In Search of George Wenham: an Aboriginal Anzac and the History of Denial.

“My own darling laddie”.

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Thesis submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Science, the Faculty of Education and Arts, The University of Newcastle in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2015
Declaration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(signed) ...........................................
This thesis contains references to Indigenous people who are now deceased, and may cause distress to some Indigenous Peoples.
Dedication

This research is dedicated to my grandfather, George Wenham (1888-1928) and to all Indigenous men who served in the First Australian Imperial Force during the Great War.
Acknowledgements

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Enabling my thesis to use a range of use of images I thank the generosity of organisations and their representatives who hold their copyright. Firstly the National Archives of Australia for permission to publish from their B2455 series of WWI files and the assistance of Cara Downes of the NAA’s Access Examination & Copyright section. To the Australian War Memorial, particularly Stuart Bennington, Curator of Official Records and Cameron Atkinson, Information Services for their assistance in facilitating my use of images from the AWM’s “Honours and Awards” and the “Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau” files. The State Records Authority of New South Wales and the role of Gail Davis, Senior Archivist Research and Publications in allowing the use of NRS 8058, Returned Soldiers’ Settlement loan files. George Wenham, File 8186,[ 12/7291]. To Robert Pike of “Ancre Great War” in generously providing me images of the grave at Baby 700, Gallipoli, of John Miller, likely the first Indigenous man to die in action in the Great War. To Julie Reece of “Connecting Spirits” for providing photographs of Cyril and Rufus Rigney, and the Aboriginal ceremony held at the grave of Rufus Rigney at Harlebeke New British Cemetery in 2006. I thank Pierre Vandervelden of “INMEMORy” for his permission allowing the use of a photograph of Indigenous hero William Irwin.

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CONTENTS

Declaration ii
Warning iii
Dedication iv
Acknowledgements v
Contents vi
List of Figures ix
Abstract xv
Introduction xvi

Chapter 1  Prelude to World War One  1
  Race and the Indigenous ANZAC: the case of Mick King  3
  Denying Aboriginal ANZACs  9
  Dispossession  12
  'A cult of forgetfulness'  15
  The enlistment of Indigenous men in the AIF  19

Chapter 2  The Indigenous soldiers of World War One – An overview  26
  The effects of the 1909 amendments to the Defence Act: the case of Thomas Talbot  27
  Who were the Indigenous members of the First AIF: the contribution of Philippa Scarlett  30
  Key geographical locations for Indigenous members of the First AIF  31
  Black ANZACS of 1914: the case of John Miller  34
  Black diggers and enlistment post 1914  39
  Insights for Indigenous members provided by their service records: age, physical attributes, occupations, theatres of service, religious denomination and casualty details  45

Chapter 3  Indigenous soldiers and their units  61
  Infantry  63
  Light Horse  74
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous military heroes: the case of William Irwin</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Indigenous winners of the DCM</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous winners of the Military Medal</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The case of Ewan Rose and the Croix de Guerre</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous men Mentioned in Despatches</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 7  “Do you know to whom you’re speaking”</strong></td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline and a citizen army.</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field punishment and the case of Frank Owen</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard labour – the case of George Aitken</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Conduct to the Prejudice”</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desertion</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning the Anzac myth</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venereal disease</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The case of Arthur Andrews</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 8  George Wenham</strong></td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry and Mary Wenham</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Wenham and the AIF</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George and Madeleine Wenham post war</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coda</strong></td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bibliography</strong></td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix 1:</strong></td>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix 2:</strong></td>
<td>B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix 3: Abbreviations</strong></td>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

CHAPTER 2. The Indigenous soldiers of World War One – an overview
Figure 1. The application form for the AIF. 28
Figure 2. The first page of Talbott’s attestation where his enlistment has been cancelled because he was “Not of European Origin”. 29
Figure 3. Place of birth for Indigenous soldiers in World War One given on enlistment. 32
Figure 4. Numbers of Indigenous enlistments by State based on POB. 32
Figure 5. Indigenous recruits for 1914. POB and place of enlistment. 36
Figure 6. Baby 700 Cemetery, courtesy R E PIKE. 39
Figure 7. Grave of John Miller, likely first Indigenous man killed in the Great War, Baby 700 Cemetery, courtesy R E PIKE. 39
Figure 8. Enlistment of Indigenous soldiers for each year of the war as a percentage. 40
Figure 9. Indigenous enlistment for 1915 showing POB and place of enlistment. 41
Figure 10. Indigenous enlistment for 1916 showing POB and increased places where a man could enlist. 42
Figure 11. Indigenous enlistment for 1917 showing POB and place of enlistment. A noticeable decline in numbers compared with 1916. 43
Figure 12. Indigenous enlistment for 1918 showing POB and place of enlistment. An even greater decline in numbers. 44
Figure 13. The age of Indigenous Recruits to the AIF, 1914-1918. 48
Figure 14. The will of Martin Coohey – defying the stereotype. 52
Figure 15. Religious denomination of Indigenous recruits as recorded on attestation paper. 57

CHAPTER 3. Indigenous Soldiers and their units
Figure 1. AWM Collection: P00889.004. Harry C Murray, 11th LH 76
Figure 2. Venereal disease case-card for Thomas Rine. 84
Figure 3. Treatment for VD administered to Thomas Rine. 84
Figure 4. Correspondence from Office of Army Records to RSL Dunedoo confirming Rine’s service in the AIF. 86
Figure 5. Occupations of Indigenous recruits. 87
Figure 6. Items issued to new recruits of the AIF from the file of Walter Coe. 104
Figure 7. Walter Coe’s “summary page”. 105
Figure 8. AWM Collection; E05465 which possibly shows Walter Coe as a member of the Australian Graves Detachment. 106

CHAPTER 4. “An Aboriginal too full blooded for AIF”
Figure 1. First page of George Cain’s attestation papers. 120
Figure 2. The records of John Clarke demonstrating the initial training. 125
Figure 3. The records of John Clarke demonstrating the initial training recruits for the AIF received. 126
Figure 4. Possible recruits from Barambah from the file of Harry Baker. 134
Figure 5. The first page of Harry Baker’s attestation where his family name was originally recorded as “Dago” 137
Figure 6. The medical records for Edmund Coochey where he has been rejected because of his race. 140
Figure 7. The first page of Edmund Bilney’s attestation papers where he has been described as “Halfcaste”. 143
Figure 8. Edmund Bilney’s medical file where he is rejected for being “Too full blood for AIF”. 144
Figure 9. Robert Bond’s medical files where he is discharged for being “Not substantially of European origin”. 145
Figure 10. Correspondence couched in racist language which led to the discharge of Abby Delaney. 149
Figure 11. William Chatfield’s original enlistment resulting in his discharge for “Unsuitable Physique (Colour) 150
Figure 12. AWM Collection; PO 246,001. Wedding portrait of William Wallace Chatfield and his bride, Mary Jane Cain. Coonabarabran. 151

CHAPTER 5 Indigenous Sacrifice 1914-19
Figure 1. AWM Canberra: The tomb of the Unknown Soldier, May 2014. 154
Figure 2. AWM: 100793 - Canberra, ACT. 4 July, 1945. An aerial photograph of the Australian War Memorial. 155
Figure 3. AWM Canberra : Roll of Honour for World War One, May 2014. 156
Figure 4. AWM: Roll of Honour for George Aitken, one of 124 Indigenous men who died in the Great War. 157
Figure 5. Deaths per year 1915-1919 for Indigenous diggers. 158
Figure 6. Casualties and enlistments for the AIF as a percentage during World War One. 158
Figure 7. Age at death of Indigenous members of AIF. 159
Figure 8. Anzac Cove - July, 2012. 169
Figure 9. The writer, as did many diggers, swimming at Anzac Cove. July, 2012 169
Figure 10. Lone Pine Memorial, July 2012. 174
Figure 11. The grave of Arthur Homer at Shell Green Military Cemetery (July 2012). 175
Figure 12. Shell Green Military Cemetery (July 2012). 176
Figure 13. Lone Pine Memorial: 15th Battalion (July 2012) 181
Figure 14. Lone Pine Memorial: Edward Maynard (July 2012) 181
Figure 15. Map showing prominent battle sites associated with Indigenous
casualties in France and Flanders.

Figure 16. AWM Collection: J00146. Map of Pozières and Mouquet Farm.

Figure 17. "2444 Wallie Johnson" Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428.

Figure 18. "2444 Wallie Johnson" Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428

Figure 19. Cyril Rigney - kind permission of "Connecting Spirits"

Figure 20. Rufus Rigney - kind permission of "Connecting Spirits"

Figure 21. NAA: B2455 RIGNEY RUFUS GORDON - German death certificate

Figure 22. Aboriginal ceremony at the grave of Rufus Rigney - Harlebeke New British Cemetery 2006- kind permission of "Connecting Spirits"

Figure 23 Locations in the Middle East where the two Indigenous troopers died.

Figure 24. International Wargraves Photography Project (#46770518)

"Trooper Ernest James Firth". Find A Grave. (19 June, 2013)

Figure 25. Official correspondence sent to George Lavender’s mother of his death. It tells her it was from a self-inflicted gunshot.

CHAPTER 6. The Good and the Great

Figure 1. AWM Collection: H15655. Portrait of Captain Albert Jacka, winner of Australia’s first VC in the war.

Figure 2. AWM Collection: P09300.001. 202 Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick in Shrapnel Gully at Anzac Cove.

Figure 3. Shrapnel Valley - July, 2012.

Figure 4. The statue of Simpson and his donkey at the AWM. May 2014.

Figure 5. AWM: P02939.043, Informal outdoors portrait of Private George Cartwright VC, 33rd Battalion.

Figure 6. AWM 281/171: Pte George Cartwright, 726, 33rd Bn – recommendation for VC.

Figure 7. AWM 281/171: Pte William Irwin, 792, 33rd Bn – recommendation for DCM.

Figure 8. William Irwin, 792, 33rd Bn. Permission of Pierre Vandervelden.

Figure 9. NAA: B2455 IRWIN WILLIAM ALLAN details of injuries received.

Figure 10. Geographical locations for Indigenous gallantry.

Figure 11. AWM28 1/174: T/Cpl Albert Knight, 5709, 43rd Bn – recommendation for DCM.

Figure 12. AWM28 1/171: Sergeant James Stanton, 3265, 7th Bn – recommendation for DCM.

Figure 13. AWM28 1/4: L/Cpl Frederick Prentice, 2597 1st Pioneer Bn – recommendation for MM

Figure 14. AWM 28 1/180: Pte Maitland Madge, 3483, 15th Bn –
Figure 15. AWM Collection: J00187. Aerial view of Mouquet Farm, after shelling by British artillery, showing the ruins of the farm and destroyed trenches.


Figure 17. Statutory declaration from Frederick Briggs where he claims Maori descent.

Figure 18. AWM28 1/47: Pte James Couley, 2978, 1st Bn – recommendation for MM.

Figure 19. AWM28 2/77: Pte Arthur Byrne, 718, 33rd Bn – recommendation for MM.

Figure 20. AWM28 1/268: Pte Charles Goldspink, 5019, 54th Bn – recommendation for MM.

Figure 21. Australian War Memorial: PO1695.002 5459 Corporal Harry Thorpe MM

Figure 22. AWM 28 1/34: L/Cpl Harry Thorpe, 5459, 7th Bn – recommendation for DCM.

Figure 23. AWM28 1/47: Dvr Charles Hearps, 207, 40th Bn – recommendation for MM.

Figure 24. AWM Collection: P01695.001 Studio portrait of 3603 Private William Reginald Rawlings MM.

Figure 25. 1DRL/0428: William Rawlings, 3603, 29th Bn.

Figure 26. 1DRL/0428: William Rawlings, 3603, 29th Bn.

Figure 27. Medical file for John Ferguson.

Figure 28. AWM 28 1/47: Pte (L/Cpl) John Ferguson, 2405, 34th Bn – recommendation for MM.

Figure 29. AWM28 1/115: Pte William John Gray, 4428, 26th Bn – recommendation for MM.

Figure 30. Raymond Runga’s attestation paper where his race is recorded.

Figure 31. AWM28 1/47: Pte Raymond Runga, 5476, 6th Bn – recommendation for MM.

Figure 32. AWM28 2/94: L/Cpl James Phillips, 1643, 53rd Bn – recommendation for DCM.

Figure 33 AWM28 2/96: Pte Ewan Rose, 3132, 14 Australian LTMB - Recommendation.

Figure 34. AWM28 1/255: Pte Ewan Rose, 3132, 14 Australian LTMB - Recommendation - MID.

Figure 35. AWM28 2/96: Pte Ewan Rose, 3132, 14 Australian LTMB - Recommendation – Belgian Croix de Guerre.
Figure 36. AWM28 2/96: Pte Ewan Rose, 3132, 14 Australian LTMB - Recommendation for French Croix de Guerre. 280
Figure 37. AWM Collection: E02677. Two men of the 7th Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery operate a light trench mortar established in a machine gun post on the new front line. 281
Figure 38. MID emblem worn on ribbon for Victory Medal. 282
Figure 39. AWM28 1/177: Pte William Jonas, 2101, 34th Battalion – Recommendation MID. 282
Figure 40. AWM: E01220 - Five Australians passing along a duckboard track over mud and water among gaunt bare tree trunks in the devastated Chateau Wood, a portion of one of the battlegrounds in the Ypres. 284
Figure 41. NAA: B884 S83431. Garnett Wilson. 286
Figure 46. NAA: B2455, CLARK T J – mention in despatches. 287
Figure 47. NAA: B2455, RUTTLEY ARTHUR HERBERT mention in despatches. 288

CHAPTER 7 “Do you know to whom you’re speaking”
Figure 1. Occupations of Indigenous recruits. 293
Figure 2. Occupations for AIF as a whole 293
Figure 3. Frank Owen’s records showing he stowed away to Gallipoli. 294
Figure 4. The will of George Aitken. 298
Figure 5. Codford military camp 1917 300
Figure 6. The quagmire that was the front at Ypres October, 1917. 304
Figure 7. 10 unidentified Australian deserters. 320
Figure 8. Précis of the service of George Lavender. 323
Figure 9. Document showing Louis Lacey at Salvation Army shelter. 332
Figure 10. Précis of the service of Louis Lacey 334
Figure 11. Document detailing issues of Arthur Andrew’s ill-discipline. 351

CHAPTER 8 George Wenham
Figure 1. The bounty ship Maitland. 358
Figure 2. Geographical locations central to my family's early history in NSW. 361
Figure 3. Birth certificate of George Wenham. 368
Figure 4. George Wenham’s application to join AIF. 369
Figure 5. Colour patch for the 30th Battalion AIF. 371
Figure 6. George Wenham, 3663, B Company 30th Battalion, 8th Brigade, 5th Australian Division. 371
Figure 7. My grandmother’s annotation of my grandfather’s photograph. 372
Figure 8. The troopship, Ballarat, sinking in 1917. It had earlier taken my grandfather to the UK. 374
Figure 9. Troops of the 30th Battalion enter Bapaume, 1917. 377
Figure 10. Prominent locations for George Wenham in WW1. 378
Figure 11. 5th Division’s Memorial Polygon Wood. 381
Figure 12. Ellis’s records showing him commissioned to write division’s history, 1919. 382
Figure 13. Obverse of Australian Comforts Fund card celebrating victory at Polygon Wood. 384
Figure 14. Reverse of Australian Comforts Fund card celebrating victory at Polygon Wood. 384
Figure 15. One of the few surviving examples of my grandfather’s writing from small notebook. 385
Figure 16. My grandmother’s entry in my grandfather’s note book. 386
Figure 17. My grandmother in 1916. 386
Figure 18. My grandfather’s note on sniping. 390
Figure 19. A sniper’s camouflage for Western Front. 390
Figure 20. A sniper’s rifle. 391
Figure 21. Coisy, France at the time of my grandfather’s leave. 393
Figure 22. Army notification sent to my great grandmother of George Wenham’s admission to hospital for haemoptysis. 395
Figure 23. Details from George Wenham’s medical record. 396
Figure 24. Details of George Wenham’s Medical Board. 397
Figure 25. Details of George Wenham’s Medical Board. 398
Figure 26. Postcode sent to George Wenham from my grandmother, 1918. 399
Figure 27. My grandparents’ wedding certificate. 400
Figure 28. Details of my grandparents’ return to Australia 1919. 401
Figure 29. The Eslick home Belford, c1920. This is where my grandparents lived about this time. 404
Figure 30. A photograph of George Wenham taken in 1920s showing the debilitating effects of his illness. 405
Figure 31. Repatriation letter advising my grandfather to attend Prince of Wales hospital. 409
Figure 32. George Wenham’s leave form for May, 1928. 410
Figure 33. My grandfather’s death certificate. 411
Figure 34. George Wenham’s grave Whittingham, NSW. 412
Figure 35. My grandmother with her first two children Marjorie and Sydney. 415
Figure 36. Marjorie, Sydney and Charles Wenham, Sydney 1940. 416
Abstract

George Wenham, 3663, 30th Battalion, First Australian Imperial Force was a Gamilaroi man. He was my grandfather. Despite the celebrations surrounding the centenary of the Great War I knew little about him. This thesis addresses the previous denial by my family of its Indigenous heritage and until quite recently the history of Indigenous members of the AIF. Using the digital records held by the National Archives of Australia, the Australian War Memorial and the large body of literature written on Australia’s participation in the war, an interrogation of the stories of 834 Indigenous soldiers has resulted firstly in an act of historical recovery and secondly a reinterpretation of the ANZAC myth. Rather than being a white myth, it can now expand to become more inclusive of the reality of our national story whereby it recognises in a postcolonial manner the dispossession at the basis of the national story and the contribution of Indigenous men and their families to the nation. Through the use of silhouette biography and oral history, my grandfather can be found located in the context of the themes established by the thesis. This thesis is part of a growing body of research on Indigenous perspectives and the Australian Defence Force. In using a largely untapped source of Australian archival history, oral histories with Australia’s First people, this thesis will contribute to future research. It has also resulted in my family’s celebration of our Aboriginality.
Introduction

This thesis began with the aim of searching for the man who is my grandfather, George Wenham. When it was commenced in late 2011 I had only his service record for the Great War and a photograph of him in uniform. I was then faced with two major issues. Firstly, why my family had until quite recently stubbornly refused to acknowledge our Aboriginality, my grandfather was a Gamilaroi man from Moree, NSW and secondly, the dearth of research concerning Aboriginal service in the First AIF. Addressing these denials then became the driving force for the thesis. For many Australians, our role in the Great War is a defining episode in the creation of our national identity, but for nearly 100 years the part played by Australia’s First People has been either ignored or worse, denied. This thesis addresses this injustice.

The structure of this thesis is essentially thematic. How a history of denial became the dominant philosophy in the representation of Australia’s First People is at the heart of Chapter 1. This then provides the context for Indigenous enlistment for the Great War. Through an analysis of the data found in the service records of 834 Indigenous soldiers held by the National Archives of Australia, Chapter 2 establishes an overview for Indigenous soldiers in the war. The digital resources of the National Archives of Australia and the Australian War Memorial are employed in Chapter 3 to establish that while the majority of Indigenous men served in 59 of the 60 battalions of the First AIF, there were Indigenous men in a wide range of units in the Australian army. A total of 152 Indigenous men enlisted for the AIF, but
for many reasons did not go on to serve abroad. While these reasons are explored in Chapter 4, its central theme is to show how the racial discrimination embodied in the 1909 amendment to the Defence Act was implemented in relation to many Aboriginal men. Chapter 5 puts into perspective the sacrifice made by Indigenous men and their families with the inclusion of a Roll of Honour for Indigenous members of the First AIF and biographical details of many on this register. Throughout the thesis it has been a deliberate strategy to give a human dimension to these men and where possible their families. Following a study trip by the researcher to the Western Front and the United Kingdom in 2014, a photographic record of many of the graves and memorials to fallen Indigenous soldiers is attached as Appendix 1. Heroes are an essential dimension to any national identity and this is especially true for Australia where military heroes occupy a key role. In this light the focus for Chapter 6 are Indigenous heroes from the Great War. A deliberate strategy in this chapter was to use images from the AWM’s digital data base for the original recommendation for each of the Indigenous men to receive a decoration or honour. This was to give immediacy to the soldier. To provide a sense of balance, Chapter 7 was entitled “Do you know to whom you’re speaking”. Throughout the thesis emphasis is given to demonstrating that in the main, the records for Indigenous men mirror those for the AIF as a whole. This is a chapter which shows that the same form of “rough justice” which applied to the AIF as a whole can be seen in the records for Indigenous men. It is not the intention of the chapter to make moral judgments; rather it endeavours to show a more rounded and more human view of the soldiers of the Great War. Chapter 8 is generated as a silhouette biography of my grandfather, George Wenham. Its aim is to locate him
in the context of the themes established in previous chapters. Appendix 2 relates to my grandfather’s unsuccessful claim for a Returned Soldiers' Settlement loan, a loan which was denied not because of race, but because of his failing health. He had contracted tuberculosis while serving in the AIF and this led to his premature death in May 1928. The thesis concludes with the CODA. Unlike the preceding eight chapters which had at their base written evidence, the coda uses oral history. It draws on the knowledge and wisdom of four of our First Nations’ elders. Through them I have gained a better understanding of my grandfather, George, and of my Aboriginal heritage.

The first hurdle to be overcome in the research was to establish the identities of Indigenous diggers. Until 2011 the limited research which had been done often referred to a number in excess of 400. This thesis acknowledges the detailed research of Philippa Scarlett whose 2012 text, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers for the AIF: the Indigenous response to World War One*, established a figure of 834. While it is a figure Scarlett argues will grow with further research, her work established a foundation for the development of a thesis which argued strongly for acknowledgement of Aboriginal service.

