 1 Australian General Hospital for Australian soldiers before they returned home, 6 May 1919.

AWM PRO3194

Australians serving overseas often had their photographs taken and turned into postcards for them to send home to their families. These photographs gave insight into where they were and what they were doing.

How has communication changed in the last 100 years? What would you say is the modern-day equivalent of these photograph postcards?

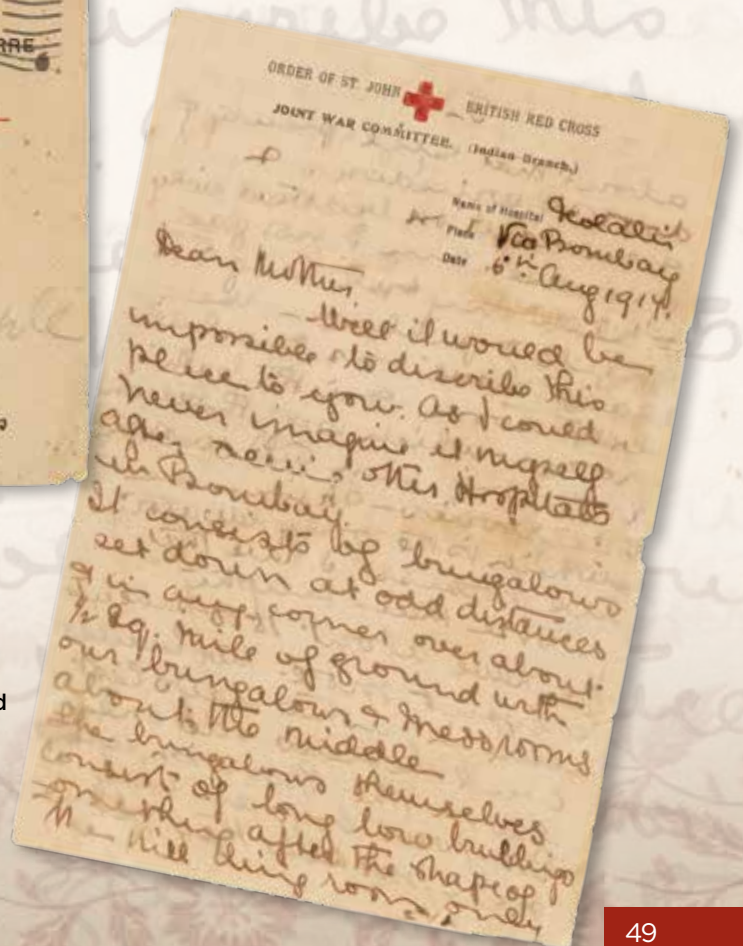


A letter and envelope Fay sent home to Edith in August 1917.

AWM PRO3194

Letters were an essential means of communication between those serving overseas during the First World War and their anxious families back home. Many organisations, including the Australian Comforts Fund, Red Cross, and YMCA provided stationery to servicemen and servicewomen throughout the First World War.

The importance of written communication meant that penmanship, or writing by hand, was an important skill to learn during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Is it still important today? Why/why not?



1914

1915

1916

Where did these stories take place?