Australian historians are well served by the nation’s archives. For example the digital technology of National Archives of Australia gave access to the *First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920* of the men identified by Scarlett. In this project, the interrogation of these files led firstly to the development of a database and secondly to the structure for seven of the chapters, Chapters Two to Eight, that form the core of this thesis. While the files often provided
revealing insights into the experiences of Indigenous servicemen, they often opened up new questions which they were unable to answer. For example, they didn’t give an insight into what motivated the men to enlist nor tell much of their lives after returning to Australia. Nevertheless the data they did provide allowed the thesis to build a narrative which gave a sense of empathy; these men became more than just a name or service number. In some cases the files provided access to the effects of a man’s war service on his family. The narrative here then is built on human stories. The age of digital information was also to prove invaluable in accessing the resources of the Australian War Memorial. This thesis makes extensive use of Bean’s *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*. Its detailed account of where the Indigenous men were to serve added to the narrative. Although critical of its writer when he adopts a tone of upper middle class morality when discussing the vexed topic of desertion in the AIF, it nevertheless needs to be acknowledged that Bean provides valuable insight from its first-hand accounts of Australian involvement in the Great War. For Beaumont, “Bean stands as a colossus whom no historian of Australia in World War 1 can ignore.”¹

Another valuable resource employed in this thesis were the digitised war diaries held by the AWM. Each was a diary in which a unit within the AIF was required to record its daily activity. The thesis establishes that Indigenous men served in most of the units within the AIF but the vast majority served in 59 of the AIF’s 60 battalions and it was from their war diaries that a greater insight into a man’s war

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time experiences was gained. For example, they might tell of a battalion’s preparation and involvement in many of the iconic battles of the Great War and so bear testament to Indigenous participation in the establishment of the AIF’s formidable reputation. They often detail individual heroism and these again have been used to confirm Indigenous involvement.

The concept of sacrifice was explored and related to its importance in the creation of Australian national identity. 124 Indigenous men were to die in the service of Australia, 17.4% of those who served; a strong correlation with the 18.75% for the AIF as a whole. Overall these digital sources have been employed in the thesis to show that once they had overcome the racial barriers placed on their enlistment for the AIF Indigenous men seemed to have received the same treatment as other recruits. It celebrated examples of Indigenous men receiving recognition for their bravery and initiative, highlighted where their leadership abilities resulted in promotion and also explored the human cost resulting from the rough justice visited on all members of the AIF. However in spite of these traits the thesis reminds its reader that while they received equality while serving their country it was not a condition many received on their return to Australia. Their service was met with denial. In 1938 William Cooper reflected that for Indigenous men their participation had been “a thankless task for them, no thanks given for the valuable service rendered”.² His son Daniel was killed in action on 20 September 1917 at Westhoek Ridge, Belgium during the disaster that was Third Ypres,


xx
Passchendaele. It is a theme raised by present day Indigenous elder, Noeline Briggs-Smith in the coda.

Digital sources then have been the strength of this thesis and they have lent it strong empirical evidence. For historians of the Great War, such as Alistair Thomson in *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, oral histories have complemented this approach. However with the death of the last veterans, the contemporary researcher needs to change the focus for oral histories. In this thesis the memories of the families of Indigenous diggers have been explored. What these have established are links to my grandfather, the initial reason for my research. They complement the core chapters which established the context for my grandfather’s war service by offering reasons for my family’s denial of its heritage. The thesis strongly argues that, faced by the likelihood of having their children taken by white authorities and the vicious racism practised in rural settings such as Moree, one defence was denial. This is also related to another theme raised in the thesis, that of “racial passing”. Although a subject for research in the USA, this is yet to be explored in an Australian context.

The search for the man who was my grandfather, George Wenham, centred on his experience as an Indigenous serviceman in the Great War. Through a historical recovery it has seen him situated within the wider examination of Indigenous men

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in the First AIF which forms the core of this thesis. A direct result of this recovery must be a reinterpretation of the ANZAC myth. Rather than being a white myth, it can now expand to become more inclusive of the reality of our national story whereby it recognises in a postcolonial manner the dispossession at the basis of the national story and the contribution of Indigenous men and their families to the nation. It is an affirmation of what Uncle John Lester said to me in our interview when discussing the future of Australia’s First People, “What’s the best thing you guys have done?” The response, “Survive.”

In 2011 there was little research for Indigenous service in the Great War. Since then there has been much progress, with the catalyst of the war’s centenary. One such important development is Serving Our Country: A History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Defence of Australia headed by Professor Mick Dodson. While this project covers all Indigenous service, this thesis will contribute specifically to a Great War perspective.

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4 Serving Our Country: A History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Defence of Australia http://www.ourmobserved.com/
CHAPTER 1

Prelude to World War One

This is a thesis which has at its focus my grandfather, George Wenham. He was a Gamilaroi man from Moree who, in 1915, enlisted in the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He died, aged 39, in 1928 from Tuberculosis contracted while serving in France. In the process of gaining a better understanding of my grandfather I address the ignorance that led eventually to denial – denial of Aboriginal ANZACs by the government, by the historians until recently, and by a family – divided from one side of our ancestry by denial of our shared history. With race and issues of racism still a controversial subject in contemporary Australia, the role of Indigenous peoples in Australia prior to World War One is central to understanding why so little is known about Indigenous diggers and why some families such as mine, seemed to deny their Aboriginality.

A key component in this process is to examine what Richard White’s *Inventing Australia* argues is a national obsession: the construction of a national identity.¹ One of the outcomes of this construction is highlighted by prominent Indigenous academic Anita Heiss. In 2007 she claimed that, “What is missing from the Australian story is the first Australians. Aboriginal people are generally not on the Australian identity radar. We are invisible”.²

In explaining how national identities are invented, White supplies likely reasons which give an insight for Heiss’s belief. Firstly he believes national identities sit within a “framework of modern Western ideas about science, nature, race, society

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[and] nationality”. Secondly, he argues that those most responsible “for moulding ideas about Australian identity are the intelligentsia – writers, artists, journalists, historians, critics”. The third group to influence the invention of national identity is that which wields economic power. The First Australians did not feature prominently in any of these groups at the time when Australian national identity was being constructed.

White contends that “national identity is continually being fractured, questioned and redefined”, in turn leading to his conclusion that:

we will never arrive at the ‘real’ Australia. From the attempts of others to get there, we can learn much about the travellers and the journey itself, but nothing about the destination. There is none.

There have been features of this identity that have greater longevity than others – one of these resistant features of the national identity is the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the story. This thesis then is written in the knowledge that while national identity is a construct and does not represent the ‘real’ Australia, it has consistently represented the interests of the empowered. The thesis acknowledges the First Australians in Australian history, in particular the role played by Indigenous Diggers in the seminal events of World War One that led to the creation of the national identity. This is an aspect that has been either largely overlooked or worse, denied. To the reader, White is undoubtedly

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3 White, *Inventing Australia*, ix.
4 White, *Inventing Australia*, ix.
5 White, *Inventing Australia*, x.
6 White, *Inventing Australia*, x.
accurate when he argues that the attempt will reveal a lot about the ‘traveller’ and his ‘journey’.

The construction of national identity around the ANZAC is discussed in Graham Seal’s *Inventing Anzac: the Digger and National Mythology* where he argues that the persona of the “digger”, which emerged in the Great War, “came to be a central defining image of ‘Australian-ness’ for the whole country and for subsequent generations”. Yet it was a creation which he maintains “effectively shut out large and/or important segments of the population”. Among this group Seal includes Indigenous Australians and he concludes that it is a factor which has been “largely unrecognised and generally unlamented until quite recently.”

This chapter seeks to understand some of the social and cultural attitudes to race in Australia of the time.

**Race and the Indigenous ANZAC: the case of Mick King**

Before turning to a fuller discussion of the persistent racial ideology in the construction of Australian national identity, it is important at this point to show the impact of race among the ANZACs themselves as a prelude to the study of George Wenham and the Indigenous diggers – and also to illustrate the problems inherent in researching these men. A powerful example is revealed through *Reveille*, the official journal of the Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (New South Wales branch) which sought in its 30 November 1931 edition to discover, “the names and units of all Aborigines who served in the

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7 White, *Inventing Australia*, x.
This appeal may well have been in response to earlier correspondence from Mr Henry B. Raine who had challenged the journal’s earlier suggestion that Douglas Grant, service number 6020, 13th Battalion, was the only ‘full-blooded Aborigine’ who served in the AIF. Raine’s interest had been piqued by the case of Mick King who enlisted with the 9th reinforcements of the 56th Battalion about whom he had written. Raine writes of King as being an accomplished boxer prior to the war. He writes, “Mick was one of the quietest and gamest men in the battalion and boxed very little in France, using his skills in teaching the younger boys”. Raine later relates an incident which occurred when a party of black troops attached to the British artillery, brought up a load of ammunition. He writes how, “Mick who at all times was a gentleman, and very well spoken, was standing by quietly smoking, when three or four niggers passed offensive remarks to him.” Raine quotes one of these remarks, “Australian nigger – lives on banks of creeks, and never wash themselves”. Raine then relates the consequences of these insults with King knocking out four of his “tormenters”. King’s ultimate fate in the War is also given by Raine, when he writes, “a little later on, poor Mick was blown to pieces by a shell”. However, what in many ways is most illuminating about Raine’s recollections, is his concluding sentence, “Although he was black, he was a White man, and a dinkum Aussie”. Despite Raine’s obvious admiration for King, race was still an issue.

Although Raine knew him as “Mick” King, my research suggests he was most likely William King, service number 3422, 9th reinforcements of the 56th Battalion, who enlisted at Maitland on 18 December 1916. Later transferred to the 36th

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Battalion, King was killed in action during the Third Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele, on 12 October 1917. He has no known grave and is commemorated with 6,000 other missing Australian soldiers in Flanders on the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium. Raine can be excused for thinking of King as “Mick”, as there was a Mick King who was a prominent boxer of the time, and he had fought Australian icon Les Darcy. Despite numerous attempts by the authorities to locate King’s family to pay his pension, return his effects, issue his medals and memorial plaque, they were unable to do so and presumably these still have not been claimed. His wife’s contact details, similar to my great grandmother’s, are a post office address. For Katie King it was Guyra, NSW. It is not difficult to imagine that for people who were most likely illiterate and marginalised, communication would be difficult.

In *Aboriginal Diggers of the 9th Brigade, first AIF*, David Huggonson makes reference to “Mick” King. He says King was a well-rated middleweight boxer, weighing in at 11 stone 4 pounds (72 kg) and stood 5 feet 9 inches (175 cm). In a reference to Raine’s piece for *Reveille*, Huggonson also refers to the exchange between King and the West Indians. “The negroes on seeing the rare sight of a black Australian taking a smoko break could not resist the temptation to tease the oddity.” In his account Huggonson does not use the term “nigger”, rather employing “negroes” and “black Australian”. It is likely that Huggonson writing in 1993 has employed these euphemisms in an acknowledgement of how insulting

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14 John Wakefield Kent, aka Mick King, Australian middleweight boxer.  
and derogatory terms such as “nigger” are, however by not using the language of Raine’s article it is also arguable that the nature of the racism prevalent at the time is diminished.

The case of William King goes some way to explaining why for so long the role of Indigenous diggers has been ignored and why my family denied their Aboriginality and attempted to “pass”, as the Americans term it, as white. There is an obvious dichotomy in Raine’s account of Mick King. Raine’s admiration and affection for Mick King can only deal with his Aboriginality by seeing him in terms of being a white man and a dinkum Aussie. Why Raine couldn’t attribute these qualities to a black man has much to do with context.

White’s *Inventing Australia*, helps provide some of this context. For example when writing of Cook’s voyages he notes that it was a time of science. He argues:

> It was a common belief [of the time] that every species of plant and animal had its own unique slot in a great chain of being that stretched from the highest form of life to the lowest, a chain which had been fixed at creation and would continue for all time.\(^{18}\)

This he then relates to racism. White argues that the Europeans saw the First Australians as the link between man and monkey. He cites views which were still held by some Europeans as late as the 1840s:

> They were ‘the last link in the great chain of existence which unites man with the monkey’ to Augustus Earle, the artist, and Peter Cunningham asked if they should be placed ‘at the very zero of civilisation, constituting in a measure the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe?’ –

for really some of the old women only seem to require a tail to complete the identity’. 19

For White views such as these provided a ‘convenient image’ for many European settlers and allowed them to gradually destroy Aboriginal society in the name of ‘civilisation’ and the expansion of their pastoral industries. 20 For a relatively brief period the First Australians were viewed by an educated minority in a positive light. In explaining the concept of the ‘Noble Savage’, White cites Cook’s famous observations that:

they may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth, but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholy (sic) unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. 21

However, White also notes that the notion of the ‘Noble Savage’ was soon to be ridiculed and refers to the satirist Dr Johnson who observed that not only was civilisation philosophically preferable, it was also more comfortable. White argues that it was a view which became particularly popular in the colony. 22 The evangelical movement was an even more powerful influence on the shaping of ideas about the Aborigines. White argues that the evangelicals saw natural man as brutish and degenerate, lacking shame and moral sense. As natural man was by definition evil, the use of harsh treatment and dispossession was justified. 23

20 White, Inventing Australia, 8.
21 White, Inventing Australia, 10.
22 White, Inventing Australia, 13.
23 White, Inventing Australia, 13-14.
White’s conclusion is that, as a vision for the Australia identity emerged, it was the Aborigines who lost out.

In Australia, as the idea of ‘being Australian’ developed among the European inhabitants, the Aborigines became less and less representative of ‘Australia’ until in the end they were quite dispossessed. For most of the settlers they were pests, sometimes comic, sometimes vicious, but always standing in the way of a civilised Australian community. Eventually they were to reach the indignity of being ‘Our Aborigines’, their image no longer representative of Australia except as garden ornaments in suburban backyards and ashtrays in souvenir shops.24

In the latter years of the nineteenth century the “Bush Myth” emerged as a representation of this new Australian identity. An understanding of this myth is provided by White:

The professional writers and artists of the 1890s contributed to the idealisation of the bush-worker, they did so within a more general context of changing Western ideas, tastes and attitudes, which included new imperialism, Social Darwinism and the exalting of the common man, as well as the desire to create a national symbol.25

The myth of “the Anzac”, white, laconic and superior to the First Australians, was built on the bush myth. This view finds support from Seal who argues that in part, “We can trace its [Australia’s national-military myth’s] origins in the romanticisation of pioneering and bush life that took place in the later nineteenth century”.26 In the process the creators of the national identity have chosen either to omit the First Australians or present them through negative stereotypes. One

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24 White, Inventing Australia, 15.
25 White, Inventing Australia, 104.
26 Seal, Inventing Anzac, 9.
of the results of this representation has been that the role of Indigenous members of the First AIF has been generally “overlooked”.

Excluding Aboriginal ANZACs

Writing in the preface to Forgotten Heroes Terry Garwood, Director of Aboriginal Affairs (Victoria) argues:

Whatever the fate of the Anzac legend, Aboriginal people were given no place in it. Their contribution to the defence of Australia has been excluded through neglect.²⁷

In The Dark Diggers of the AIF Huggonson argues for at least one Indigenous soldier being in the “first wave” ashore at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. “Photographic evidence shows that at least one Aborigine was among the members of Brisbane’s famous 9th Battalion which was the first unit to land on the Gallipoli Peninsula”. On the overall role of Indigenous soldiers he claims “By the end of the Great War Aborigines had served in practically every unit of the 1st AIF and in every theatre of operations”.²⁸ Yet they did so despite what Huggonson states were:

Cartoons and racist jokes of the era [which] did much to reinforce the view that Aborigines lacked the ability to cope with all the advances of 'modern civilisation' and [portrayed] Aboriginal people as having infantile intellectual abilities. On the reserves they were

²⁷ Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell, Forgotten Heroes Aborigines at War from the Somme to Vietnam, (Melbourne: Victoria Press, 1993), xi.
deemed as being unable to progress past the third grade in the few second-rate schools that existed.\(^{29}\)

Huggonson’s point is emphasised by Ida West in the preface for *Pride Against Prejudice: reminiscences of a Tasmanian Aborigine*. She writes, “We were brought up to respect our European relations but to be ashamed of Aboriginal relations”.\(^{30}\) This had been a theme in my own family. This thesis will incorporate oral history, but I will not interview my grandfather’s only surviving child as she is terrified that she will be turned out of her nursing home if her Aboriginality becomes known. My aunt is 88. I am ashamed to admit that this legacy of supposed Aboriginal inferiority has meant that it is only now that I feel comfortable with who I am.

In “Villers-Bretonneux: a strange name for an Aboriginal burial ground”, Huggonson reminds his readers:

> that it must be remembered that at the time, Aborigines in Australia were denied the vote under the Commonwealth Franchise Act of 1902, the Invalid and Old-age Pension, and Commonwealth's Maternity Allowance which was introduced for white Australian families in 1912.\(^{31}\)

When I began this thesis in 2011 the exact number who did serve was an unknown. *Indigenous Brothers in Arms during the First World War*, by Timothy Winegard gives the number who enlisted as 545, but estimates that it could be about 1,000.\(^{32}\) For Doreen Kartenyeri, it was a reason to write *Ngarrindjeri*

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\(^{29}\) Huggonson, “The Dark Diggers of the AIF,” 354.


**Anzacs.** While recent work by the National Archives of Australia and Philippa Scarlett has resulted in a figure in excess of 800, to counter the earlier history of denial, Kartenyeri had believed it important to “let future generations of my people know that we had relatives and loved ones who fought in the First World War”.33

Australian historian Alistair Thomson in discussing Charles Bean’s *Anzac Book*, argues that Bean has selectively constructed a text which, “sustains and promotes the legend of ordinary Australians who had displayed characteristics qualities of bravery, humour and endurance in the most trying circumstances”.34 They are also qualities revealed in a letter to his parents by Australian VC hero, Joe Maxwell, dated 25 September 1917. It was written during the hell known as Passchendaele:

> The days and nights just keep rolling into each other and it feels like this nightmare will never end. It’s the company I’m keeping that keeps me strong, the other soldiers in my battalion are great we are all great mates and take care of each other best we can, I am fortunate to have a great bunch of mates.35

Often the subject is embraced by Bean’s “ordinary Australian”. It is their work which laid the foundations for the national myths which are often associated prominently with Australia’s role in World War One. Yet as has been shown, they are myths in which the First Australians are not acknowledged. The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* enabled Australia to eliminate non-European migration. This formal implementation of the ‘White Australia Policy’ was welcomed by most of the community. Implementation of the policy included the ‘Dictation Test’, which

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was used to exclude certain applicants by requiring them to pass a written test in a European language, with which they were not necessarily familiar.  

Geoffrey Stokes, Professor of Politics at Deakin University, who, in his *The ‘Australian Settlement’ and Australian Political Thought*, maintains that while many agree that the White Australia Policy may have contributed to the consolidation of Australian racial identity by essentially barring Asian immigration into Australia, its less acknowledged result was that “it also operated internally through the exclusion and subordination of the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia”. These effects for the First Australians were to be devastating.

**Dispossession**

Driven by a process of protecting itself from what it saw as a hostile world, white Australia continued in and acted out of its racist attitude to the First Australians. A time line for how this unfolded is provided in Henry Reynolds', *Dispossession*, where he argues that after 1856 responsibility for Aborigines passed from the British Government into the hands of the self-governing colonies. After 1901, he remarks that the states continued to have the major say on Aboriginal policy. He also advances that policy differed in the various colonies. What then occurred can be seen by his citing the Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines 1858-9 for Victoria:

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Victoria is now entirely occupied by a superior race and there is scarcely a spot … on which the Aborigine can rest his weary feet. To allow this to continue would be to tolerate and perpetuate a great moral wrong.\textsuperscript{38}

Later in answer to just how this might be addressed, the Report suggests that it would be best, “to form reserves for the various tribes”.\textsuperscript{39}

Reynolds makes the point however that things were very different in Queensland. He argues that there “Aborigines received little sympathy beyond an annual grant of blankets and an abortive attempt to establish a few reserves in the 1870s.” He believes that initially the policy had been to “disperse” the Aborigines from in front of the advancing tide of settlement. He then argues that in 1897, the government introduced ‘protective’ legislation which remained largely intact until 1965.\textsuperscript{40}

In \textit{Violence and Colonial Dialogue}, Tracey Banivanua-Mar gives an insight into the violence which had accompanied European settlement in Queensland when she cites part of a speech made by Boyd Morehead in a Queensland Parliamentary debate in 1880:

\begin{quote}
What was being done in Queensland was being done in every country; let them blink the matter as they liked, the black man had to go – he had to move out. The colonists had come there as white men and were going to put the black man out. Some people might attempt to foster or keep alive this wretched race who now inhabited the Australian continent, but the white man had come there, and the blacks had got to go further … \cite{morehead}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} Cited in Reynolds, \textit{Dispossession}, 194.
\textsuperscript{40} Reynolds, \textit{Dispossession}, 195.
For Richard Broome in *Aboriginal Australians* the position had been reached where:

The upshot of all this violence, decimation and exploitation on the northern frontier was the humanitarian minority in the colonies, and eventually the colonial governments themselves, became concerned that they were witnessing the destruction of a race.42

Banivanua-Mar argues it was time for a change. With federation likely for Australia and with the approach of a new century, now was time to emerge from a dark colonial past; a time for modernity, progress and civilisation. For Banivanua-Mar this necessitated Aboriginal protection.43 She credits a report submitted to the Queensland parliament by Archibald Meston as a major influence in the development of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*, (Queensland, 1897). “He [Meston] gently rejected the doomed-race theory and centered *(sic)* instead on the desirability of total surveillance in isolation and protective control and regulation of particularly Aboriginal women and children”.44

Broome argues that “the life of an Aborigine on a government reserve became much like that of a prisoner or an inmate of a mental institution”.45 He goes on to conclude that “few Europeans at the time really cared; the Aborigines were out of sight and out of mind”.46 Broome further comments that the Queensland model was adopted and refined by the administrations of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia, while those in New South Wales and

Victoria formed their own policies along different line.\textsuperscript{47} Broome contends that there it was the intention of the authorities to “push the Aborigines into European society to fend for themselves”.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{'A cult of forgetfulness'}

W. E. H. Stanner, argued in a Boyer lecture given in 1968, \textit{The Great Australian Silence}, that historians had largely ignored Indigenous history. “What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.”\textsuperscript{49} Historiography in Australia however was to change with the work of Henry Reynolds and other revisionist historians, who set out to provide some of those “other possible views” called for by Stanner. Manning Clark had written in 1988 that “the story of the confrontation between the white man and the Aborigine would take centre stage when the next historian tells the story of human beings in Australia”.\textsuperscript{50} It seems as though the challenge had now been taken up. However, their new history was to be met with considerable resistance by those who saw as under attack “the ways in which the national past is remembered, commemorated and celebrated”.\textsuperscript{51} It is still a cause for debate in 2015.

The revisionists challenged the justice and egalitarianism central to Australia’s foundation myths. Pivotal to this new history are the answers it provides to the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{47} Broome, \textit{Aboriginal Australians}, 99.
\textsuperscript{48} Broome, \textit{Aboriginal Australians}, 99.
\textsuperscript{50} Cited in Woolmington, “I'm sorry, very sorry,” 112.
\textsuperscript{51} Bain Attwood, \textit{Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History} (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005), 1.
\end{flushright}
major moral questions which underlie the history of Australian colonisation. Reynolds provides these questions in the introduction to his text, *This Whispering in our Hearts*:

Were the Aborigines the true owners of Australia?

If so were the British justified in taking possession of the continent?

Was it legitimate for them to use force when they met resistance?

Should they have provided compensation for those they dispossessed?

They are questions which still concern us. They were there in the beginning. 

Arguably, for the revisionists, these are the questions largely unaddressed by most twentieth-century historians up to that time, yet interestingly had been commented upon in early editions of *The Bulletin*. As Reynolds' historiography demonstrates that it is possible to address these largely unexplored issues, it raises the concern as to why had historians not done so before? Could it be that the evidence simply was not there or that morality is not the subject of history? *This Whispering in our Hearts*, illustrates Reynolds’ use of extensive data to show that there were many in the colony who regarded the dispossession of the First Australians without any form of compensation or treaty as theft. He also reveals that the widespread violence which accompanied this dispossession was both acknowledged and debated at the time in the colony. 

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53 Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* 15.
54 Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* 20.
of those who supported the occupation, Reynolds highlights the position of prominent colonist, Richard Windeyer. In 1842, Windeyer gave a public lecture, its subject, *On the Rights of the Aborigines in Australia*.\(^{55}\) It is revealing in that it demonstrates how many colonists justified their role in the dispossession. For Windeyer the natives ‘had no right to the land’\(^{56}\). Using the philosophy of Locke, Windeyer as the owner of large amounts of land, believed his claim legitimate because he, unlike the Aborigines, worked the land. He therefore totally rejected ‘the ridiculous notion that we have no right to be here’. If that view was ever accepted the colonists would ‘have nothing to do but to take ship and go home’\(^{57}\).

This seems unequivocal, for Windeyer there appear to be no moral scruples about the dispossession. As Reynolds highlights however this was not the complete picture, for despite arguing the legitimacy of British possession, Windeyer concludes “How it is our minds are not satisfied? What means this whispering in the bottom of our hearts?”\(^{58}\) In their construction of a white history for Australia many historians have endorsed the arguments advanced by Windeyer and done so by a denial of the history and fundamental rights of the First Australians. In doing so, one wonders if they too were disturbed by a “whispering in the bottom of [their] hearts?” Reynolds’ use of Windeyer’s speech successfully reinforces the nexus between European action and morality.

Reynolds establishes that the violence which accompanied the dispossession was far greater than a few incidents and that it also caused debate in the emerging colony. He relates the experiences of missionary Lancelot Threlkeld,

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\(^{55}\) Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* 20.

\(^{56}\) Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* 20.

\(^{57}\) Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* 20.

\(^{58}\) Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* 21.
who in 1826 reported that “the murderers of the blacks ‘boldly maintained that the
blacks were only a specie of baboon, that might be shot down with impunity, like
an Ourang Outang (sic)”’. In 1848, Quaker James Backhouse wrote of the
widespread violence he had witnessed as the First Australians were forced from
their land by settlers who now wantonly murdered Aborigines without scruple.

But as demonstrated by Reynolds the situation was to get worse. As the
European settlement expanded, it was resisted by the Aborigines. This resistance
was met by what Reynolds argues was a response “out of all proportion to the
intensity of Aboriginal resistance”. He cites a report by Threlkeld, in 1838, to the
New South Wales Legislative Council. Threlkeld notes that while the Council had
been provided with the names of fifteen Europeans killed by the Aborigines, it
was unaware that in the previous two years upwards of 500 natives had been
killed by lawless banditti and by members of the colonial military forces,
commanded by a Major Nunn. By publically naming Nunn, Reynolds argues
Threlkeld had gone too far; that consequently his report was filed away and the
official copy eventually disappeared. In 1841 Threlkeld lost his public funding
with “never a word of thanks for his 27 years hard labour”. This one example
would seem to be how those in positions of authority chose to deal with an
escalating level of violence: one of self-imposed ignorance. It might also be
argued that historians of a white Australian history have adopted a similar
strategy by largely denying the brutality which accompanied the European

59 Henry Reynolds, This Whispering in Our Hearts 64.
60 Henry Reynolds, This Whispering in Our Hearts 12.
61 Henry Reynolds, This Whispering in Our Hearts 64.
62 Henry Reynolds, This Whispering in Our Hearts 66.
63 Henry Reynolds, This Whispering in Our Hearts 68.
64 Henry Reynolds, This Whispering in Our Hearts 68.
expansion in Australia. Reynolds’ work raises an uglier side to European settlement than that recorded in earlier histories, one no longer based on an unchallenged belief in Terra Nullius, or on egalitarianism.

Just as the work of Reynolds and other revisionist historians has addressed a previous neglect and denial in mainstream Australian historiography, the time is now right to build on and acknowledge the role played by Indigenous servicemen in World War One. While the experiences of the War are seen by many as crucial to the development of an Australian identity, their role has been largely ignored. In the process I hope that it will play a healing role for my family. As a result of my search for George Wenham I believe that, after a long period of ignorance and denial, we all will be able to proudly acknowledge our Aboriginality.

The enlistment of Indigenous men in the AIF

After the exclusionary legislation of 1901 Broome commented that: “Aborigines were out of sight and out of mind”.65 For Broome, “By the early twentieth century, racism not only permeated the community, but was enshrined in acts which treated Aboriginal people as different and inferior”.66 An examination above of this history of Australia written after this period supports these observations that in turn promoted a history of denial. Given this background it might appear surprising that so many Indigenous men wanted to, and were able to, enlist in the First AIF. Doreen Kartinyeri in the introduction of Ngarrindjeri Anzacs writes:

65 Broome, Aboriginal Australians, 99.
66 Broome, Aboriginal Australians, 100.
I find it difficult to understand how so many Aboriginal men were allowed

to enlist in the Army, as they were not allowed to vote in federal and state

elections and they were not counted as human beings. Why did the
government want them to enlist? Was it because they did not care who
went to fight the War for them? I feel strongly that the then Protector of
Aborigines should have stepped in and stopped them from enlisting.67

In the early years of the War, *The Instructions for the Guidance of Enlisting
Officers* stated that, “Aboriginals, half-castes, or men with Asiatic blood are not to
be enlisted. This applies to all coloured men.”68 Nevertheless, Private Richard
Martin, service number 1359, 47th Battalion enlisted on 17 December 1914.

Martin’s original unit was the 15th Battalion in which he served at Gallipoli, landing
on the afternoon of 25 April.69 Wounded twice in action, Martin was later killed in
action 28 March 1918 when the 47th Battalion “played a role in turning the great
German Spring Offensive by defeating attacks around Dernancourt during the
last days of March … 1918”.70 On 28 March the Battalion’s casualties were high:
21 Killed and 78 wounded.71 The severity of the fighting that took place at
Dernancourt on 28 March is reflected by the award of the Victoria Cross to
Sergeant Stanley Macdougall, service number 4061.72 It was the only Victoria
Cross won by the 47th Battalion in World War One. Martin’s attestation papers
give his birth place as Dunedin, New Zealand.73 However Huggonson’s research

68 “Instructions for the Guidance of Enlisting Officers at Approved Military Recruiting Depôts,”
2013)
March, 2013)
71 AWM: War diary of the 47th Battalion
224-0072.pdf (27 March 2013)
(27 March, 2013)
establishes that it was in fact North Stradbroke Island and that he was Indigenous. Winegard supports Huggonson arguing “Richard Martin, who falsely listed his place of birth as Dunedin, New Zealand, claimed to be Maori”. This Indigenous soldier, involved in two of the major battles of World War One, an original ANZAC, wounded twice, was killed in the last year of the War. The fact that he had to lie to enlist, serves as testament as to why the history of men such as Martin should not be denied.

Martin’s is not the only example. Winegard cites “Albert Tripcony, [who] explained his dark complexion by telling recruiters that he came from Italy”. Albert Tripcony, service number, 5655, 25th Battalion enlisted on 11 February 1916. He was killed in action on 3 May 1917 in the Second Battle of Bullecourt. It was a battle characterised by “two weeks of bitter trench fighting which eventually, and at the cost of 2,250 Australian casualties, cleared and held part of the Hindenburg Line.” Tripcony represents another example of an Indigenous soldier whose role in World War One has been denied.

It would seem that Martin and Tripcony had to deny who they were because of the attitude to race in Australia at the time. There is an irony that these two Aboriginal men died fighting for Australia when it is balanced with Reynolds’ exploration of the issue of “colour”. He argues that the Queensland, Western

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74 Huggonson, “Villers-Bretonneux: a strange name for an Aboriginal burial ground”, 287.
75 Winegard, “Indigenous Brothers in Arms during the First World War”, 38.
76 Winegard, “Indigenous Brothers in Arms during the First World War”, 38.
Australian and Federal governments all adopted policies aimed at controlling the “breeding of half-castes”. Reynolds writes that for these the governments:

the problem of the increase of the half-caste population is a matter that in all states has caused grave concern. It is difficult to see how this social blot can be erased as long as the white and black races are allowed in contact.79

On the basis of the number of Indigenous soldiers known to him in 2007, Winegard’s research concludes that 83 were killed, 123 wounded and another 17 became prisoners of war.80 Winegard makes the point however, that despite having served with the AIF, an Aboriginal from New South Wales still came under the care or supervision of the provisions of Aborigines Act, 1909.81 The policy of denial regarding Indigenous veterans even extended to them and their families being refused military burial services or funeral compensation unlike non-Indigenous veterans.82

That attitude to race is further reflected by an incident related by Huggonson. He cites the case of Rose Martyn, an Aboriginal woman who was ostracised because of her Aboriginality at the dedication of a war memorial at Goombungi in the Darling Downs. This occurred despite the fact her son, Charles, had been killed in action during the Battle of Menin Road, 20 September 1917. Huggonson makes the case that this example of blatant racism was at odds with the equality shown to Martyn by his fellow soldiers.83 Charles Martyn, service number 5959,

79 Reynolds, Dispossession, 206.
80 Winegard, “Indigenous Brothers in Arms during the First World War,” 43.
82 Winegard, “Indigenous Brothers in Arms during the First World War,” 40.
26th Battalion, enlisted in the AIF on 13 February 1916. He is buried in Hooge Crater Cemetery, Zillebeke, Belgium.\(^{84}\)

In his article Huggonson refers to “Exemption Tickets” which operated in Queensland.\(^{85}\) Judi Wickes’ research in ‘Never really heard of it’: the certificate of exemption and lost identity, establishes that they were a provision of the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act.\(^{86}\)

It shall be lawful for the Minister to issue to any half-caste, who, in his opinion, ought not to be subject to the provisions of this Act, a certificate, in writing under his hand, and that such half-caste is exempt from the provisions of this Act and the Regulations, and from and after the issue of such certificate, such half-caste shall be so exempt accordingly.\(^{87}\)

Wickes argues that one of the lasting results of the exemption ticket was the loss of Aboriginal identity.

The exemption certificate represented the only legal mechanism by which Indigenous Queenslanders could live independently away from reserves or missions, out from ‘under the Act’. However, it required severing all ties with their Aboriginal kinship and culture including connections with country, or the exemption could be revoked by the state.\(^{88}\)

\(^{85}\) Huggonson, “Aborigines and the aftermath of the Great War,” 3.  
Wickes, writing from the perspective of an Indigenous academic, gives an interesting insight into the effects of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*. For her it:

had literally enslaved my family and countless other families over many decades. I was aware that [it] was responsible for so much loss and heartache for thousands of Indigenous Australians. The loss of kinship, culture and traditional land, which also encompassed stolen wages and even stolen children, was the painful legacy of this document. The 1897 Act had come close to achieving the genocide of Australia’s original inhabitants and it was certainly responsible for generations of despondency and helplessness that persist to this day.\(^8^9\)

Although New South Wales did not adopt the Queensland model, Huggonson argues that the Aboriginal Protection Board still had wide ranging power over the First Australians. He writes that in 1915, the Board gained the power to act *in loco parentis* over all Aboriginal children and that Aboriginal parents had no right of appeal over any of its decisions.\(^9^0\) This meant the power to remove children from Aboriginal families.

Huggonson cites the case of Michael Flick to show how it could be used as coercion in New South Wales. “Mick” Flick enlisted on 16 May 1916 and joined the 29\(^\text{th}\) Battalion with the service number, 4292.\(^9^1\) As with my grandfather he enlisted at Narrabri. Although his attestation papers give his age on enlistment as twenty three years and nine months, Huggonson maintains that he was


\(^9^0\) Huggonson, “Aborigines and the aftermath of the Great War,” 5.

actually only sixteen.\textsuperscript{92} Having returned from active service, Flick “persistently argued against Collarenebri Public School’s refusal to admit his six children”.\textsuperscript{93} It is Huggonson’s assertion, that the Board repeatedly used the threat of the removal of his children as a means of silencing Michael Flick.\textsuperscript{94}

Faced with all these factors: a prevailing belief in Social Darwinism which predicted your imminent demise; a virulent xenophobia which seemed to extend to all non-white Australians; a draconian system of governmental regulations applying to the “protection” of Aborigines which saw them excised from the rest of society; a developing sense of national identity which had as its base the supposed superiority of white Australians fostered by the popular press and academics, it is little wonder then, why many of Aboriginal descent, such as my family took the option of “passing” as white and denying who they really were. In the following chapters the thesis takes up the story of the Indigenous diggers as conveyed mainly by their service records.

\textsuperscript{92} Huggonson, “The Dark Diggers of the A.I.F.,” 354.
\textsuperscript{93} Huggonson, “Aborigines and the aftermath of the Great War,” 6.
\textsuperscript{94} Huggonson, “Aborigines and the aftermath of the Great War,” 6.
CHAPTER 2

The Indigenous soldiers of World War One – an overview

The mainstream history of the involvement of Indigenous Australian soldiers in World War One as highlighted in the previous chapter has largely been one of denial. There are various reasons for this; the Australia of the early part of the twentieth century was a society rapidly hardening its attitude to race and among the major victims were the First Australians. Secondly determining the number of Indigenous soldiers who did enlist has often been the result of some guesswork. It is a task made more difficult by the fact that attestation papers completed by recruits for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) did not officially record ethnicity. Thirdly amendments to the Defence Act of 1903 expressly exempted Indigenous men from military service. The effect of these changes has been addressed in Winegard’s *Indigenous Brothers in Arms during the First World War*:

In 1909, to rectify existing inadequacies Australia (like all Dominions) introduced an amendment to the *Defence Act 1903* mandating that all males aged 12–25 receive military training, while men older than 25 would form the reserve. Given this amendment, a more relevant clause with regard to Indigenous service was promulgated. Section 61 (h) stated that:

> The following shall be exempt from service in time of war, so long as the employment, condition, or status on which the exemption is based continues … (h) Persons who are not substantially of European origin or descent, of which the medical authorities appointed under the Regulations shall be the judges… Provided that, as regards the persons described in paragraphs (h) and (i) [Conscientious Objectors] of this section, the exemption shall not extend to duties of a non-combat nature.¹

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Later Winegard goes on to examine whether the amendments precluded Aboriginal men from volunteering to enlist. In doing so he argues:

> Although these discrepancies could be used to argue in favour of the voluntary enlistment of Indigenes, the contemporary realisation was that they were neither of European descent nor citizens under the Australian Constitution; therefore, they would not have been considered relevant in the formation of defence or other federal policies, unless precisely mentioned.²

My research would support Winegard on this point, as there are many cases of men being either not accepted because of their Aboriginality or given early discharges, usually before their departure overseas.

**The effects of the 1909 amendments to the Defence Act: the case of Thomas Talbott**

To illustrate this point I will give one example, but it is a topic which will be addressed in more detail later in Chapter 4. Thomas Talbott enlisted at Narrabri on 2 January 1917. He was a shearer and his age on enlistment was 18 years, 1 month. The result of his preliminary medical examination, conducted by a doctor in Narrabri, NSW, clearly shows that he was “fit for active service”. However when he reported to Sydney on 4 January 1917, he was discharged: the reason, Thomas Talbott was not substantially of European origin. Figure 1 is an example of the first documentation which confronted a potential recruit; an application to enlist. It shows that on 2 January 1917 Thomas Talbott’s preliminary medical examination found him fit for active service. It also shows that as he was only 18

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years of age, he required the permission of his father to enlist. Yet a mere two
days later at the more formal attestation stage (see Figure 2) this was overturned
when Talbott was judged to be “Not of European origin”. Other Indigenous men
were also rejected because of race, but this large, red annotation is likely one of
the more dramatic to be found on a recruit’s attestation form.

Figure 1. NAA: B2455 TALBOTT WILLIAM THOMAS The initial stage of
recruitment for the AIF, an application to enlist which shows that Thomas
Talbot was fit for active service.
Figure 2. NAA: B2455 TALBOTT WILLIAM THOMAS. At attestation Thomas Talbott’s enlistment was cancelled because of race.
Who were the Indigenous members of the First AIF: the contribution of Philippa Scarlett.

A further reason for the widespread historical denial of the role played by Indigenous servicemen can be attributed to their exclusion, until quite recently, from much of the official and semi-official history written about Australia’s involvement in the War. It is an aspect that this thesis aims to address. In arriving at a figure for the number of Indigenous servicemen this section relies heavily on the work of Philippa Scarlett who in her book, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers for the AIF: the Indigenous response to World War One* identifies 834 Indigenous men who either enlisted or attempted to do so.³ It is Scarlett’s belief that the number is conservative and “a figure well in excess of 1,000 does not seem unrealistic”.⁴ Of the 834 identified by Scarlett all but one concerns the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF); that exception is Laurence Sayers. Born at Busselton, Western Australia on 18 August 1894, Sayers joined the Royal Australia Navy (RAN) on 27 September 1912 and was still serving at the outbreak of war. From 25 April 1915 until 13 April 1917, Sayers served as a stoker on-board, the destroyer, *HMAS Yarra*.⁵ At this point in time, Laurence Sayers is the only identified Aboriginal member of the RAN for World War One.

The principal aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the role played by Indigenous men in the Great War. As stated in the introduction, ensuing chapters will address the following aspects of Indigenous participation in World War One

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in more detail: the units in which the Indigenous men served; race as a bar to enlistment; Indigenous sacrifice; bravery and service recognised by awards; and lastly, those who fell foul of the military system.

Historians interrogating Australia’s participation in World War One are well served by the digital data bases developed by both the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and the Australian War Memorial (AWM). For instance, the service records of men and women from the Great War have, in the main, been digitised, whereas up to 60% of similar records in Britain were destroyed during the Blitz. Using these Australian databases it is possible to plot places of birth (POB) for Indigenous recruits as recorded on their attestation papers.

**Key geographical locations for Indigenous members of the First AIF**

The following map (Figure 3) reflects that, as might be expected, most Indigenous recruits came from the more heavily populated Eastern states, yet somewhat surprisingly, the figures for Victoria, 71 or 9%, seem much lower than what might be expected (Figure 4). A possible answer is implied by Scarlett when she notes that, “Recent research, which includes at least ten Tasmanian servicemen of Aboriginal heritage, is an example of how the number of identified individuals can rapidly increase”. There seems a case for greater research in regard to Victoria.

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6 National Archives (Great Britain), “Soldiers’ records (1914-1920)

Figure 3. Place of birth for Indigenous soldiers in World War One given on enlistment.

Figure 4. Numbers of Indigenous Enlistments by State based on POB

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8 The maps in this chapter detailing Indigenous recruits’ POB and place of recruitment have been developed by the researcher using data from their records held by the NAA.

9 Charts and graphs found in this thesis detailing Indigenous service have been developed by the researcher using data from their records held by the NAA.
The first contingent of the expeditionary force was approximately 20,000 and L.L. Robson in *The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment*, notes that when recruiting depots opened in August 1914 there was an “embarrassment of riches”. He argues that Australia’s response to war was almost unanimous: “there were no serious political divisions on the issue of war; there was no organised opposition to Australia’s entry into the conflict”.10

The date when men enlisted is another important factor. In the first two years of the War, Indigenous men were confronted by many obstacles if they wished to enlist.

Because there was a flood of enlistments, the Government could and did set the bar for enlistment very high, and Indigenous men had to face not only the hurdle of their origins, but also the stringent physical qualifications imposed at the start for enlistment. As Robson explains:

> The AIF was designed to be a force of experienced and skilled soldiers; at least half the numbers of the rank and file were to be men in their twentieth year or over who were serving with the colours, and the remainder trained men specially enlisted who had served in the militia, in the imperial forces, or who had war service. If any more men were needed, they were to be chosen from the best physical specimens offering. The standards of age, minimum height and minimum chest measurements for the AIF were eighteen to thirty-five years, 5 ft. 6in. [168 cm] and 34 in. [86 cm] respectively.11

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Notwithstanding these demanding criteria, Huggonson argues:

> Despite racist military regulations, and the denial of what are now considered basic human rights, when war was declared in August 1914 in support of Great Britain and the Empire, a significant number of Aboriginal men attempted to enlist; and some succeeded in enlisting”.

**Black ANZACS of 1914: the case of John Miller**

As a consequence of all this, an analysis of Scarlett’s list establishes that there were only twenty eight Indigenous recruits in 1914 (see Figure 5). One of whom was Walter Franks, service number 598. This low number indicates that he was an original member of the 9th Battalion. In his article Huggonson claims that “photographic evidence shows that at least one Aborigine was among the members of Brisbane’s famous 9th Battalion which was the first unit to land on the Gallipoli Peninsula”. However it is unlikely to have been Franks as his service file states that he was “evidently” discharged 23 September 1914. Unusually for these service records there is no reason given for Franks’ discharge.