1 Lieutenant Colonel John Linton Treloar

- Egypt
- Turkey
- France

2 Lieutenant Thomas James Richards

- Egypt
- Turkey
- France
- Belgium

3 Chaplain Walter Ernest Dexter

- Egypt
- Turkey
- France
- England

4 Captain Thomas Walter White

- Iraq
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- Greece

5 Lieutenant George Courtney Benson

- Egypt
- Turkey
- France
- England

6 Sergeant Ernest George Chudleigh

- Egypt
- Turkey
- France
- Belgium

7 Able Bodied Driver Laurie John Smee

- Lemnos
- Imbros
- Turkey
- Egypt

8 Lance Corporal Charles Tednee Blackman

- France
- Belgium

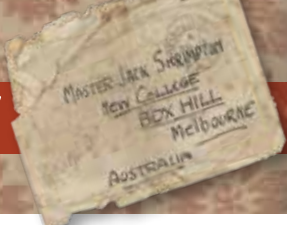
9 Private Robert Mackellar

- France

10 Sister Frances Mackellar

- India
- England

1917



1918



1919



ASIA

4

IRAQ



INDIA

10

INDIAN OCEAN



1914

1915

1916

Glossary

A.1.	An informal expression meaning very good, well, or excellent
all hands	Naval term for everyone available
allied	Describing countries working together towards a common goal
amnesia	Loss of memory
Armistice	The Armistice of Compi�gne was the agreement between the Allies and Germany that ended the fighting in the First World War. It came into effect at 11 am (Paris time) on 11 November 1918
Australian Imperial Force	The main Australian military force that served overseas during the First World War
billet	A place, often a civilian's house, where soldiers board temporarily
casualties	Those who are killed, wounded, ill, or taken prisoner during war
censored	When information is officially concealed either in part or in full
cholera	A serious disease of the gut caused by infected water
Communion	The blessing and sharing of bread and wine during Christian worship
courts-martial	The proceedings in which members of the armed services accused of breaking military law are tried
dale	A valley
disbanded	Broke up
discharged	Released from an obligation to serve
dysentery	An infection of the intestines resulting in severe diarrhoea
enteric fever	Or typhoid; an infectious bacterial fever
fetlocks	The "ankle" joint of a horse's leg
fez	A brimless felt hat, which sometimes has a tassel on the top
flanks	The right and left sides of a group of people
front line	The military line closest to the opposing side
haversack	A small backpack worn by soldiers
infantry	The land-based section of the army that fights on foot
influenza	Otherwise known as the flu; a contagious viral infection
intelligence	Military or political information
light horse regiments	Units of troops typically mounted on horseback
Mentioned in Despatches	To have one's actions in the field praised by superior officers in an official report
Military Cross	A British and Dominion decoration instituted in 1914 and awarded to officers for brave and distinguished active service on land
Militia	An Australian military force established in 1903 consisting of civilians, designed to supplement a regular army in an emergency
mustard gas	A chemical weapon used during the First World War that caused blistering, sore eyes, and internal injuries
N.C.Os	Non-commissioned officer: an officer not holding a rank conferred by a commission
ordained	When someone has been made a priest or minister
osteoarthritis	Degeneration of joint cartilage and the underlying bone
panoramic	A wide or sweeping view
pantomimes	Musical stage comedies, often put on for family entertainment
parishioners	Members of a church parish
passed out	Completed initial training in the armed forces

1917



1918



1919



pearler	Someone who dives for or trades in pearls
pier	A raised structure built on posts that extends out over water
postas	Turkish word meaning soldier
primus stoves	The first portable, pressurised-burner kerosene stoves
prisoner exchange	An agreement between opposing sides in a conflict to release certain prisoners to each other
puttees	A long piece of material wound around the leg (from ankle to the knee) for protection or support
quartermaster	A military store supervisor, who distributes supplies
reconnaissance	An exploratory mission to gain information for military purposes
regulations	Rules maintained by an authority
repatriation	Returning someone to their home country
shilling	A coin in the British currency system until 1971. There were 20 shillings in one pound
stretcher-bearer	Someone who carries the sick or wounded from the battlefield on stretchers
tres bon	A French term meaning very good
viaduct	A long bridge-like structure which carries a road across a valley or other low ground
vernacular	The language or dialect spoken by the people of a country or area
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association; a welfare movement which began in 1844, with branches all over the world
Western Front	A line of trenches running from Belgium to Switzerland, and the main area of operations for Allied forces in Western Europe