While Franks was clearly not the soldier in the photograph described by Huggonson it might well be Hurtle Patterson. A 30 year old widower Patterson enlisted at Rosewood, Queensland on 22 August 1914. Giving his trade as

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12 David Huggonson, ‘The Dark Diggers of the AIF,’ 352.
13 Huggonson, ‘The Dark Diggers of the AIF,’ 352.
“Painter” he was 5’ 5” (165 cm) in height, 155 pounds (70 kg) in weight and an expanded chest measurement of 37” (94 cm). He is described as being “dark” in complexion, with “hazel” eyes and “dark and curly” hair. His service number, 34, indicates that he was an original member of the 9th Battalion.

His records contain the entry, “Embarked to join the MEF, GALLIPOLI CAMPAIGN, Alexandria 2/3/15”. The 9th were the first ashore on 25 April and it seems quite conclusive that one of its number was an Indigenous man. However Hurtle Patterson’s time on the peninsula was to be quite brief. On the 30 April he was wounded in action: gunshot wound to the knee. Its seriousness reflected by his being returned to Australia 28 June 1915. Unfortunately his file is brief and tells nothing of what life held in store for Hurtle Patterson.

Another Indigenous man, who was able to meet the stringent conditions facing recruits in 1914, was John Miller who enlisting on 19 October 1914 in the first reinforcements for the 12th Battalion. A 25 year old married man, Miller was born at Peppermint Bay, Tasmania, and he was allocated the service number, 1227 on enlistment at Claremont, Tasmania.
The first Australians ashore at Gallipoli, from 4.30 am 25 April 1915, were members of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Brigade, one of whose battalions was the 12\textsuperscript{th}. John Miller and his comrades landed at North Beach and immediately made their way inland to Russell's Top and Baby 700 around the sides of the Sphinx or Walker's Ridge. The objectives for the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Brigade were to act as a covering force for the Anzac Corps and capture the ridges from Gaba Tepe to Battleship Hill. However by the end of 25 April, while the Anzacs had a firm toe-hold, they had not reached their objectives. Although originally capturing objectives such as Baby 700, the Anzacs had been pushed back by the Turks.\textsuperscript{16} John Miller was killed in action in these early chaotic days on Gallipoli. Originally listed as having been wounded and missing, Miller's records later state that he was killed sometime between April

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{16} Ron Austin, \textit{Gallipoli: an Australian Encyclopedia of the 1915 Dardanelles Campaign} (McCrea: Slouch Hat Publications, 2005), 96 – 97.}
25 and 28. He is buried in Baby 700 Cemetery, Anzac (see Figures 6 and 7 below). Another member of the 12th buried at Baby 700 was Joseph Lalor, grandson of Peter Lalor of Eureka Stockade fame. He died attempting to reinforce those desperately defending their position on Baby 700. His last words are reported as “Now then, 12th Battalion”.

The war diary for the 12th gives more detail of this first day:

A Coy pushed forward to 1st Ridge ... Enemy encountered – Bayonet charge made – enemy retired from their trenches, to ridge 1000 yds away – we pursued and opened fire 350 yds from ridge. [Then following the death of its commanding officer] ...Capt Lalor took command pushed forward over ridge. Enemy discovered in strong force attempting to get around our flank. We retired but meeting reinforcements from 2nd Bn advanced again. Eventually forced to fall back on to defensive line …

It is likely that John Miller fell during the action described in this diary entry. This was also an action which marked some of the furthest advances made by the Australians at any time at Gallipoli and is a moment recorded in the Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918:

If the men had looked over their right shoulder they could from this point have seen distinctly, beyond the nearer hills, a triangle of shining water which was the goal of all this campaign – the Narrows. But few of them noticed it. They were intent on the ridges ahead. The line advanced over the shoulder of Baby 700 across a depression, and onto the shoulder of

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18 Austin, Gallipoli, 140.
the next hill, still keeping a little on the inland side of the crest. The summit raised its head between them and the sea.\(^{20}\)

John Miller is most probably the first Indigenous man killed in action in World War One. However there is more to his story than his involvement in these iconic moments in Australian military history. As previously stated, John Miller was a married man. Recalling that he had firstly been reported as “wounded and missing” his wife, Ida, in correspondence with authorities on 7 October 1915, enquired about her husband where she wrote that: “I am living in a very lonely place [Kellevie, Tasmania] with my four little children. I am very anxious to hear of my husband”.\(^{21}\) Details of his children can also be found in John Miller’s records. He had three sons: Ernest William, John Tasman, Henry Leslie, and a daughter, Edna Joyce. He was not officially declared killed in action until 5 June 1916 after a Court of Inquiry had been held, nor buried until October 1922. However unlike many of these early casualties his is a known grave which shows his age as 27, although on enlistment he was 25. Ida Miller was sent his identity disc recovered in the field by the Graves Exhumation Parties. With no further reference to his family in his records one can only guess as to lasting impact of his death on them.


Black diggers and enlistment post 1914

Robson writes that after the landing at Gallipoli and the sinking of the *Lusitania* the Australians asked the British government if it would accept as many men as
could be recruited in Australia. The answer was in the affirmative.\textsuperscript{22} Now efforts were made in every state to persuade men to join the AIF and consequently the number of enlistments increased greatly.\textsuperscript{23} This proved to be the case for Indigenous recruits as reflected in the following map for 1915, where the number of enlistments compared with 1914 is much greater. Although 1915 was the year when recruiting peaked for the AIF as a whole, it was not so for Indigenous recruits. As can be seen in Figure 8 below this was to be 1916. A likely explanation is that authorities were more rigidly enforcing the restrictions due to race than they were later in the war. In Figure 8 the enlistment of Indigenous soldiers for each year of the war is given as a percentage of all Indigenous enlistments for the entire war.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{enlistment.png}
\caption{Enlistment of Indigenous soldiers for each year of the war as a percentage of all Indigenous enlistments during the war.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{22} Robson, \textit{The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment}, 46.
\textsuperscript{23} Robson, \textit{The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment}, 54.
Robson’s argument that the Commonwealth government’s attitude to recruiting and the war in general change radically when William Morris Hughes succeeded Andrew Fisher as Prime Minister is reflected in Indigenous recruiting after 1915.\textsuperscript{24} Robson notes that in November 1915, Hughes announced “that in addition to the 9,500 men a month currently being raised, a further 50,000 were sought for the AIF.”\textsuperscript{25}

Figure 9. Indigenous enlistment for 1915: POB is shown in red, place of enlistment in green.

Robson later makes the point that from 1916 onwards: “Enthusiasm for the war was on the wane”.\textsuperscript{26} As the human cost of the war grew, with a “doubling of the AIF”, the Easter uprising in Dublin and the failure of the Conscription referenda in 1916 and 1917, restrictions on the enlistment of Indigenous men were eased,

\textsuperscript{24} Robson, \textit{The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment}, 60.
\textsuperscript{25} Robson, \textit{The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment}, 61.
\textsuperscript{26} Robson, \textit{The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment}, 70.
especially in the case of Queensland. This can be seen in the *Instructions to Enlisting and Recruiting Officers Regarding Enlistment of Recruits in the Australian Imperial Forces*, which stated:

Half-castes may be enlisted when, in the opinion of the District Commandant, they are suitable. Half-castes are usually of two classes – those who have mixed all their lives with white people and copied their ways, and those who have lived with their full-blooded brothers; the former lad might be suitable for enlistment, but the latter is not eligible and not to be enlisted. As a guide in this matter it is to be borne in mind that these men will be required to live with white men and share their accommodation, and their selection is to be judged from this standpoint and whether their inclusion will cause irritation to the men with whom they will serve.27

In Figure 10 below another development in recruiting is evident. The locations where a man could enlist have been greatly expanded.

![Figure 10. Indigenous enlistment for 1916: POB is shown in green, place of enlistment in red.](image)

28 Developed in 2011, the maps for 1916 and 1917 have unintentionally reversed the colours allotted to previous maps.
1917 was a year where recruiting figures for the AIF as a whole dramatically declined, a little over 10% of all recruitment for the war. It is a trend also reflected in the recruitment of Indigenous men, Figure 11 below.

These maps reflect how recent scholarship, such as that of Scarlett, has added to an understanding of Indigenous participation in the War. For example, David Huggonson, one of the first to address the issue, had argued in 1989 that:

The Western Australian Recruiting Committee, however, never deviated from the pre-war military regulations. Hence the relatively small number of Aboriginal recruits from that State compared to the Eastern States.\(^{29}\)

However as a result of research published in 2013, this number has grown so that it is now greater than that for Victoria. It is also a trend reflected in the map above for 1917.

Of 1918 Robson argues: “No matter what the news, it failed to bring forward the required number of men … To all intent and purposes, Australia had run out of men who were prepared to be recruited in any quantity. The same was true for Indigenous recruits. In 1918 no Indigenous man enlisted in either Tasmania or South Australia although, as Figure 12 below shows, two recruits were born in South Australia.

![Figure 12. Indigenous enlistment for 1918: POB is shown in red, place of enlistment in green](image)

In summary, 417,000 men had enlisted in the AIF: of the 330,000 who served in theatres of war, 60,000 were dead and 160,000 wounded and maimed. The

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30 Robson The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment, 196-197.
system of voluntary enlistment had resulted in 40% of all Australian men between eighteen and forty-five joining the AIF. In many ways due to the importance of World War One in the construction of Australia’s national identity, this seems a surprising low percentage. For Indigenous men the figures are 834 enlistments: of the 682 who served in theatres of war, 124 were dead and 236 wounded and maimed. What are not included in any of these statistics are the men, like my grandfather, whose involvement in the Great War led to a premature death.

Insights for Indigenous members provided by their service records: age, physical attributes, occupations, theatres of service, religious denomination and casualty details

The service records of Indigenous men provide further insights into their story. For example, on enlistment their average age was 25 years, their average height 5 feet 7 inches (170 cm), their average weight 143 pounds (65 kg) and average chest measurement 34 inches (86.3 cm). Perhaps the oldest Indigenous recruit was Jerome Locke, who enlisted on 3 January 1916. The age he gave was 44 years, 5 months. He was assigned the service number 117A and on arrival in France allotted to the 53rd Battalion. Interestingly his file shows he was later discharged for being overage although it took over a year of service overseas before this was carried out. However not to be deterred, Locke was to re-enlist

31 Robson The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment, 202-203.
on 11 June 1919 as a member of Special Forces AIF who provided an escort for German repatriation after the War.

Officially the youngest was Sidney Marks\textsuperscript{33} who enlisted on 16 September 1915. Born at Springdale, NSW, his attestation papers show that he was 17 years, 3 months. He was given the service number, 6053 and allotted to the 38\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. His occupation is given as “farm hand” and at 5 feet 7 inches and 141 pounds he was close to the average for Indigenous recruits. His records show that he was accidentally wounded, but returned to Australia 14 June 1919.\textsuperscript{34}

However, the age declared by a recruit on enlistment may not have always been a true record. This is illustrated in the records of Percy Anderson,\textsuperscript{35} who enlisted on 24 April 1916. His declared age was 21 years, 11 months. Allocated the service number 6704, he was taken on strength by the 9\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. He was wounded in action, gassed on 7 May 1918 and absent on leave on four occasions. Anderson’s records also show that he was treated for Venereal Disease (VD) for 48 days. In many ways his records are no different from many other soldiers in the AIF, except for correspondence from the Office of the Queensland Commissioner of Police, 16 December 1944. It asks the military authorities for details of Anderson’s records for the judge in regard Anderson’s upcoming trial in Roma, Queensland on a charge of stealing. What is of particular interest is the remark, “Age on enlistment 15 years – but gave his age as 20

years”; it also states that his occupation prior to enlistment was “schoolboy”.\textsuperscript{36} A 
15 year old boy had been involved in the fighting in Flanders at the end of 3\textsuperscript{rd} Ypres, the German Spring offensive of 1918, and the bitter fighting experienced by the AIF later in 1918. He had been gassed, contracted VD, and returned to Australia with unimaginable mental scars. The true age of many of the AIF is a vexed issue.

In ‘The Dark Diggers of the AIF’ David Huggonson claims ‘Mike Flick and Harry Manson from Collarenebri were only 16 years of age when they enlisted’.\textsuperscript{37} However, their service records show that on enlistment they gave their ages as being ‘23 years 9 months’ and ‘26 years and 7 months’ respectively. Obviously Huggonson based his comment on research, but for this section I have used the declared age as shown on official records even though it was very likely recruits did either increase or lower their ages to enlist. Similarly the \textit{Reveille} article ‘Many Served: AIF Aborigines’ states that Harry and Samuel Thomas were 17 when they enlisted.\textsuperscript{38} However their records show they gave ‘19 years 7 months’ and ‘18 years 6 months’ when enlisting.

\textsuperscript{37} Huggonson, ‘The Dark Diggers of the AIF,’ 352.
\textsuperscript{38} Stagg (ed.), “Many Served: A.I.F. Aborigines.”
Another insight is provided by the occupations given on enlistment. Many Indigenous recruits have been most associated with either the working class or rural backgrounds. However there are some which one might not immediately associate with Indigenous recruits: “book keeper”, “bookkeeper’s clerk”, “grazier”, “jackaroo”, “picture operator”, “show man” and “school teacher” seem more in keeping with European Australians. Table 1 below provides an alphabetical list of occupations of the Indigenous recruits of World War One on enlistment. The soldiers listed in the right hand column with asterisks are those selected for further discussion in the remainder of the section on employment.

**Table 1 Alphabetical List of Occupations of the Indigenous Soldiers of World War One**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Baker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Martin Coohey – D.O.W.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookmaker’s clerk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thomas Skelly – K.I.A.**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle washer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary rider</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread carter</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 13. The age of Indigenous Recruits to the AIF, 1914-1918**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Brick layer</td>
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<td>Clothing cutter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach driver</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Colt breaker</td>
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<td>Contractor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dairy farmer/man</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Dairy hand</td>
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<td>Demolisher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draftsman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drain digger/navvy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drover</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Engine cleaner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine driver</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farm hand/labourer</td>
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<td>Farmer</td>
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<td>Farrier</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fettler</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireman</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardener</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Gas fitter</td>
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<td>Glassworker</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazier</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Grocer</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Groom</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Hatter</td>
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<td>Horse breaker</td>
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<td>Horse trainer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horseman</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackaroo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacka roo</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Douglas Grant**

**Wilfred Clayton – K.I.A. ***

**Wallie Johnson – K.I.A. ****
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jockey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>George Wenham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lime burner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livery stable proprietor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locomotive fireman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager cattle station</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariner/Seaman</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>William Maynard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk carter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Mill worker/hand</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Motor driver</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor mechanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Stanley Copley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musterer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurseryman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchardist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oysterman</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Albert Tripcony – KIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture operator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Robert Robbins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plasterer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ploughman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber's labourer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police tracker/tracker</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Charlie Clarke, Archie Murphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printer’s assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit grader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbiter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway cleaner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway clerk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway navvy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway repairer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw mill hand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw miller</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Joseph Wandin*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shearer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship’s fireman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elijah Coe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station hand</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station overseer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevedore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Benjamin Wellington</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Martin Coohey*[^1] enlisted at Brisbane on 26 August 1916. His attestation papers show his age as 29 years 2 months and his occupation as book keeper. He joined the 4th Pioneer Battalion with the service number 2569. His enlistment record gives as his next of kin, a friend, William Cruice. Promoted to Lance Corporal, Martin Coohey was to die of wounds, 20 October 1917, received in fighting near Zonnebeke, Belgium, during Third Ypres or Passchendaele. In many ways Martin Coohey is something of an enigma. He seems to have no immediate family but was highly educated as reflected both by his occupation and in the will he left before departing for the Western Front (see Figure 14 below). His will mentions a violin and bow in case, which suggests a young man of many talents. In addition to two watches he also refers to a gold medal. Unfortunately its significance is not detailed. Martin Coohey’s service records on the one hand tantalise the reader, but ultimately fail to provide all of the answers. Was his friend, William Cruice, the reason a young man with no apparent relatives, was educated to this high level?

**Thomas Skelly** enlisted at Dubbo NSW on 10 February 1916. He was 35 years old on enlistment and at 5 feet 11½ inches well above average in height. He was a member of the 54th Battalion with the service number 890. His occupation is given as bookmaker’s clerk. He was killed in action late in the war on 1 September 1918. His file contains a letter written by his sister, Mrs C. Byrum, to the authorities in February 1919, six months after her brother’s death. In it she speaks of the frustration caused by the lack of information concerning her brother’s death:


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I think I am entitled to some news as to how he died. I just got the information of his death and not a word since. God help us it was an awful war but I can say they [Skelly had brothers who also enlisted] did their bit and died like men and wasn’t frightened there by conscription.  

The bitter cost of the war is reflected in the tone of the letter and the reference to the Conscription issue, a reminder of its divisive effects for Australian society. The letter also makes reference to the writer’s ill health and in a later letter written in May 1923 by another brother, we learn that Mrs Byrum had died in the interim.

While there is nothing in his records to show whether his sister ever received details of his death, some clues can be found in the Battalion’s war diary entry for 1 September 1918. It states that it was to be involved in an attack on the German strong hold at Peronne, France. For a war diary entry it is very detailed, giving a history of the town and its German defenders. After a graphic description of the successful Australian attack the diary speaks of the cost to the 54th Battalion. ‘The casualties throughout the day were heavy’ and as is the norm for war diaries, while officers’ names are mentioned, this was not the case for other ranks. ‘We had 9 officers killed and 25 other ranks. Of wounded 8 officers and 138 other ranks. In addition 9 other ranks were reported ‘missing.’ The Official History argues: “that the capture of Mont St. Quentin and Peronne is held by many Australian soldiers to be the most brilliant achievement of the AIF”.

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was also at Peronne where the AIF came close to breaking point. Again *The Official History* gives an insight:

> It was at Peronne that the first recorded mutiny in the A.I.F. occurred. The 59th Battalion when relieved on September 14th after a week of repeated efforts and continuous strain had no sooner reached its bivouac and settled to sleep than it was summoned to the line again to follow the enemy's retirement. Three platoons refused and their officers supported them, saying that the men 'believe their action to be the only way they can impress the (higher) authorities with their needs.'

Another Indigenous soldier, Wilfred Clayton, enlisted on 25 November 1915 at Toowoomba Queensland. His age was 22 years 11 months and his occupation grazier. As with Martin Coohey, he gives as his next of kin a friend, in this case Isabella Laycock. Unlike Coohey, Wilfred Clayton’s apparent lack of formal education saw him only able to make his mark on his attestation papers. On arrival at the Western Front, Wilfred Clayton was allotted to the 41st Battalion on 25 November 1916. His time at the front was short as he was killed in action on 9 March 1917. The war diary of the 41st for 9 March reflecting how death had become an everyday event, simply has the comment, 'Casualties 3 O.R. killed 4 O.R. wounded'. The location for the 41st at this time is given as Armentieries.

On this occasion the service records do provide a little more information, Isabella Laycock was his foster mother.

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Wallie Johnson enlisted in the AIF on 17 April 1916. His age on enlistment was 22 years and his occupation jackaroo. The physical descriptions for many Indigenous recruits have an interesting way for describing “complexion”, for Wallie Johnson it is given as “medium”. On arrival in France, he was taken on strength by the 47th Battalion on 23 March 1917. On 11 April 1917 he was reported missing, but later confirmed as having been killed in action. Wallie Johnson’s records demonstrate two important features. Firstly he was killed in the First Battle of Bullecourt. The Australian War Memorial site says of this battle:

The attack was hastily planned and mounted and resulted in disaster. Tanks which were supposed to support the attacking Australian infantry either broke down or were quickly destroyed. Nevertheless, the infantry managed to break into the German defences. Due to uncertainty as to how far they had advanced, supporting artillery fire was withheld, and eventually the Australians were hemmed in and forced to retreat. The two brigades of the 4th Division that carried out the attack, the 4th and 12th, suffered over 3,300 casualties; 1,170 Australians were taken prisoner - the largest number captured in a single engagement during the war.

Secondly, as outlined at the start of this section, racism regarding the First Australians was hardening in Australia in the years leading up to the War, but as seen in the case of Wallie Johnson, there were those whose actions showed that it was not a universal feature of Australian life. He had been raised by a Queensland policeman and his wife.

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***** While many Indigenous recruits were illiterate and could only “make their mark”, Joseph Wandin\footnote{NAA: B2455, WANDIN JOSEPH \url{http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp} (12 December 2013)} is something of a remarkable exception. He was one of the first to enlist, doing so on 18 August 1914. Born in Healesville Victoria, the 29 year old Wandin enlisted at Ballarat. His records show that he was 5 feet 7 inches (170 cm) in height and weighed 144 pounds (65 kg). His complexion was ‘dark’, eyes ‘brown’ and hair ‘dark brown’. With such an early enlistment date it is not surprising therefore to see that he was an original member of C Company, the 8th Battalion. His time in the AIF however was short and he was discharged 10 September 1914. A possible reason for this early discharge is suggested by a letter from his mother, dated 9 September 1914, to the commanding officer of the 8th Battalion where she asks for his discharge.

“I wish to inform you about my son Joseph Wandin. He has volunteered against my wish. I don’t wish him to have anything to do with the war. … if he goes it will only break my heart”\footnote{NAA: B2455, WANDIN JOSEPH \url{http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp} (12 December 2013)}.\footnote{NAA: B2455, WANDIN JOSEPH \url{http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp} (12 December 2013)} One might think that as he was discharged the day following his mother’s letter, it alone was the reason. However, there is something else in the letter which might have influenced the authorities. His mother had given as her address, ‘Aboriginal Station, Coranderrk, Healesville Post Office’.\footnote{NAA: B2455, WANDIN JOSEPH \url{http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp} (12 December 2013)} There is also the comment ‘discharged unsuitable’ on his record. For a 29 year old man to have been able to successfully enlist at this time in the war it seems fanciful that a letter from his mother alone could bring about such a quick

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\end{thebibliography}
discharge, but race might. There is a further facet to the revealing story of Joseph Wandin, he was a school teacher.

How the culture of the First Australians had been affected by its contact with European civilisation can also be seen in the service records of Indigenous recruits: not only do most have European family names, but their stated spiritual belief is reflected in the religious denomination recorded, which arguably represents a cross section of Australian society at the time.

![Figure 15. Religious denomination of Indigenous recruits as recorded on attestation paper.](image)

However an aspect not answered by the records is why, when faced with such discrimination, did so many Indigenous men choose to enlist. In examining what she believes to have been the underlying reasons Philippa Scarlett begins by citing an ‘Open Letter to Queensland’s Half-caste Aboriginals’ from the Brisbane Courier, in 1917, which, in praising Aboriginal enlistment, identifies the strong affinity to land held by Indigenous people. Scarlett in affirming the point notes
however, that its earlier manifestation in the “Frontier Wars” was ironically missed by the letter’s writer. For Scarlett though the simple answer is that many enlisted for the same reasons as non-Indigenous men: pay, travel, joining mates and response to aggressive recruitment campaigns.52

The records tell us more of the 834: 110 were married of whom 21 married overseas. 11, including Douglas Grant, were to become Prisoners of War and 129, or 15.4%, contracted VD. 14 were to later serve in World War 2 and one claimed to have fought in the Boer War. This was Sydney Joseph Skelly, the brother of Thomas Skelly, who enlisted at Dubbo, New South Wales, on 22 November 1915. His attestation papers show that for previous military service, Skelly answered, ‘ALH, 21 months South Africa’. Sydney Skelly, however, throws up a mystery as archival records can sometimes do. His age on enlistment, 37 years, one month, certainly would support that claim as does his impressive physique, his height was 6 feet and ½ inches (184 cm), his weight 154 pounds (70 kg), and he had an expanded chest measurement of 37½ inches (95 cm).53 However, the databases for both the NAA and the AWM show only one Skelly for the Boer War, Clement Skelly, and even allowing for a different given name, Clement Skelly’s height on enlistment was 5 feet 8½ inches (174 cm). His eyes were blue whereas Sydney Skelly’s were brown.54 There is also an interesting reference to a Sydney Skelly of Dubbo in Trove.55 In The Dubbo Liberal and

52 Scarlett, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers for the AIF: the Indigenous response to World War One, 33.
Macquarie Advocate of Saturday 3 August 1901, there is a report of a Sydney Skelly who was sentenced to a fortnight’s imprisonment with hard labour for escaping from the custody of Constable M. J. Williams. This date of 1901 does not help explain how he could have been in South Africa at about the same time. Sydney Skelly also answered in the negative for the question ‘Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power?’

The unit Sydney Skelly gave the enlisting officer was the ALH, presumably the Australian Light Horse, but there were no units with this name which served in South Africa, there was an Australian Commonwealth Horse, the unit of Clement Skelly, but Australian Light Horse was a name associated with the First World War. Despite all the circumstantial evidence against Sydney Skelly’s service in South Africa, it is still possible that he may have done so, for example he may have enlisted under an alias. The participation of Indigenous men in the Boer War is supported by research. For example Lindsay Watson’s, Better Than a One-Eyed Man: An Incomplete History of Queensland’s. Indigenous Soldiers of the Boer War and World War One names several Indigenous men who did see active service in South Africa. When discussing Australian Indigenous participation, Watson cites a tracker named ‘Billy’ attached to a Queensland contingent and Private Mulumphy and Trooper William Stubbings who were members of the 3rd (NSW) Mounted Rifles. Nevertheless Sydney Skelly’s time in the AIF was brief;

56 NAA: B2455, SKELLY SYDNEY JOSEPH

57 Lindsay Watson, “Better Than a One-Eyed Man: An Incomplete History of Queensland’s. Indigenous Soldiers of the Boer War and World War One”
http://books.google.com.au/books?id=gzIw-c1YOAI&pg=PA57&dq=Lindsay+Watson+%27Better+Than+a+One-Eyed+Man:+An+Incomplete+History+of+Queensland%27s+Indigenous+Soldiers+of+the+Boer+War+and+World+War+One%27&hl=en&sa=X&ei=m860UsDsMceiiAfYulHwDQ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&
he was discharged on 18 March 1916. The reason is given in a note on his records, 'drunkenness'. His conduct sheets show it was a recurring problem and one which led to his discharge.

These are some of the insights into the Indigenous men who played a role during World War One. With a total of about 1,000, Indigenous men are only a small percentage of the 416,809 who enlisted for service in the First AIF, yet the following chapters will establish that in many aspects the role played by Indigenous men during the Great War was representative of the AIF as a whole. In age, their records demonstrated a range of between 17 and 45 years on enlistment, yet as for the AIF the mean was 25 years. Their attestation papers give an insight into the working backgrounds of Indigenous men, with 90% either employed as a “labourer” or in the rural sector. (See p.135). From the records of these Indigenous men we learn quite a deal of the impact of European colonisation on the First Australians; as most Indigenous men have identified using European names and religions.

Indigenous men played a part in most Australian units during the war and this aspect is the subject of the following chapter.

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60
CHAPTER 3

Indigenous Soldiers and their units

Patrick MacGill’s, *The diggers: the Australians in France*,¹ published in 1919, has a foreword written by then Australian Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes. It is a revealing text that clearly demonstrates that even from this early date, Australian participation in the Great War is central to the creation of the myth of national identity:

The war has made of Australia – a young community without traditions – a nation, acutely and proudly conscious of its nationality, its record in this war, and the great future which awaits it.²

Although ‘a young community without traditions’ reflects the Eurocentric nature of the foundation myth, one which arguably excises the pre-existing culture of First Australians, Indigenous men had played a role in this new foundation myth. An examination of the units in which they served during World War One helps address, what until recently, is a history which has been largely overlooked.

The concept of myth is also addressed by Jane Ross in *The Myth of the Digger*, where she argues that for many ‘the Australian soldier [represents] all that is best and most Australian in the national character’.³ I would argue that for many in contemporary Australia, one of the main representations of ‘the digger’ is the infantry man of World War One. It is a myth which may well owe its origin to the importance given to the landing at Anzac Cove and later Dardanelles’ campaign. The power of the word ‘Gallipoli’ is evidenced by the Australian Government

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having to conduct a ballot for the 8,000 available spots to attend the 2015 Dawn Service in Turkey.

This pre-eminence of Gallipoli in the Australian psyche seems often to overshadow the experience of the Australians on the Western Front, in France and Belgium, later in the War. It is a trend particularly noticeable in *Reveille*. During the 1930s there are many articles and references to Australia’s participation on the Western Front, but after World War Two the emphasis seems to have narrowed to Gallipoli, with perhaps the exception of continued material on Harry Murray VC and Albert Jacka VC, who are turned into icons by the magazine. Although there seems recently to be a growing awareness and interest with what occurred at places such as Villers Bretonneux and Fromelles, Gallipoli still holds supremacy. The Australian War Memorial site tells us that for the whole Gallipoli operation [there were] 26,111 Australian casualties, including 8,141 deaths. While obviously significant these figures are overwhelmed by those for the often overlooked Western Front, where for example there were over 12,000 deaths in 1916 alone. Nevertheless for many, the image which usually comes to mind is the digger as infantryman whether it is at the Dardanelles or the Western Front.

In World War One most Indigenous soldiers were infantry men: 44% or 367 in total. There were Indigenous men in all but one, the 44th, of the AIF’s 60 infantry battalions. The following table gives the number who served in the battalions of the First AIF. The notes in the “Comments” column have been taken from the

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website of the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and have been included to give some insight into the background of each battalion. While some Indigenous men were in the original intake for these battalions, the majority joined at a later date as reinforcements.

INFANTRY

TABLE 1. INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF THE AIF BATTALIONS, 1914-1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BATTALION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>STATE OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>This was the first infantry unit recruited for the AIF in and took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915 as part of the second and third waves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>It took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915 as part of the second and third waves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>This battalion also took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915 as part of the second and third waves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>This battalion also took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915 as part of the second and third waves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>This battalion took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915, as part of the second wave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>This battalion also took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915, as part of the second wave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>This battalion also took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915, as part of the second wave.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| 8  | 2  | VIC  | Raised from rural Victoria within a fortnight of the declaration of war in August 1914 and embarked just two months later. It took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915, as part of the second wave. |
| 9  | 10 | QLD  | It was the first battalion recruited in Queensland. It was heavily involved in establishing and defending the front line of the ANZAC beachhead. |
| 10 | 5  | SA   | Two soldiers of the 10th Battalion, Lance Corporal Philip Robin and Private Arthur Blackburn, are believed to have penetrated further inland than any other Australians at ANZAC. |
| 12 | 15 | TAS/SA/WA | Half of the battalion was recruited in Tasmania, a quarter was recruited in South Australia, and a quarter from Western Australia. |
| 13 | 12 | NSW  | The battalion was recruited in New South Wales. In March and April 1918, the battalion helped to stop the German spring offensive. It subsequently played a role in the great allied offensive of 1918, fighting near Amiens on 8 August 1918. This advance by British and empire troops was the greatest success in a single day on the Western Front, one that German General Erich Ludendorff described as ‘...the black day of the German Army in this war...’ |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Recruits</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>This battalion's recruits came principally from Melbourne and its suburbs. It was the battalion of Albert Jacka, the winner of Australia’s first Victoria Cross in World War One.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>QLD/TAS</td>
<td>Three-quarters of the battalion were recruited as volunteers from Queensland, and the rest from Tasmania. With the 13th, 14th and 16th Battalions it formed the 4th Brigade, commanded by Colonel John Monash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>WA/SA</td>
<td>Three-quarters of the battalion were recruited in Western Australia, and the rest in South Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>The 17th Battalion was raised at Liverpool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>The 18th Battalion was raised at Liverpool in March 1915. It is the battalion of Joe Maxwell VC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>The 19th Battalion was raised at Liverpool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>The 20th Battalion was raised at Liverpool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>The 21st Battalion was raised, as part of the 6th Brigade, at Broadmeadows in February 1915. Its recruits hailed from all over the state. The later enlistment of these men, and their average age of 29, would seem to indicate a more considered decision to enlist that set them apart from those who did so amidst the heady enthusiasm of late 1914.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>The 22nd Battalion AIF was formed on 26 March 1915 at Broadmeadows Camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>The 23rd Battalion was raised in Victoria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>State(s)</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>The 24th Battalion was raised in a hurry. The original intent was to raise the fourth battalion of the 6th Brigade from the “outer states”, but a surplus of recruits at Broadmeadows Camp in Victoria lead to a decision being made to raise it there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>QLD/NT</td>
<td>Although predominantly composed of men recruited in Queensland, the battalion also included a small contingent of men from Darwin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>QLD/TAS</td>
<td>The 26th Battalion was raised at Enoggera, Queensland, in April 1915 from recruits enlisted in Queensland and Tasmania. Belgium, 1917, the 26th fought in the battle of Menin Road on 20 September, and participated in the capture of Broodseinde Ridge on 4 October.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Raised in South Australia in March 1915, from recruits previously earmarked for the 24th Battalion, a large number of whom hailed from the suburbs of Adelaide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>The 28th Battalion was raised at Blackboy Camp on 16 April 1915 from recruits previously earmarked for the 24th Battalion. The 28th Battalion took part in its first major battle at Pozières between 28 July and 6 August 1916.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>The 29th Battalion was raised as part of the 8th Brigade at Broadmeadows Camp on 10 August 1915. Having enlisted as part of the recruitment drive that followed the landing at Gallipoli, and having seen the casualty lists, these were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>State/Region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NSW/VIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>QLD/VIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>SA/WA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men who had offered themselves in full knowledge of their potential fate.

Most of its recruits hailed from the Newcastle region and other parts of country New South Wales, but almost an entire company was composed of former RAN ratings from Victoria. This was my grandfather, George Wenham’s battalion.

The 31st Battalion was raised as part of the 8th Brigade at Enoggera, on the outskirts of Brisbane, in August 1915. Some of the battalion's companies, however, were also raised at Broadmeadows Camp in Victoria. In early October, these two elements were united at Broadmeadows, and the battalion sailed from Melbourne the following month.

The 32nd Battalion was raised as part of the 8th Brigade at Mitcham, on the outskirts of Adelaide, on 9 August 1915. Only two companies were raised from South Australian enlistees - another two were formed in Western Australia and joined the battalion at the end of September.

The bulk of the battalion’s recruits were drawn from the New England region of N.S.W. The 33rd Battalion became part of the 9th Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division. It left Sydney, bound for the United Kingdom in May 1916. Arriving there in early July, the battalion spent the next four months training. It crossed to France in late...
November, and moved into the trenches of the Western Front for the first time on 27 November, just in time for the onset of the terrible winter of 1916-17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Batt.</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 34  | 11    | NSW   | The 34th Battalion was formed in January 1916 at a camp established at the Maitland showground. It was planned that the bulk of the battalion's recruits would be drawn from the Maitland area and thus it was dubbed “Maitland's Own”.
| 35  | 8     | NSW   | The 35th Battalion was formed in December 1915 in Newcastle. The bulk of the battalion’s recruits were drawn from the Newcastle region and thus it was dubbed “Newcastle’s Own”.
| 36  | 2     | NSW   | The 36th Battalion was raised at Broadmeadow Camp, in Newcastle, in February 1916.
| 37  | 2     | VIC   | The 37th fought in its first major battle at Messines, in Belgium, between 7-9 June 1917. The battalion fought in another two major attacks in this sector - the battle of Broodseinde on 4 October, and the battle of Passchendaele on 12 October. Belgium remained the focus of the 37th Battalion's activities for the next five months, until it was rushed south to France in late March 1918 to meet the German Army's Spring Offensive.
| 38  | 1     | VIC   | The 38th Battalion was formed on 1 March 1916 at a camp established on the Epsom Racecourse at Bendigo.
| 39  | 3     | VIC   | The 39th Battalion was formed on 21 February 1916
<p>| 40 | 12 | TAS | The 3rd Division was raised in Australia early in 1916. The 40th Battalion was Tasmania’s contribution to the strength of the division. |
| 41 | 11 | QLD/NSW | Recruits for this battalion came from Brisbane, northern Queensland and the northern rivers district of New South Wales. |
| 42 | 6 | QLD | The 42nd Battalion was raised at Enoggera, on the outskirts of Brisbane, in December 1915. |
| 43 | 9 | SA | The 3rd Division was raised in Australia early in 1916. The 43rd Battalion was South Australia’s contribution to the strength of the division. |
| 44 | 0 | WA | The 44th’s last major action of the war was fought between 29 September and 3 October 1918 as part of the Australian-American operation that breached the formidable defences of the Hindenburg Line along the St Quentin Canal. By this stage, the 44th was just about spent. It had crossed the Hamel start-line approximately 600-strong, but just on 80 men were relieved on 3 October. |
| 45 | 7 | NSW | The 45th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 2 March 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its new recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 13th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 13th, the |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Battalion</th>
<th>Raised</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>24 Feb 1916</td>
<td>VIC/NSW/WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>24 Feb 1916</td>
<td>QLD/TAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>16 Mar 1916</td>
<td>SA/WA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 46th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 24 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its new recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 14th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 14th, the new battalion was composed mostly of men from Victoria, although some of the reinforcements hailed from New South Wales and Western Australia.

The 47th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 24 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its new recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 15th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 15th, the new battalion was composed mostly of men recruited in Queensland and Tasmania.

The 48th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 16 March 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Roughly half of its new recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 16th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 16th, the men of the new battalion hailed mainly from regional South Australia and Western Australia.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>49</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>The 49th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 27 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 9th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 9th, the 49th was predominantly composed of men from Queensland.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>The 50th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 26 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its recruits were veterans from the 10th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 10th, the 50th was predominantly composed of men from South Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>The 51st Battalion was raised in Egypt in the first week of March 1916, as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 11th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 11th, the 51st was predominantly composed of men from Western Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>SA/WA/TAS</td>
<td>The 52nd Battalion was raised at Tel el Kebir in Egypt on 1 March 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its recruits were veterans from the 12th Battalion, and the other half, fresh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 12th, the 52nd was a mix of men from South and Western Australia and Tasmania.

| 53 | 11 | NSW | The 53rd Battalion was raised in Egypt on 14 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 1st Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 1st, the 53rd was predominantly composed of men from the suburbs of Sydney. |
| 54 | 12 | NSW | The 54th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 16 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 2nd Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 2nd, the 54th was predominantly composed of men from New South Wales. |
| 55 | 6  | NSW | The 55th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 12 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 3rd Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 3rd, the 55th was predominantly composed of men from New South Wales. |
| 56 | 10 | NSW | The 56th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 14 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli |
veterans from the 4th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 4th, the 56th was predominantly composed of men from New South Wales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>57</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>VIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 57th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 18 February 1916 as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 5th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 5th, the 57th was predominantly composed of men from the suburbs of Melbourne.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>58</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>VIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early in 1917 the 58th battalion participated in the advance that followed the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, but it was spared from the assault. It did, however, defend gains made during the second battle of Bullecourt, between 9 and 12 May. Later in the year, the AIF’s focus of operations switched to the Ypres sector in Belgium. The 58th’s major battle here was at Polygon Wood on 26 September.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>59</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>VIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 59th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 21 February 1916 as part of the expansion of the AIF. Approximately half of its recruits came from the veteran 7th Battalion and the other half were fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 7th, the 59th was predominantly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VIC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LIGHT HORSE**

If there is an image of the Australian soldier in World War One which might challenge that of the infantryman it would be that of the Light Horse. Whether it is the association many Australians hold of it being the embodiment of the Australian bushman, or the Light Horse’s use of the iconic emu feather in their slouch hats, it has become an image associated by many in contemporary Australia for service in the Great War. One of the more significant contributions to the legend of the Light Horse comes from the literature of Ion Idriess.⁷ A sniper in the 5th Light Horse, Idriess’s popular, *The desert column: leaves from the diary of an Australian trooper in Gallipoli, Sinai, and Palestine*⁸ published in 1932 arguably did much to promote the myth in popular culture. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography*’s entry for Idriess acknowledges this role when it argues that he was responsible for the development of several Australian legends; the

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⁷ NAA: B2455, IDRIESS ION LLEWELLYN  
⁸ Ion L Idriess, *The desert column: leaves from the diary of an Australian trooper in Gallipoli, Sinai, and Palestine* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1932)
first being the Light Horse. Another positive view is provided by Ross, “the light horsemen … have been described as being the most typically Australian of any troops”. Ross reinforces this view by citing John Laffin who believed:

The light horseman … was living and fighting under conditions closely resembling those to which he had been accustomed all his life. He needed only to learn discipline, and to become skilled in the effective use of modern destructive weapons to be a formidable soldier.

The Light Horse has been the subject of iconic Australian films: Charles Chauvel's *40,000 Horsemen* (1941), Peter Weir’s *Gallipoli* (1981) and Simon Wincer’s *The Lighthorsemen* (1987). In 1982 a mini-series directed by Di Drew and Chris Thomson, made for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), adapted Roger McDonald’s novel, *1915*. While it can be argued that the timing of *40,000 Horsemen* could see it as a film to bolster patriotism in World War Two, *Gallipoli, The Lighthorsemen* and *1915* seem to mirror resurgence in the ANZAC myth following a period when it was under threat, as for example in Alan Seymour’s play *The One Day of the Year* (1958). Perhaps reflecting their rural background there were 114 Indigenous members of the Light Horse. An example of the Indigenous recruits who served as light horsemen was Harry Murray (Figure 1 below).
Figure 1. AWM Collection: P00889.004. Harry C Murray, 11th LH - Public domain.

Harry Murray enlisted at Mitchell, Queensland on 2 June 1917. A station hand, Murray was 30 years old when he was allotted to the 11\textsuperscript{th} Light Horse Regiment with the service number 2436. He saw service in the Middle East in 1918 and returned to Australia in July 1919.\textsuperscript{13} 37 Indigenous men were to serve in the 11\textsuperscript{th} Light Horse during the war, a greater number than in any other Australian unit. It is therefore surprising that Ernest W. Hammond’s *History of the 11th Light Horse*

Regiment, Fourth Light Horse Brigade, Australian Imperial Forces, war 1914-1919, published in 1942, makes no reference to them.

An Indigenous man who had an earlier enlistment was Henry Locke. He joined in Sydney on 1 September 1914. His attestation papers show at the time of his enlistment he was 19 years 9 months and his trade, lime burner. He was an original member of the 1st Light Horse Regiment with the service number 532. Although Aboriginal, Locke’s physical description gives a possible insight into how he may have “passed” as being of European origin. It describes his complexion as ‘fair’, his eyes as ‘blue’, and his hair as ‘yellowish brown’.

Ironically, Locke’s first experience with active service was as an infantryman at Gallipoli. As is shown in Weir’s Gallipoli, the Light Horse was used in this role following the heavy casualties suffered by the regular infantry battalions. In July 1915, when Locke re-joined his unit following illness, the war diary of the 1st Light Horse shows them at Pope’s Post.

Locke is an Indigenous soldier who served his country for the whole war. In total 13 Indigenous Anzacs served from 1914 until the end of the war. His records

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14 Ernest W. Hammond, History of the 11th Light Horse Regiment, Fourth Light Horse Brigade, Australian Imperial Forces, war 1914-1919 (Brisbane: W. Brooks 1942)
16 Named after Colonel Harold Pope of the 16th Battalion, Pope's Hill was a razor-backed ridge lying at the centre of a fork at the head of Monash Valley, in the heights above ANZAC Cove. It was occupied by Australian troops on 25 April 1915 and remained a key post on the ANZAC frontline until the end of the campaign. Pope's Hill commanded a good field of fire over the Turkish lines opposing the crucial position of Quinn's Post and thus was a favourite spot for Australian snipers and the site of several machine-guns and trench mortars.
show that he then spent the rest of the War in the Middle East, serving in other units besides the 1st Light Horse, being promoted but later reverting to the rank of “Trooper” at his own request and contracting malaria before returning to Australia on 26 December 1918. He had been granted “1914 leave”, given to those soldiers who had been early enlistments.  