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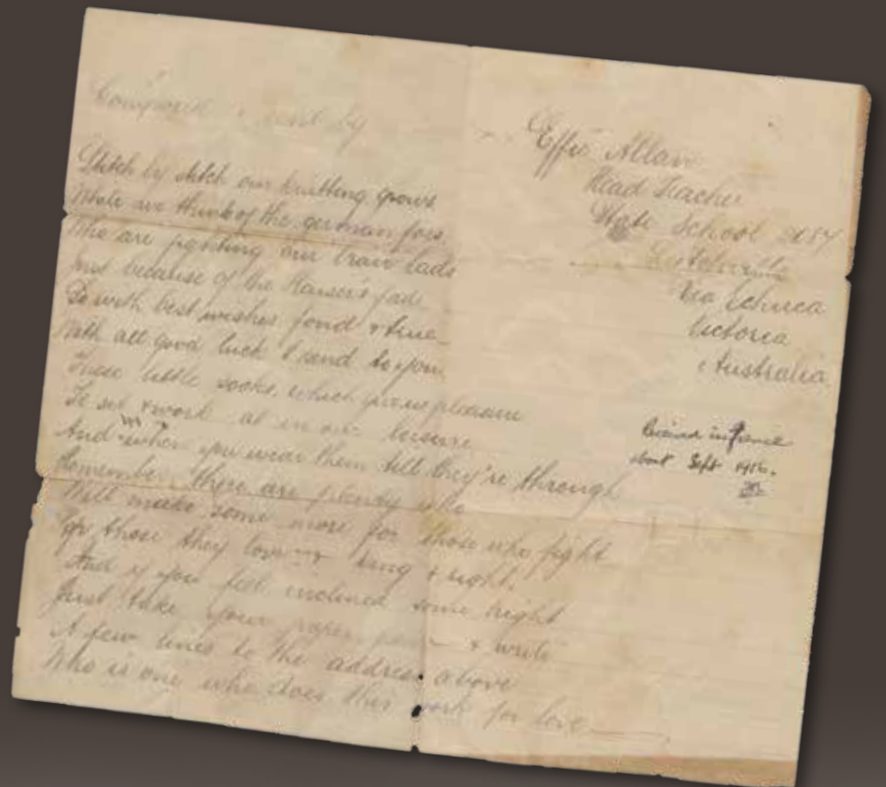
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While hundreds of thousands of Australians served abroad during the First World War, others contributed on the home front. Many, particularly women, joined groups such as the Voluntary Aid Detachment, the Country Women's Association, and the Red Cross Society to support the war effort.

By 1918, more than 102,000 Australians were involved in the Red Cross, and by war's end some 400,000 Red Cross parcels containing clothes, socks, bandages, and toiletries had been sent overseas. Schools were heavily involved in these activities, assisting with fundraising and knitting warm clothes for servicemen facing cold foreign winters.

Miss Euphemia "Effie" McMurdo Allan, head teacher at the Leitchville State School in Victoria, was active with her local Red Cross Society during the war. With her students, she organised a concert and Anzac Day event to raise much-needed funds, and sent a pair of hand-knitted socks and a poem to a soldier serving overseas:

*Stitch by stitch our knitting grows,
While we think of German foes,
Who are fighting our brave lads
Just because of the Kaiser's fads,
So with best wishes fond and true
With all good luck I send to you
These little socks, which give us pleasure
To sit and work at in our leisure,
And when you wear them till they're through
Remember there are plenty who
Will make some more for those who fight
For those they love – and king and right.
And if you feel inclined some night
Just take your paper, pen – and write
A few lines to the address above
Who is one who does this work for love.*



Effie with schoolchildren from Leitchville State School, 1915.

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Effie's poem was received by an unknown soldier in France in 1916.

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The Australian soldier and sailor frequently recorded in his diary or in his home-letters indications of the thoughts, hopes, and fears which were uppermost in his mind, and descriptions of his own and others' work and actions. These papers are often the most valuable human documents.

Lieutenant Colonel John Linton Treloar
AWM 1DRL/0092



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