The following table (Table 2) gives the breakdown of all Indigenous men who served in the Light Horse. As was the case with the infantry battalions which made up the First AIF, the notes in the “Comments” column have been taken from the website of the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and have been included

NAA: B2455, DICKERSON J,  
NAA: B2455, FARMER L,  
NAA: B2455, LAVENDER ANDREW,  
NAA: B2455, MCCALLUM A E,  
NAA: B2455, MCDONALD A,  
NAA: B2455, MUCKRAY HURTLE,  
NAA: B2455, NALEY CHARLES GORDON,  
NAA: B2455, ROWAN JOHN,  
NAA: B2455, SIMPSON STAMFORD WALLACE,  
NAA: B2455, SLOANE JOHN,  
NAA: B2455, SMITH W E,  
18 NAA: B2455, LOCKE HENRY JAMES 532.
to give some insight into the background for each of the Light Horse regiments concerned.

**TABLE 2. INDIGENOUS RECRUITS IN THE LIGHT HORSE REGIMENTS, 1914-18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGIMENT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>STATE OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>The 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment was raised at Rosebury Park in Sydney in August 1914.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; LH Machine Gun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Full unit name: 1st Australian Machine Gun Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>QLD/NSW</td>
<td>The 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment was raised at Enoggera on 18 August 1914. Its recruits came mainly from Queensland but some hailed from the northern rivers district of New South Wales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; LH Machine Gun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>QLD/NSW</td>
<td>Full unit name: 2nd Australian Machine Gun Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Of the 6 who enlisted, 3 were members of the Field Ambulance. The 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment was raised in Adelaide on 17 August 1914.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; LH Field Ambulance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Full unit name: 3rd Australian Light Horse Field Ambulance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>The 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment was formed as the divisional cavalry regiment for the 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Australian Division on 11 August 1914. Belying traditional stereotypes, over 20 per cent of the original regiment were city dwellers from Melbourne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>The 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment was raised in Brisbane in September 1914.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>The 6th Light Horse Regiment was raised in Sydney in September 1914.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>The 7th Light Horse Regiment was raised in Sydney in October 1914.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>The regiment that would eventually become the 8th Light Horse Regiment was formed at Broadmeadows camp in Victoria on 23 September 1914 as the 6th Light Horse Regiment. A reorganisation of the rapidly expanding AIF in early October resulted in the 6th being renumbered the 8th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>The 9th Light Horse Regiment was formed in Adelaide and trained in Melbourne between October 1914 and February 1915.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>The 10th Australian Light Horse Regiment AIF was the only AIF light horse regiment recruited in Western Australia during the First World War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>QLD/SA</td>
<td>The formation of the 4th Light Horse Brigade, and the 11th Light Horse Regiment as part of it, was announced on 11 February 1915. Two squadrons of the 11th Light Horse were subsequently formed in Queensland and a third in South Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>With two frontal attacks on Gaza having failed, the next attempt to capture the Turkish bastion was a wide outflanking move via the town of Beersheba, launched on 31 October 1917. A deteriorating tactical situation late on the first day of the operation caused the 12th and its sister regiment, the 4th, to be unleashed on Beersheba at the gallop - an action which has gone down in history as the charge of Beersheba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regiment</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>In 1916 with the expansion of the AIF, the 13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse was broken down to provide a divisional cavalry squadron for the 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;, 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; and 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Divisions. These squadrons proceeded to France with their divisions in March and June 1916, and were eventually reunited in July when the 13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse was reformed as the cavalry regiment for I ANZAC.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Not state based</td>
<td>The 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment was formed in Palestine in June 1918 from members of the Australian companies of the Imperial Camel Corps (ICC). The ICC had been disbanded because camel-mounted troops, a valuable addition to the British forces in the deserts of Egypt and the Sinai, were not suitable for the conditions being encountered in Palestine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Not state based</td>
<td>The 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Regiment was formed in Palestine in June 1918. The new regiment, along with another regiment of former cameleers - the 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - and a regiment of French colonial cavalry, formed the 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Light Horse Brigade, which became part of the Australian Mounted Division.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IMPERIAL CAMEL CORPS

The Imperial Camel Corps was raised in Egypt in 1916. It was composed of four battalions: the 1st Battalion was entirely Australian, the 2nd Battalion was British, and the 3rd and 4th Battalions were a mix of Australians and New Zealanders.\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperial Camel Corps (ICC)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Imperial Camel Corps (ICC) was formed in January 1916 in order to deal with the revolt of pro-Turkish Senussi tribesmen in Egypt’s Western Desert.(^2) The men of the ICC had a rough reputation, largely because when the Corps was originally formed, Australian battalion commanders had seized upon it as an opportunity to offload some of their more difficult characters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An indigenous member of the Imperial Camel Corps was Thomas Rine, service number, 3513. Rine’s enlistment papers show him as being born in Warren, NSW and enlisting at Orange, NSW on 3 May 1917. His age on enlistment was 21 years, one month.

His service record shows that Rine enjoyed a mixed time while in the forces. Early in his army life Rine was found guilty of ‘breaking camp whilst under isolation’,

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\(^2\) The Senussi were a political-religious organisation centred in Libya and Sudan. They began a guerilla war against the British Army during the First World War, threatening the Nile Delta. The Senussi were only subdued after a prolonged campaign, which was not marked by any major battles, but which was a major strain on the resources of the British Army stationed in Egypt.
‘absent without leave for eight days’ and ‘being out of bounds’. He was awarded eight days Field Punishment No 2 and fined £2.\textsuperscript{21}

Rine was also injured in action and when this occurred the authorities attempted to notify the next of kin, but as can be seen in Rine’s case, they were unable to do so. Still serving in 1919, Rine was admitted to hospital suffering from Venereal Disease (VD). The service records for members of the AIF can be quite revealing. Figures 2 and 3 below, shows that VD was such a common illness that special forms needed to be printed to record the patient’s details and treatment. For sufferers such as Rine, in a time before antibiotics, it could include being “cauterised with pure carbolic [acid]”. His records also show that Rine was at the time of admission a ‘prisoner’. This can be explained by his conviction for assault on a Syrian merchant at Homs in 1919. There is nothing in his records to explain the circumstances of the charge. Rine was returned to Australia in October 1919 and was discharged 29 November 1919. Again the authorities attempted to notify his next of kin, and again the result was the same their correspondence was ‘returned unclaimed’.

\textsuperscript{21} Field punishment could be awarded by a court martial or a commanding officer for any offence committed on active service. There were two categories field punishment. Field punishment No. 1 consisted of heavy labouring duties, possibly being restrained in handcuffs or fetters, and being tied to a post or wheel. Field punishment No. 2 differed, in that the offender was not liable to be attached to a fixed object. AWM, “Field Punishment”, \url{https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/field_punishment/?query=FIELD+PUNISHMENT} (24 December 2013).
A possible explanation for this inability to contact Rine’s next of kin is explained in a letter to Army Records from Dunedoo RSL (R.S.S.I.L. of A) dated 31 March 1959. It is only in this request that Thomas Rine’s Aboriginality is raised although a reason for the reference is not clarified. The Honorary Secretary wrote that one ‘William Riley’ enlisted under the name Tom ‘Ryan or Rine’, and that they
believed ‘he was part aboriginal’. This reflects firstly that some men for whatever reason enlisted under an alias. Secondly, it would seem that the local RSL branch may have been responsible for Thomas Rine’s burial. It also suggests that between his discharge and death Thomas Rine had no official contact with government departments such as Repatriation. Although there is no reference to Thomas Rine’s race in his service records, it will be shown later that this was not always the case.

The example of Thomas Rine illustrates several points. Firstly it demonstrates how the experiences of Indigenous soldiers can be explored. In Rine’s case it reflects the fact that there were First Australians in a wide range of units in World War One; in his case the Imperial Camel Corps. Secondly, the service records highlight how the issue of identity can pose a challenge for the researcher. Why didn’t Thomas Rine enlist as ‘William Riley’? Was it because, like other Indigenous men, he was seeking to distance himself from his Aboriginality? Even in 1959, there was an issue with the race of a returned man as is implied by the writer of the letter to Army Records (see Figure 4 below). That the writer of the reply does not refer to Thomas Rine’s race is to his credit; it suggests egalitarianism for those who fought.

---

REMTOUNT UNITS, 1914-1918

With a developing need for the maintenance of the Light Horse’s mounts during the Peninsula campaign a specialised remount unit was formed in Egypt in December 1915. From then until the war’s end, remount units “contributed a steady stream of properly acclimatised, broken and trained horses to the
Australian formations”. An analysis of the occupations of Indigenous members of the AIF, as seen in Figure 5, clearly demonstrates that 37% of these are directly associated with rural work. In addition, many of those in the 53% classified as “labourers” are also likely to have been employed in the country.

Consequently it is hardly surprising that some of these men found themselves in the specialised and demanding work undertaken in these units. The details for the 1st and 2nd Remount Units which follow are from the AWM’s website.

Figure 5. Occupations of Indigenous recruits

Consequently it is hardly surprising that some of these men found themselves in the specialised and demanding work undertaken in these units. The details for the 1st and 2nd Remount Units which follow are from the AWM’s website.

---

Table 4. INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF THE REMOUNT UNITS, 1914-1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Remount Unit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A.B. Paterson, whose role in crafting a developing Australian identity has been explored earlier, was experienced with horses. He was promoted to major and commanded the Australian Remount Squadron.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Remount Unit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2nd Australian Remount Unit was raised to care for the horses of Australian Light Horse regiments which were engaged as infantry units in the fighting on Gallipoli.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Often there is a belief that the Australians who fought in World War One were all young. David Mullett\(^24\) was an Indigenous member of the First Remount Unit. He enlisted on 6 November 1915 aged 43 years eight months. He was married and had four children who were under sixteen years. Born at Lake Condah, Victoria, he joined at Melbourne. David Mullett’s service number is 500 and he was to serve until discharged on 14 May 1919. Despite his age and Aboriginality, David Mullett was able to enlist in 1915. Attestation papers do have a physical description of the applicant and Mullett’s, similar to other Indigenous soldiers,

show him to have a ‘dark’ complexion, ‘dark brown eyes’ and not surprisingly 
given his age, ‘grey’ hair.

L.L. Robson’s *The First A.I.F. A Study of its Recruitment*, provides a likely reason 
for Mullett’s enlistment. He argues that there was a substantial increase in 
recruitment following the landing at Gallipoli and the sinking of the *Lusitania*. He 
writes that ‘the Australians asked the British government whether it would accept 
as many men as could be recruited in Australia’. He goes on to note that the 
British reply was positive. Robson later writes that the Defence Minister, 
Senator Pearce, in October 1915 told the new Prime Minister, William Morris 
Hughes, that the new target for recruitment would need to be 9,000 a month.

In 1931, G. A. Handcock, the chaplain at the Aboriginal reserve, Lake Tyers, in 
Victoria, wrote to the Repatriation Commission regarding the ‘fitness’ of David 
Mullett re ‘boarded out children’. The Chaplain wrote that Mullet’s ‘version’ of his 
war service and discharge needed ‘confirmation’ (even though the chaplain also 
notes that David Mullet was in receipt of a war pension!) because he was 
‘aboriginal or half caste’. Despite having served from 1915 until 1919, the fate 
of David Mullett, now apparently living at Lake Tyers Mission, was regulated by 
his Aboriginality, seemingly a source of official mistrust by the chaplain. 
Nevertheless, despite these restrictions, David Mullett retained pride in his 
service to Australia as can be seen in a post script in a letter to the authorities 
inquiring about pensions. He wrote:

---

27 Letter from Officer in Charge to Deputy Commissioner, 22 September 1931, with excerpts from 
the letter of G.A. Hancock
PS Excuse the liberty I would like to attend the march in Sydney, April 25/1938 and would like to wear the old uniform once more, if there is a chance of being equipped with one (an old one would do) I would esteem it a great favour. David Mullett, No 500 1st Remount Unit 1915-1919.  

The reply came that ‘regrettably’, a uniform could not be supplied for marchers.

OTHER UNITS

While the majority of Indigenous men were to serve in the infantry and light horse, they can also be found in many other units of the First AIF. As the Great War became total war, an efficient army demanded a sophisticated structure. The following units of the First AIF not only illustrate this point, but are also proof that Indigenous participation went beyond just that of front line troops.

ARMY VETERINARY UNITS

Although many aspects of the Great War were the product of industrialisation, the horse and mule were still an integral feature. An indicator of this role is reflected by the fact that at the war’s end, “Australians had 13,000 surplus horses which could not be returned home for quarantine reasons”. Indigenous men can be

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28 NAA: B2455, MULLETT DAVID
29 NAA: B2455, MULLETT DAVID
found in the veterinary units which attended to horses and other animals in army service.

TABLE 5. INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF THE ARMY VETERINARY UNITS

In describing the role of Army Veterinary Units Ellis writes of the large number of horse and mules needed for an army to function effectively in the Great War. A typical unit was composed of about five veterinary officers and 40 other ranks.\(^{31}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army Veterinary Hospital</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The hospital was located at Calais, France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1(^{st}) Mobile Veterinary Section</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ellis writes, “During heavy fighting [this unit’s function] was to establish advanced posts for the immediate reception of wounded animals”.(^{32})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MACHINE GUN BATTALIONS

At the start of the First World War each infantry battalion was issued with two, later four, machine-guns which were manned by the battalion’s machine gun section. However, during the war this organisation evolved. In February 1916 the machine gun sections were brought together, concentrating their firepower, to form machine gun companies. Each company was allocated to a brigade and all companies were re-equipped with Vickers medium machine-guns. In March 1918


\(^{32}\) Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 10.
each division’s four companies were consolidated into machine gun battalions (Table 6 below).  

### TABLE 6 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF THE MACHINE GUN BATTALIONS  
1914-1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BATTALION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>FULL NAME OF UNIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st MGB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1st Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd MGB</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2nd Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd MGB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3rd Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th MGB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4th Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th MGB</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5th Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th MGB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6th Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th MGB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7th Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th MGB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11th Machine Gun Battalion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ARTILLERY

The role of artillery in World War One seems often to be understated. As Prior and Wilson argue in *Passchendaele – the untold story*, “Artillery, even more than small-arms fire, was the great destructive force in this war”.  

Yet on the Australian War Memorial’s site, *First World War, 1914-1918 units: Australians at*
War, there is only one entry, that for the 4th Field Artillery Brigade. Their records show that Indigenous men served in a range of artillery units.

One such Indigenous man was William Gower who enlisted in the early years of World War One. He did so on 28 December 1915 at Melbourne, Victoria. On enlistment Gower was 21 years, 1 month. At 5 feet 4¼ inches (164 cm) and 126 pounds (57 kg) he was slightly smaller than average, but his expanded chest measurement of 36 inches (91 cm) was greater than the norm. Gower was a member of the fifth reinforcements for the 4th Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) and allocated the service number, 14604. He left Australia on 4 June 1916. At this time in the war the skill level for Australian artillery was in a state of development and Gower’s first overseas post was in Egypt at Tel-el-Kebir’s artillery training school. On arrival in France, William Gower was promoted to driver. His record reveals only one blemish, ‘being on private premises for the purpose of obtaining intoxicants during prohibited hours’ and giving military police ‘a false account and name’. His punishment was relatively light: ‘48 hours Field Punishment, Number 2’.

During the fierce fighting which characterised the last months of the war, William Gower was wounded in action on 7 September 1918. Correspondence to his family dated 25 September 1918 reports that his condition was not serious and that he was progressing ‘favourably’. However after being granted leave, William Gower contracted influenza, presumably “Spanish Flu” and died the 4 November

1918. The 2010 journal article, “Mortality Risk Factors During the 1918–1919 Influenza Pandemic in the Australian Army”, notes that it was a pandemic which resulted in 40 million deaths. The writers also note that ‘influenza typically kills individuals at the extremes of age; however, in 1918–1919, young adults died in numbers and at rates that were unprecedented and not adequately explained’. Unsurprisingly then, many of its victims were people like William Gower. Despite the authorities’ best efforts through measures such as quarantine, Spanish Flu most likely entered Australia with returning troops. The AWM’s Too Dark for the Light Horse, makes the point that many Aboriginal communities in south eastern Australia were subsequently hard hit by the virus.

At the time of his death William Gower’s records show that he was attached to the 110th Howitzer Battery, AIF. William Gower was buried Moorgate Cemetery, Rotherham, Yorkshire, his loss magnifying the death of his brother John, who had died of wounds on 29 July 1916. His battalion, the 26th, had been engaged in the attack on Pozières when John Gower, 2838, received gunshot wounds to the ‘leg and perineum’ on 25 July 1916. He was just 19 years old at the time of death.

The majority of Indigenous men served in Field Artillery Brigades. These were made up of four six-gun batteries; three of which were 18-pounder guns and the fourth a 4.5-inch howitzer battery. Others served in units which maintained the supply of ammunition for both artillery and infantry: the Divisional Ammunition

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Column. As trench warfare developed more artillery weapons were developed. For example each infantry brigade had a battery of light trench mortars and later Medium Trench Mortar Batteries.41 “These were developed to counter the “devastating minenwerfer of the enemy” and fired a shell or bomb weighing about 60 pounds a distance of about 500 yards”.42 In addition, one Indigenous man served in the Divisional Train. This was a “transport and supply organisation”, which linked the division with the main supply hub locations.43

### TABLE 7 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF ARTILLERY UNITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>FULL NAME OF UNIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd FAB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd FAB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3rd Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th FAB</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4th Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th FAB</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5th Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th FAB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7th Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th FAB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10th Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th FAB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11th Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th FAB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12th Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th FAB</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14th Australian Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

42 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 4.
43 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 7.
| 2nd DAC | 2 | 2nd Australian Divisional Ammunition Column |
| 4th DAC | 3 | 4th Australian Divisional Ammunition Column |
| 1st DAT | 1 | 1st Division Artillery Train |
| 1st ALTM | 1 | 1st Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery |
| 2nd ALTM | 1 | 2nd Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery |
| 4th ALTM | 1 | 4th Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery |
| 14th ALTM | 1 | 14th Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery |
| 2nd DMTMC | 2 | 2nd Division Medium Trench Mortar Company |

**ENGINEERS**

Engineers, also known as sappers, were essential to the running of the war. Without them, other branches of the Allied Forces would have found it difficult to cross the muddy and shell-ravaged ground of the Western Front. Their responsibilities included constructing the lines of defence, temporary bridges, tunnels and trenches, observation posts, roads, railways, communication lines, buildings of all kinds, showers and bathing facilities, and other material and mechanical solutions to the problems associated with fighting in all theatres. There were many different sets of Engineers: the Pioneers, the Field Company Engineers, the Tunnellers and the Railway men. As shown below, Indigenous men served in all of these units. Although they had existed in the Indian Army before 1914, pioneer battalions were essentially an innovation of the British Army
during the First World War. During the war there was a much heavier reliance on field work and roads and railways needed to be maintained. Engineers alone could not meet the heavy demand, while rifle men were always needed at the front. Therefore, pioneer battalions were raised to meet the needs of both and trained to support engineers and infantry.\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
UNIT & NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS & COMMENTS \\
\hline
1\textsuperscript{st} Pioneers & 2 & \\
2\textsuperscript{nd} Pioneers & 1 & \\
3\textsuperscript{rd} Pioneers & 4 & \\
4\textsuperscript{th} Pioneers & 3 & \\
5\textsuperscript{th} Pioneers & 4 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF PIONEER BATTALIONS}
\end{table}

Jane Ross raises an interesting point when exploring the myth of the digger, when she argues that:

The digger is a man of action, his story is that of a dramatic struggle for existence.

The front line is the stuff of dramatic action; base-camps and staff conferences are not. Just as diplomatic histories of war lack balance, in that they present only the élite view of war, so too do the Australian histories – they present the conflict as the experiences of individual fighting units or even of individual soldiers. Other nations make films about their generals; we have films about our privates.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} AWM: “First World War, 1914-18 units: Australians at war”, \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/units/ww1.asp} (19 May, 2013)
The service records of Peter Ross addresses some of these “imbalances”. Peter Ross was not a member of one the AIF’s elite fighting units, rather his war was spent in the 2nd Pioneer Battalion. Ross enlisted at Melbourne on 7 September 1915. His age on enlistment was 19 years, 1 month and his trade was blacksmith. Being under aged, Peter Ross required the permission of his parents to enlist.46 His service record contains nothing to give him an ‘élite’ status; it contains the basic entries one might encounter on countless other soldiers’ files. There are the details of his embarkation from Australia, two examples of being absent without leave and his promotion to ‘Driver’. However what Peter Ross’s service does represent is that for many of the AIF, this is how they served their country, often engaged in what seemed mundane roles. Yet without people such as Peter Ross it might be argued there could be no ‘élite’.

During the Great War each division had three Field Companies each with a strength of six officers and about 200 other ranks.47 Ellis writes that these were highly trained technical units “capable of undertaking all branches of field engineering, construction and demolition”.48 The presence of Indigenous soldiers in these units is further evidence of their ability and flexibility. There were four Indigenous men engaged in these units (see Table 9 below)

| TABLE 9 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF FIELD ENGINEER UNITS |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| UNIT                           | NUMBER OF        | COMMENTS       |
| 1st Division Field Engineers   | 1                |                |
| 1st Field Company Engineers    | 1                |                |

46 NAA: B2455 ROSS PETER
47 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 5.
48 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 5.
One of the strategies employed in breaking the stalemate which came to characterise trench warfare in the Great War, was the use of tunnellers to explode great mines under the enemy’s positions. As Winston Groom argues in *A Storm in Flanders*, “Mines, with their sudden devastating shock effects had been utilized for years.” The conditions endured by the miners are also given by Groom. “It was gruelling work in often deplorable conditions: cold, wet – water was sometimes knee deep – physically exhausting, and dangerous.” There were seven Indigenous men in tunnelling companies (see Table 10 below)

**TABLE 10 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF TUNNELLING COMPANIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Australian Tunnelling Company</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Australian Tunnelling Company</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Australian Tunnelling Company</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Australian Tunnelling Company</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Indigenous soldier in the 1st Tunnelling Company was Alfred O’Neill, service number 5394. His attestation papers show that on enlistment he was 39 years old and a miner. While his place of birth was Sydney, he enlisted in Darwin on 5 April 1916. He was taken on strength on 27 January 1917. His records show that

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50 Groom, *A Storm in Flanders*, 160
he was to remain with the 1st Tunnelling Company until 1 October 1917 when he was killed in action.

The recent Australian film, Beneath Hill 60, centres largely on the part played by this unit in the deadly preparation of one of the 19 huge mines placed under German positions at Hill 60 near Ypres, in preparation for the Battle of Messines which began on 7 June, 1917. The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 gives an insight into the impact of these mines when it describes how they:

blew vast craters as much as 300 feet in width and 50 to 70 in depth, and each shattered or buried beneath its heaped-up rim the garrison of some 150 yards of trench.51

It later describes the effects of these mines:

But enemy resistance was almost absent. Although much of the greater part of the German front-line garrison was outside the physical danger-zone of the mines, the moral shock was naturally terrific. The Australians, stumbling into the German trenches, still recognisable in the shell-torn ground, found a sprinkling of the enemy cowering there, mostly in the numerous rectangular concrete shelters which had formerly lain beneath the parapets but had been partly unearthed by the bombardment.52

The time frame for the Australian mining under Hill 60 is also explored on the Australian War Memorial’s site:

The 1st Australian Tunnelling Company had worked there since November 1916, extending shafts for the mines while sometimes encountering

German underground works. Finally, along the whole British front, 19 mines were exploded with a devastating effect and an impact that some said they felt in London. Many of the enemy were killed, and the survivors demoralised, even before the infantry attacked.\textsuperscript{53}

It is apparent from this time frame that O’Neill was engaged in this dangerous work. Unfortunately while there is no record in the 1\textsuperscript{st} Tunnelling Company’s war diary for October 1917, those for September and November shows them to be engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres, Passchendaele. O’Neill’s entry on the Australian War Memorial’s Roll of Honour records show that he is commemorated at Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium.\textsuperscript{54} He like many of the casualties of Passchendaele has no known grave.

Rail networks played a key role in the transportation of men and material on the Western Front. In addition to the heavy gauge of the main lines, a network of narrow, light gauge “ran from the marshalling yards of the main line French and Belgian railways right to the very limits of the Front Line”.\textsuperscript{55} There were two Indigenous men in the Rail Units (see Table 11 below)

### TABLE 11 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF RAIL UNITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} ALROC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} Australian Light Rail Operating Company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5th Railway Unit | 1 | This was a unit operating on broad gauge rail.

**SIGNALS**

Another area where Indigenous men served was in the Signals Units (Table 12). Ellis writes that “in a war of such intense artillery concentration few problems were more difficult than to maintain communication”. The Divisional Signal Company became expert in telegraphy, telephony, wireless and visual signalling in a range of trying conditions.

**TABLE 12 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF SIGNAL UNITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Division Signal Company</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Signals Squadron</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MEDICAL**

Medical Units were vital to the war effort. The Great War presented serious problems for those tasked with the maintenance of an efficient fighting force. The staggeringly high level of injuries caused by trench warfare and the ever present dangers posed by a range of diseases were but two of the hurdles which confronted the medical units of the AIF. Table 13 shows that three Indigenous men served in the Medical Units during the war.

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56 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 6.
57 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 6.
TABLE 13 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF MEDICAL UNITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14th AFA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14th Australian Field Ambulance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Army Medical Corps</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>As well as fighting personnel, there were other large Australian groups that participated in the First World War, and fought their own battles, such as the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Indigenous member of the Australian Army Medical Corps was Walter Coe. His records reveal a very interesting history. Walter Coe’s first enlistment into the AIF was on 27 January 1916. He gives his age as being 22 years and his occupation drover. Although allotted to the 17th Battalion, Coe was discharged 9 March 1916. Coe’s records provide the reason for his discharge; he was absent without leave.

Despite being discharged for having ‘an undesirable character’, Walter Coe re-enlisted on 9 June 1917. He gave the same personal details as he had in 1916, but his answer for Question 10 on his attestation papers asking if he had been discharged for negative reasons, was ‘No’. Walter Coe was soon again in conflict with the military. On this occasion allotted to the 6th Light Horse, he again went absent without leave, and was told by letter that unless he reported to Menangle Camp, he would be ‘classed as a deserter’ and a warrant would be issued for his arrest.\(^{58}\) Apparently Coe did not respond to this communication as his records show that he had been arrested by NSW Police. During his absence, from 28 September 1917 until 12 November 1917, Walter Coe appears to have “lost” the

\(^{58}\) NAA: B2455 COE W.
equipment issued to him (Figure 6 below). While this may appear a rather mundane entry, it does give an insight into just how a member of the AIF was equipped in the war. For example, there is listed “Housewife S.F”, not a partner, but a sewing kit which allowed the soldier to make repairs to his kit.

![Declaration of a Court of Inquiry held to inquire into Illegal Absence of Soldiers](image)

A letter dated 27 August 1917 from Cowra solicitors, Garden and Gilcreest, to army officials, partly explains Coe’s absence. It states that while in Cowra, he had been arrested for assault and given one month’s imprisonment in lieu of a fine of 104
£5. The letter goes on to ask that this be taken out of his pay so that he can return to camp. Coe’s record shows that the fine was paid, not by the army, but by his father Thomas.

Coe’s records show that on this occasion the army chose not to discharge him although his absence was far greater than the previous occasion. With Australia now involved in a war of attrition it seems as though every man counted. Despite this record, and having been in several units, Walter Coe was ultimately to serve overseas with his final unit being the Australian Army Medical Corps. Figure 7 which follows is an example of how the NAA records can assist the researcher. Usually one might expect to find this “summary” page.

![Figure 7. NAA: B2455 COE W](image)
While based in the United Kingdom, Walter Coe married Fanny Challenger. He was to serve until 14 May, 1920, which is a date much later than most in the AIF. A possible explanation can be found in correspondence between Army records and Repatriation which alludes to work with war graves.\textsuperscript{59} The records of Walter Coe reflect a complex human story, they show a man who obviously found the restraints of army life challenging, yet he enlisted twice. What happened in his life with Fanny Challenger is unknown; why he was also known as ‘Hayes’ is also a mystery. Perhaps one piece to the puzzle is offered in the following photograph taken 26 July 1919 (Figure 8). Is the unnamed ‘aboriginal serviceman’ Walter Coe?

\textsuperscript{59} NAA: B2455 COE applied for a service pension, Letter 26 March 1959 NSW Branch Commonwealth Repatriation Dept to AIF Base Records.
SERVICE CORPS

Fallen comrades in the AIF had to be buried, but they also had to be sustained while they were alive and the AIF had a service corps that supplied and prepared provisions. Eleven Indigenous men served in these units (see Table 14 below).

TABLE 14 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF THE SERVICE CORPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Army Service Corps</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Army Service Corps was responsible for the transport and provision of supplies and rations other than machinery or ammunition; this included the delivery of mail to the troops. This corps also provided additional transport resources for moving troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Divisional train</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A divisional train’s function was to carry the baggage of the units of the division and to form the last stage of bringing up supplies to the men at the front.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Divisional train</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Field Bakery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Division traffic unit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Indigenous man in the 5<sup>th</sup> Field Bakery was William Leane.\(^{60}\) Enlisting at Sydney on 22 September 1915 he was 19 years and 9 month of age and his occupation “Baker”.

PROVOSTS

One group routinely loathed by their fellow AIF comrades were the provosts.

There were two Indigenous provosts.

**TABLE 14 INDIGENOUS MEMBERS OF THE PROVOST CORPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Peter Stanley's *Bad characters: sex, crime, mutiny, murder and the Australian Imperial Force*[^61^] makes the point that men attached to base units, such as those at Horseferry Road, London, often attracted the hostility of fighting troops. He writes that the provosts, the AIF’s military police, were the most hated. To support this argument he cites the following soldiers’ song:

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Provost bastards, provost bastards,
May bad luck follow you;
May crabs as big as lobsters
Bite your balls red black and blue[^62^]
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An Indigenous provost was Arthur Ruttley, who enlisted at Narrabri on 17 August 1917[^63^]. A 22 year old farmer, Ruttley however, does not deserve the stereotype of the soldier who avoided frontline action. As Stanley writes APMs (Assistant

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[^61^]: Peter Stanley, *Bad characters: sex, crime, mutiny, murder and the Australian Imperial Force*, (Miller’s Point NSW, Murdoch Books 2010)
[^63^]: NAA: B2455, RUTTLEY ARTHUR HERBERT
Provost Marshals) had usually seen action, yet most “soldiers sardonically professed that ‘APM’ stood for ‘Absent from Pozieres and Messines’”.

Originally a member of the 13th Battalion, with the service number 3896, Ruttley was promoted to lance-corporal before being wounded at Pozières on 13 August 1916. His injuries, gunshot wounds to the cheek and left thigh, were serious enough for him to be evacuated to Britain. In 1917, still in Britain and perhaps as a result of his injuries, Ruttley was promoted to corporal and transferred to the Australian Provost Corps.

Recovering from his wounds Arthur Ruttley married Grace Meers at Gillingham, Kent on 2 June 1917. In 1918 he was promoted to sergeant and later mentioned in despatches ‘for valuable services rendered’ on 9 February 1920. He was discharged from the AIF on the relatively late date of 17 April 1920.

Arthur Ruttley’s file also includes correspondence between the Local Land Board Office in Moree and military officials. In this correspondence the Land Board Office is enquiring as to when Ruttley is returning to Australia and identifies him as a ‘selector’. This suggests that Arthur Ruttley was one of a very small number of Indigenous soldiers in the ‘Soldier Settlement’ scheme which operated after the war. As with many other Indigenous soldiers, Arthur Ruttley had a brother who also served and again as with many, a brother killed in action. Arthur Ruttley’s brother was William, service number 3897, 13th Battalion. William Ruttley, 27 years old, was firstly reported missing and later killed in action at Mouquet Farm, 29 August 1916. The war diary for the 13th Battalion reports the

64 Stanley, Bad Characters, 64.
65 NAA: B2455, RUTTLEY WILLIAM JOHN, 109
heavy casualties for its attack at Mouquet Farm on this date: ‘18 other ranks Killed, 4 officers and 95 other ranks Wounded, 3 officers and 31 other ranks Missing’. The ferocity of the fighting at Mouquet Farm is highlighted by Stanley who maintains that, ‘Ordered into the attack for the ruins of Mouquet Farm on 14 August, men of three battalions seem to have refused to go over the top’. Unfortunately while Stanley does not provide a source for this comment, it nevertheless conveys an insight into the brutality of the fighting which characterised the struggle for Mouquet Farm.

Before concluding this chapter detailing the numbers of Indigenous men serving in the various units of the AIF, two other groups of Indigenous servicemen should be mentioned: these are the nine recruits allotted to the reinforcement unit in late 1918, and the 152 Indigenous men who enlisted, but who were discharged early – often for racist reasons. This group will be the subject of the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that an interrogation of their service records demonstrates that Indigenous serviceman did play a significant role in Australian involvement in the Great War. As members of 59 of the 60 battalions in the AIF, they were present at the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 and later fighting in the Dardanelles. On the Western Front in 1916, they fought and died at the catastrophe of Fromelles and the slaughter at Pozières and Mouquet Farm on the Somme. In 1917 they were part of the tragedy that was First Bullecourt, the success at

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66 AWM: War diary 13th Battalion
Messines and later in what Stanley describes as ‘the protracted agony of Ypres’. In 1918 they fought in AIF divisions which helped stem the German Spring offensive at Villers-Bretonneux. When the tide then turned they were at the victories at Hamel and Amiens. Before an exhausted AIF was rested from the front, they helped in the victories at Mont St Quentin and the breeching of the Hindenburg Line. While their records tell us of their involvement, they provide limited insight into the cost. In Stanley’s view:

Combat on the Western Front, where most Australians served, exposed men to some of most horrific experiences imaginable. Men faced sights, sounds and sensations that shattered humanity and character. Every offensive killed men in hideous ways and wounded others so badly that many prayed for death rather than such terrible mutilation.

As the war in Afghanistan, Australia’s longest war, draws to a close, the issue of post-traumatic stress syndrome has been highlighted. One can only guess of its impact on veterans of the Great War. However it is an issue which makes Stanley’s observations even more frightening.

As their records reveal, Indigenous men served in many other units beside the infantry. The second largest group, 114, served in the light horse. As with their comrades in the infantry, Indigenous light horsemen first fought at the Dardanelles and then from 1916 the majority served in the Middle East. Although 34 Indigenous men served in the 11th Light Horse, the most in any unit, they

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68 Stanley, Bad Characters, 90.
69 Stanley, Bad Characters, 96.
receive no recognition in its unit history. This arguably is a symptom of a situation where Indigenous soldiers can be likened to ‘invisible warriors’.\textsuperscript{70}

Indigenous men have been shown to have served in: the artillery, engineers, signals, service corps, machine gun companies, tunnelling companies, rail units, the military police, medical units and veterinary sections. These were support units crucial to the ultimate professionalism of the AIF. Post-war Indigenous men served in the War Graves detachment and with the repatriation of German prisoners of war. In toto, with the inclusion of Laurence Sayers’ service in the RAN, the AIF records of the Indigenous servicemen reveal why they should no longer be the ‘invisible warriors’.

Despite the proven ability of Indigenous soldiers, not all who enlisted were accepted. While it might be argued that there were legitimate reasons for some of these rejections, a disturbing large proportion were judged ‘unsuitable’ for reasons of race. This aspect will be addressed in the next chapter, \textit{An Aboriginal Too Full Blooded for AIF}.

CHAPTER 4
“An Aboriginal too full blooded for AIF”

The aim of this chapter is to provide an insight into why 152 or 18% of those Indigenous men, who did enlist, did not go on to serve overseas. In the recruitment of any military force there will be always those who are given early discharges because of underlying medical conditions which would prejudice their ability to become effective soldiers. There are also those who through either illness or misadventure were to die before leaving Australia; those found to be under aged; and those who enlisted near the war’s end. However for Indigenous men there was also the hurdle of race. In examining each of these factors this chapter will have as its focus those found to be “unsuitable” because of their Aboriginality.

Remembering that as a result of the 1909 amendment to the Defence Act, no Indigenous man should have been accepted, the fact that 683 served overseas demonstrates that this regulation was not always followed. While this may in part be explained by some Indigenous men successfully “passing” as being European, there are at least two cases of “full blooded” Aborigines, in the language of the time, being accepted for service in the expeditionary force.\(^\text{1}\) While another factor must be the easing of restrictions for Indigenous men in 1917, it must be remembered that 219 enlisted in the years 1914 and 1915. The responsibility for determining whether a recruit was of “substantially European

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\(^\text{1}\) NAA: B2455, GRANT D
NAA: B2455, PUNCH WILLIAM JOSEPH
“origin” is also stated in the 1909 amendment: it lay with the medical authorities. The methods by which they did so are suggested in the records of some of those who were given early discharges. As the following analysis will show, it seems to have been largely based on a recruit’s appearance, although as demonstrated in the records of Joseph Wandin for example, as will be discussed below, this was not always the case.

Officially ethnicity was not recorded on a man’s attestation papers, yet in a large number of cases, 172 or 26%, there are references to a recruit’s Aboriginality. As will be demonstrated in spite of being discharged because of their Aboriginality, some men endeavoured to enlist a second time. The records, while not providing a complete picture, reveal an insight into the lives of these men. In addition they help establish that attitude to race was a major factor in recruiting for the AIF and a significant factor explaining why the story of Indigenous men in World War One has, until quite recently, been denied.

In an earlier chapter the ambiguity arising from the term ‘exemption’ in the 1909 amendments to the Defence Act 1903 was raised. At this point it is beneficial to recall Winegard’s argument that:

> Although these discrepancies could be used to argue in favour of the voluntary enlistment of Indigenes, the contemporary realisation was that they were neither of European descent nor citizens under the Australian Constitution; therefore, they would not have been considered relevant in the formation of defence or other federal policies, unless precisely mentioned.²

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² Winegard, ‘Indigenous Brothers in Arms during the First World War,’ 192.
The discussion proceeds by examining the seven reasons for early discharge of Indigenous soldiers as displayed in the records examined for this study. These reasons were: those who died before leaving Australia; those who were found to be underage; those who went AWL or deserted; those with medical reasons for discharge; those deemed to be unsuitable for soldiering; those who were enlisted ‘irregularly’; and finally those excluded on racial grounds. A number of short biographical accounts from the army records accompany each reason.

**REASONS FOR EARLY DISCHARGE**

1. **Those who died before leaving Australia**

Five Indigenous members of the AIF were to die before leaving Australia. Having large groupings of men is a feature of service in the military. When there are these concentrations the likelihood of the spread of disease is magnified, especially influenza as will be documented below. The records of the following men: Harry Bratt, George Brown, Joseph Clatworthy, John Delaney and Richard King reveal that each was to die as a result of illness contracted early in their time in the military.

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3 NAA: B2455, BRATT H F

4 NAA: B2455, BROWN G E

5 NAA: B2455, CLATWORTHY J

6 NAA: B2455, DELANEY J J

7 NAA: B2455, KING R

115
The first man, Harry Bratt, was an 18 year old shop assistant who enlisted on 22 September 1915. Although born at Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, he enlisted in Sydney. Harry Bratt’s war was ended by ‘Acute Military Tuberculosis’ on 16 January 1916. His time in the army was so brief that he had not even been allotted a service number. He was buried at the Salvation Army Cemetery, Rookwood, NSW, on 17 January 1916.

The second man who died before he had a chance to sail from Australia, George Brown, was one of 16 men who enlisted from either Flinders or Cape Barren Island, Tasmania; his attestation papers show that like Harry Bratt he was a young man. On enlistment he was 19 years 2 months. However, in one of the ironies of war, George Brown was to die in hospital at Hobart on 11 July 1916: the cause was meningitis. His physical description as shown on his records does however give an insight into how some Indigenous men were more easily able to enlist. George Brown’s complexion is described as being ‘fair’, his eyes ‘blue’ and hair ‘brown’. As has already been noted in the case of Henry Locke in the previous chapter, not all Indigenous men fit the dark skin and hair and brown eyes stereotype of Aboriginality.

Another Indigenous recruit, Joseph Clatworthy, was a 21 year old dairy farmer, who enlisted at Geraldton, Western Australia on 12 July 1918. A late enlistment, Joseph Clatworthy appears to have been a victim of the Spanish Flu. His records show that on 23 December 1918 he died in quarantine of ‘pneumonic influenza’. Shanks et al showed in their study of the Influenza pandemic in the AIF that: ‘individuals who are new members of dynamic, congregated groups (such as mobilization camps, recruit camps, and deployed military units) [were] likely to be
more susceptible to and may have more severe clinical expressions of acute respiratory infections in general. Clatworthy’s records reveal that his only relative was a sister, Lily, whose address was Swan Mission, Midland Junction, Western Australia. This gives some insight into Joseph Clatworthy’s Aboriginal heritage as the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission was run by the Anglican Church in Guildford (Middle Swan) from 1888 to 1920.

The fourth man in this group was John Delaney. Delaney, a horse breaker, was 33 years 10 months old when he enlisted at Brisbane on 16 June 1916. Not only was he older than the average, but at 5’ 9½” (177 cm) he was also taller. John Delaney’s records show that he died on 4 September 1916 at Enoggera, Queensland, from pneumonia caused by an earlier case of measles. While providing some of John Delaney’s history, his records also raise issues which are not resolved. They show that he was a married man with one child. However in correspondence from the secretary of Gympie RSL dated 3 April 1923, concerning Delaney’s next of kin, the comment is made that John Delaney’s wife remarried after his death and ‘then disappeared’. It also states that John Delaney had ‘no true child’. The writer maintained that his brother, Abby William Delaney, should be his next of kin. Abby Delaney’s case is documented later in the chapter.

Richard King, service number 579, was an original member of the 39th Battalion. His records reveal that in many ways he was anything but average: older at 34

years 9 months on his enlistment on 13 March 1916, he had an impressive physique - 5’ 11” (180 cm) in height, weight 188 pounds (85 kg) and an expanded chest measurement of 41½” (105 cm). Despite these impressive statistics, Richard King died at Ballarat on 15 May 1916 from heart failure caused by influenza.

2. Those who enlisted under age

The issues surrounding a recruit’s age have been discussed in earlier chapters and in the example of Percy Anderson, who seems to have enlisted when only fifteen, some men were able to enlist successfully despite being under age. However the records of the following four recruits demonstrate that when the authorities became aware of a man’s true age, they were soon discharged.

Willard Brown enlisted at Claremont, Tasmania, on 29 June 1916. He was born on Cape Barren Island and gave his age as 18 years. He was one of five Browns whose records show that they were born on Cape Barren Island and so it would seem likely that one of his relatives made Willard’s true age known to the recruiting officers. Willard Brown was soon to be discharged on 13 July 1916. His records give the reason that he had made a false attestation and reveal his true age as being 16 years 9 months. Willard Brown, being an impressive 6’ 1½”, (187 cm) in height suggests how at first he may have been able to mislead the recruiters.

Another Tasmanian, William Brown,\(^\text{13}\) was from Flinders Island and when enlisting on 20 July 1916, gave his age as being 18 years 2 months. His attestation papers show that he declared himself an ‘orphan’ in an apparent attempt to avoid demonstrating parental approval for his enlistment. However, William Brown was soon to be discharged, the reasons are recorded as providing ‘false statements on attestation: assumed name, underage and not an orphan’.

Although it is tempting to imagine that “Willard Brown” and “William Brown” might be the same person, their physical descriptions are quite different. Nevertheless, it does reinforce that the age shown on attestation can pose a problem, but ultimately it is the age the Army assumed to be correct.

The third Indigenous underage recruit was George Cain\(^\text{14}\) who enlisted at Singleton, NSW, on 20 August 1918 when he gave his age as being 21 years 3 months. For no clear reason, the recruiting officer has also recorded ‘half caste’ on Cain’s attestation papers. Apparently, uncertain about Cain’s age, the recruiting officer had it checked. This was to lead to his discharge. A possible reason for George Cain’s attempt to enlist is given in a letter from his father who states that he already had a son in the AIF, James Cain, who enlisted in 1917. Although the recruiting officer seems to have been acting in George Cain’s interests by checking his age, there seems no logical reason for referring to his race as ‘half caste’ and ‘N.B.B.S.’ (which seems to be a reference to ‘Not a British Born Subject’) except as another reason to reject him.


Figure 1. NAA: B2455, CAIN G. An example of authorities recording a recruit’s Aboriginality.

William Ralph\textsuperscript{15} enlisted on 27 October 1915 at Casula, NSW, and was intended to be one of the original members for the 19\textsuperscript{th} Battalion; however he was soon to be discharged on 14 December 1915 at his mother’s request. On enlistment William Ralph had given his age as being 22 years 9 months, but as his file shows, he was under age. Again the issue of a recruit’s real age is highlighted,
not only for the Army officials, but also for the researcher, although the real number of underage Indigenous men may never be known.

3. Desertion/Absent Without Leave (AWL)

The likelihood of a man being discharged as a result of an unauthorised absence seems largely to have been determined by date. Early in the war, when there was an embarrassment of numbers for recruiters, even a relatively short term absence might and did result in an early discharge. However, as casualties mounted and recruitment declined, illegal absence did not necessarily result in a man’s immediate discharge as will become clear later in the case of Thomas Davis. For example, the devastation for the AIF’s involvement on the Western Front is captured in Will Davies’s *The Boy Colonel*. In summarising the horrors of Pozières, he notes that “the Australians had taken nearly 16,800 casualties in only twelve days, far more in their than (sic) seven months on the Gallipoli Peninsula”.

Numbers such as these saw changes in recruitment for the AIF. The records for the following Indigenous men demonstrate some of these changes.

John Heland was one of the men who fell foul of the early abundance of recruits when he went missing for a day. Heland was 20 years 6 months when he enlisted at Cowra on 28 January 1916. However, he was soon to be discharged on 22 March 1916 as being ‘unlikely to become an efficient soldier’. His records show that he was absent without leave (AWL) for a mere twenty four hours, but it was

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apparently sufficient reason for his discharge. While his general conduct was recorded as being ‘bad’, there is nothing of a disciplinary nature in his records to explain it. It is also interesting to note that for his discharge certificate this has been changed to ‘fair’. John Heland was discharged before the AIF’s involvement on the Western Front and demonstrates that at this time even an absence of twenty four hours could and did lead to the end of a man’s time in the army.

Another man, Leslie Coe,\(^\text{18}\) was one of seven in his family to enlist for the War. He enlisted at Cowra, NSW, on 27 January 1916. He was soon to be discharged on 26 April 1916 as ‘being unlikely to become an efficient soldier’. The underlying reason, as with Heland, was being absent without leave. For Leslie Coe it was a period of ten days. Perhaps army life was not to the liking of Leslie Coe for he was arrested by the civil police at his home town Cowra, NSW. As with Heland, Coe’s discharge came before Fromelles and Pozières 1916, and the attendant horrific casualty figures. The case of his brother, Walter, was highlighted in Chapter 2 and in many ways is evidence of a far worse record; but with a later enlistment reflects the changes regarding illegal absence which were to come later in the war regarding service in the AIF.

Thomas Davis\(^\text{19}\) was an Indigenous man who, as with Walter Coe, enlisted twice for the AIF. On the first occasion it was on 27 January 1916 at Cowra, NSW. However he was soon to be discharged on 19 April 1916. Originally intended as


a reinforcement for the 18\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, Davis’ ‘services were no longer required’ as he was judged to have deserted.

The background for the disciplinary system employed by the AIF is provided by Peter Stanley who notes that the authorities in Australia decided upon the British Army Act as their model.\textsuperscript{20} An insight into how this applied in a real world setting is provided in an appendix to Putkowski and Sykes’ \textit{Shot at Dawn}.\textsuperscript{21} Written by a ‘Military Lawyer’ the guide, ‘Military Law in Tables’, was obviously intended to provide practical assistance for those who had the task of implementing the provisions of the Act.\textsuperscript{22} It is soon apparent from the guide that desertion was seen as a far more serious offence than being absent without leave. In fact desertion while on active service had the very real possibility of the death sentence.\textsuperscript{23} Putkowski and Sykes write that during the war 312 members of the British Army were executed by firing squad, the majority for desertion.\textsuperscript{24} However as Stanley argues, a sentence of death for Australian troops had to be ‘ratified by the Governor-General: effectively by the Australian government’.\textsuperscript{25} Consequently no Australian serviceman was to be executed during the war, but Putkowski and Sykes stress that the British commander in France, Field Marshall Haig, made ‘strong representations for powers to inflict the extreme penalty upon Australian soldiers’.\textsuperscript{26} Although Davis’ desertion occurred soon after enlistment and so while he was still in Australia, it would seem most unlikely to have resulted in a sentence

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{20} Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 18.
\bibitem{22} Putkowski and Sykes, \textit{Shot at Dawn}, 343.
\bibitem{23} Putkowski and Sykes, \textit{Shot at Dawn}, 348.
\bibitem{24} Putkowski and Sykes, \textit{Shot at Dawn}, 11.
\bibitem{25} Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 20.
\bibitem{26} Putkowski and Sykes, \textit{Shot at Dawn}, 18.
\end{thebibliography}
of death, there were several cases of Indigenous men who did desert while on active service and this is an aspect which will be examined in greater detail in a following chapter. Reflecting the seriousness of a charge of desertion the records often reveal that it was downgraded to having been absent without leave.

Despite a warrant having been issued, Thomas Davis seems to have evaded capture and then successfully reenlisted in the AIF on 19 October 1916. On this occasion the recruiting officer has made the annotation ‘Aboriginal descent’ on his attestation papers. On arrival in France, Thomas Davis was allotted to the 55th Battalion with the service number 3132. His records go on to reveal a number of minor infringements, including as might be expected if previous behaviour was anything to go by, being absent without leave. Davis was wounded in action on 3 September 1918 when the war diary for the 55th shows them to be fighting near Peronne, France. These injuries resulted in Thomas Davis’ return to Australia, 5 March 1919. Later, as did many returned men, Thomas Davis wrote to Army Records for a copy of his service, which reveals no reference to his first enlistment.

John Clarke enlisted on 8 August 1917 at Melbourne. He was married and 23 years 7 months on enlistment. His records show that originally intended as reinforcement for the 21st Battalion, he was later discharged before leaving Australia. Clarke’s training records indicate that he had the makings of a fine

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Peronne, an ancient French town at the junction of the Somme and Cologne Rivers, was the objective of an intensive series of operations mounted by the Australian Corps between 29 August and 2 September 1918.
soldier. To find completed training records is quite rare in AIF files and Clarke's reveal that for example, his musketry results are those for a 'first class shot', nearly those for a 'marksman'. However, where his records are less revealing are the reasons for his 'desertion'. It seems this, combined with uncured VD, lead to him being discharged on 5 December 1918 (see Figures 2 and 3 below).
Curtis Ford is another Indigenous man who enlisted twice for the AIF. On 6 August 1915, he enlisted at Brisbane, originally allotted to the 15th Battalion; he was discharged on 11 March 1916 as a deserter. However, Curtis Ford was to reenlist on 31 January 1916 and incredibly answered that he was a serving member of the AIF. Somehow his desertion does not seem to have adversely affected his time in the military and no consequences for his desertion appear

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anywhere in his records. Curtis Ford was sent to Egypt, but returned to Australia on 17 August 1916 suffering from tuberculosis.

Joe Goolagong was a 19 year old drover, who enlisted at Cowra on 28 January 1916.\(^3\) Originally allocated to the 17\(^{th}\) Battalion, he was discharged on 26 April 1916 as being ‘absent without leave’, although ‘unlikely to become an efficient soldier’ was listed elsewhere.

William Homer also enlisted twice for the AIF.\(^3\) On the first occasion it was at Orange, NSW, on 25 October 1915, when he was allotted to “B” Company, 13\(^{th}\) Battalion. However, owing to having been AWL, he was discharged on 12 February 1916. William Homer then reenlisted at Dubbo, NSW on 18 October 1916. His attestation papers show that he declared having been discharged earlier and why. That he was able to successfully reenlist with this history, suggests that the casualty rates being experienced on the Western Front meant the recruiters were willing to overlook these earlier indiscretions. William Homer now a member of the 3\(^{rd}\) Battalion spent his time abroad in England where a series of medical problems resulted in him being returned to Australia and discharged on 27 December 1917. So Homer belongs both in the discharged due to AWL category and those who were discharged for medical reasons.

4. Indigenous soldiers discharged for medical reasons

At this point it is necessary to differentiate between those whose medical condition was such as to explain their discharge from those who were medically discharged because of Aboriginality. The following men were most likely discharged for a physical condition, not their race.

The first was Frederick Barber who joined the AIF on the 27 November 1915, at the age of 38 years. However he was to be discharged on 5 February 1916. In Barber’s case the reason is clearly given: he was medically unfit. Frederick Barber suffered from epilepsy. In this case his race was definitely not an issue. However race may have been an issue in the case of Shaw Briar who enlisted late in the War on 6 May 1918. He was 19 years. On 24 May he was discharged because of ‘an unsuitable physique’. There is nothing in Shaw Briar’s records to suggest that race played a role in the decision to discharge him. Briar may have been genuinely medically unfit as his medical report describes his physical development as being only ‘fair’. Shaw Briar represents the case of an Indigenous man whose race may have been an issue, ‘unsuitable physique’ is a term that was often linked to Aboriginality, but in this case there is no clear evidence to definitely argue that this is the case.

Arthur Bundie was a late enlistment, 28 May 1918. He was 20 years old. Bundie spent a considerable amount of his time in hospital suffering VD and was discharged, at his own request, still uncured on 16 December 1918. The records

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of many Indigenous soldiers, like other soldiers in the AIF, show VD as a major concern.

Cornelius Coombes was 28 years 6 months and married when he enlisted on 20 June 1917. Coombes was discharged on 5 October 1917. Again the cause is medical, but in Cornelius Coombes’ case, it appears to be the result of a pre-existing condition. Bernard Enright has only one page in his file. It shows that he enlisted at Narrabri on 14 January 1916. He was discharged on 17 January 1916 for medical reasons.

Arthur Everingham is the first of three brothers who enlisted in the AIF, but who were all given early discharges. Arthur joined on 4 March 1918. As with his brothers he did so at Parramatta, NSW, on 28 March 1918. His discharge is attributed to ‘unsuitable physique’.

Alfred Everingham as with his brother Arthur, enlisted at Parramatta, but a little earlier, 4 March 1918. He was older, 38 years, and a widower with two minor children. He was discharged for medical reasons, namely for ‘defective vision’. Richard Everingham enlisted on 24 June, 1918 also at Parramatta. He was discharged 9 September 1918 on medical grounds as his physique was judged

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to be ‘below standard’.\textsuperscript{39} Although Alfred Everingham’s discharge is supported by medical evidence, that for his brothers is less clear cut and so race, is a distinct possibility.

Harry Harper joined the AIF on 25 June 1917 and was originally intended for the 10\textsuperscript{th} reinforcements of the 52\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion.\textsuperscript{40} However he was discharged as ‘medically unfit for further service’ on 10 August 1917. There is nothing in Harry Harper’s file to suggest the nature of the medical issue resulting in his discharge. His files describe his character as being ‘good’. This is a pattern which can be seen in men who were discharged because of their Aboriginality and so it cannot be discounted in explaining Harper’s discharge. Later correspondence in his records however provides an insight into how many years later a man’s service in the AIF could be shrouded in some mystery. By 1963 the RSL had come to believe that Harry Harper had enlisted in the AIF in 1914 and had served in the Light Horse.

5. ‘Not likely to make an efficient soldier’

Men who were classified as ‘not likely to make an efficient soldier’ present something of a dilemma as the reason may well have been their Aboriginality, but with no direct evidence to support, there is only circumstantial evidence such as the physical description of the recruits.


130
One such man was Henry Alberts.\textsuperscript{41} Alberts enlisted at Geelong on 21 June 1916. He was born at Lake Condah, Victoria, and on enlistment his age was 21 years 5 months. He was discharged on 26 September 1916. His initial medical examination found him fit for active service and his conduct sheet is unblemished. Yet Henry Alberts was discharged for being ‘not likely to be an efficient soldier’. There are no reasons given in the records for this decision. However, the real reason may have been Albert’s Aboriginality for his records are very similar to others who were discharged because of their race.

Another was W.J. Austin who was discharged at the same time as Alberts.\textsuperscript{42} His records are almost an exact copy of Alberts’. He too was born at Lake Condah, originally was passed fit for active service and had an unblemished conduct record. His attestation papers described him as having a ‘dark’ complexion, ‘brown’ eyes and ‘black’ hair. His application to enlist was completed at Warrnambool, Victoria, on 22 May 1916. These facts correspond exactly with Henry Alberts, even their occupations are the same: ‘woodcutter’.

Evidence which suggests race as an underlying reason is supported by Lake Condah being known as a Mission Station. Begun in 1867 as an Anglican Mission it was closed in 1919 when it came under government control.\textsuperscript{43} In Chapter 2 maps showed where Indigenous men were born and where they enlisted. From these it can be argued that in most cases they varied and a possible reason was enlistment was easier if one was not associated with a predominantly Aboriginal

\textsuperscript{43} “Lake Condah”, http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/lake_condah/ (3 February 2014)
settlement. As with the early example of Joseph Wandin, being associated with a predominantly Aboriginal settlement seems to bear a strong correlation with a man’s enlistment being terminated. It is a pattern which holds true for later men in this chapter.

Eric Angie was 24 years 4 months when he enlisted on 27 January 1915. His enlistment was at Keswick, South Australia. On 15 June 1916 he was discharged ‘not likely to become an efficient soldier’. His attestation papers show his place of birth as ‘Point Pierce (sic), South Australia’. Point Pearce had previously been named Yorke’s Peninsula Aboriginal Mission. As with Alberts and Austin no reason is given for his discharge, but there is the shared link with an Indigenous background. Being an early enlistment it might be thought that with the passage of time things may have been easier for his brother Frank who enlisted on 2 September 1917. However this was not to be the case: Frank Angie was also discharged soon after joining. On 16 October 1917 his records show that he was ‘Discharged medically unfit, not due to own misconduct’. There is nothing in Frank Angie’s records which explains what led to this decision except that he too shows his place of birth as being Point Pearce.

6. ‘Having been irregularly enlisted’

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44 NAA: B2455, ANGIE E,
46 NAA: B2455, ANGIE F,
The following men, Harry Baker and the Barambah recruits,\textsuperscript{47} besides being found to have been ‘irregularly enlisted’, also enlisted at the same location, Barambah. The term ‘Having been irregularly enlisted’ appears to be a bureaucratic euphemism for discharging an Indigenous man on the basis of race. Thom W. Blake argues that the Barambah settlement became the model for other settlements and typified how the Act [Aboriginal Protection Act, 1897] operated in Queensland.\textsuperscript{48} Today Barambah Settlement is known as Cherbourg and of its history Blake is scathing, and it is worth quoting him at length on the functions of Barambah:

One of the major functions of the settlement was to serve as a place for segregating Aborigines from whites. They were forcibly removed to the settlement to be out of sight and out of mind. The removals program also functioned as a means of disciplining and controlling inmates once on the settlement. Another major function of the settlement was to establish cultural hegemony over the inmates. Vigorous attempts were made, on the one hand, to inculcate the inmates with the values of white capitalist society, and on the other, to destroy their cultural ties and identity. The school and dormitories were the principal means of achieving this goal. Ironically, many of the techniques used, particularly in the dormitories, were anything but civilised. A third major role of the settlement was to serve as a labour depot. Despite supposedly being created to isolate Aborigines from whites, inmates were sent out to work as labourers and domestic servants. The settlement served as a source of cheap and dependable labour for capital.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} NAA: B2455, BAKER H.

\textsuperscript{48} Thom W. Blake, A dumping ground : Barambah Aboriginal settlement 1900-40,

\textsuperscript{49} Blake, A dumping ground : Barambah Aboriginal settlement 1900-40,
The situation that existed in Queensland has been examined in depth in Chapter 1; however it seems somewhat ironic that it was viewed as a suitable recruiting ground for the AIF. David Huggonson has also discussed this recruitment and writes, “Passport size photographs of these men in Army uniform which appeared in the Queenslander illustrate that they had a predominance of ‘Aboriginal blood’.” Interestingly in Harry Baker’s file, there is a copy of what seems to correspond to Huggonson’s description. While unfortunately the image is not of the highest quality, it does nevertheless support Huggonson; many of the faces appear to be those of First Australians (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4. NAA: B2455 BAKER H

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On the records of these recruits from Barambah the name, David J Garland JP, is prominent, usually his signature being that of the attesting officer. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has the following entry:

David John Garland (1864-1939), clergyman, was born on 4 October 1864 in Dublin, son of James Garland, librarian, and his wife Mary, née Saunders. Trained for the law, he migrated with his parents to New South Wales, and in 1889 joined the Church of England ministry.\(^{51}\)

Later in his entry there is information which helps locate Garland within Barambah.

A chaplain to the volunteers in Western Australia and Queensland from 1896, Garland volunteered at the outbreak of World War I. Senior army camp chaplain in Queensland in 1914-17; in 1915 he founded and was director of the Soldiers Help Society. Co-founder with Colonel A. J. Thynne of the Compulsory Service League, he was also honorary organizing secretary for recruiting in Queensland.\(^{52}\)

When a check is made of Garland’s signature on his attestation papers it can be seen to be the same as that for the attesting officer for the Barambah recruits.

Harry Baker’s records are quite revealing of the measures some such as Garland pursued in recruiting for the AIF. Indigenous men, who as Blake had observed, were previously out of sight and out of mind, were now “encouraged to enlist”. Baker was enlisted on 14 June 1917 at a time when restrictions on the recruitment of Aboriginal men had been relaxed and when in a circular, 11 May 1917, cited

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\(^{52}\) Mansfield, “Garland, David John (1864-1939)”
by Huggonson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland seems actively to promote the recruitment of Indigenous men:

Advice has been received from the recruiting committee that half-castes will now be accepted for service in the Australian Expeditionary Forces provided they satisfy the medical officer that one parent was of European origin. As the enlistment of full-blood Aboriginals is also being advocated, will you, as soon as possible, ascertain and advise me of the probable number of full-bloods and half-castes, separately, under 45 years, who would be prepared to enlist within the next three months.53

Secondly, Harry Baker’s attestation form suggests that as he could only make his mark; he was illiterate and therefore unable to read what the officials were recording. His name as originally recorded was Harry ‘Dago’. In Australia, the word, ‘Dago’ is an extremely derogatory term usually applied to people from Southern Europe; it seems likely to have become associated with Baker because of his race. It is hardly a term which bestows any dignity on Harry Baker. That it was recorded at all does not reflect well on the recruiting officials.

Fortunately all the Indigenous men recruited at this time were later discharged ‘for having been irregularly recruited’.

Charles (Charlie) Morgan as with the other Barambah men who enlisted in May 1917 was found to have been irregularly recruited and quickly discharged, but a mere two months later he was more successful when he joined at Maryborough, Queensland. One noticeable difference between his two records is a change of permanent address. While residing in Barambah may have been a hindrance; Ipswich, Queensland was not. Once overseas he was attached to the 25\textsuperscript{th} Battalion with the service number 3679. The 25\textsuperscript{th}, as part of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Brigade, was heavily involved in the attack on Morlancourt\textsuperscript{54} on 11 June 1918 when Morgan

\textsuperscript{54} AWM: War diary, 25\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, 
was wounded in action, a shell wound to his right calf. The heavy casualties for
the battalion in this action were: killed – 2 officers and 41 other ranks; wounded
– 10 officers and 146 other ranks; missing – 8 other ranks. Of this attack the
*Official History* claims ‘Success was complete and it was beginning to be said
that the attack could have gone much further’. Whilst on leave in the UK Charlie
Morgan was awarded 100 days’ detention for being AWL for approximately five
weeks. He was discharged from the AIF 13 May 1919. The simple change of
address had resulted in a major impact on Charlie Morgan’s life.

In total fifteen men were recruited at Barambah, given quick discharges and
their files marked ‘Having been irregularly enlisted’. It is an incident which reflects

55 AWM: War diary, 25th Battalion,
56 Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Volume VI,
57 NAA: B2455, BECKETT B,
NAA: B2455, CABBO DANIEL,
NAA: B2455, CHRISTIE W,
NAA: B2455, DICK O,
NAA: B2455, DOUGLAS M,
NAA: B2455, HILL C,
NAA: B2455, HUBBARD R,
NAA: B2455, MITCHELL BISMARK,
NAA: B2455, MONSELL HENRY,
NAA: B2455, MOSS SUNNY,
that Australia in 1917 was finding it extremely difficult to maintain the numbers required by its forces in the field. This exercise to recruit from an Aboriginal mission suggests just how desperate the situation had become. It seems regardless of age or marital status, there were some who would do anything in their power to meet the numbers required. It might also be argued that support for Blake’s point about Barambah being a ‘dumping ground’ is reflected in their records. For the majority, Barambah was not their place of birth. Another interesting insight into the Barambah recruits is provided by David Huggonson who writes:

Some [Indigenous soldiers] joined up out of some bizarre sense of patriotic duty to white Australia as illustrated by a report in the Wide Bay and Burnett News. At a recruitment procession held in Maryborough in December 1917, Aborigines from Barambah Aboriginal Reserve dressed in tribal paraphernalia carried a placard which reportedly read 'By cripes! I'll fight for white Australia'.

Edmund Coochey enlisted at Maryborough, Queensland on 11 July 1917. He was married and had a two month old son. Edmund Coochey’s records show that he was discharged on 27 July 1917 as having been ‘irregularly enlisted’. Later this irregularity is explained, Coochey ‘had no white parentage’. His is a clear case of how the restriction regarding race had been applied. It also shows clearly

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NAA: B2455, PAGEL WILLIAM,

NAA: B2455, RILEY ARTHUR,

Huggonson, “Dark Diggers of the A.I.F” 356.

NAA: B2455, COOCHEY E,

139
that in line with the provisions of the Defence Act, this was to be done by the medical examiners.

Figure 6. NAA: B2455 COOCHEY E

Although clearly, Edmund Coochey could be included in the following group he has been kept with those who were ‘irregularly recruited’ to illustrate how this phrase seems to be a bureaucratic “code” for excluding a man on the basis of race. The final reason for Indigenous men being discharged before going overseas to fight is because of their race.
7. Race

On 25 June 1917 recruiters visited Koonibba Mission Station, South Australia and enlisted five Indigenous men: Edmund Bilney, George Burgoyne, Willie Coleman, Dick Davey and Ernest Wilson. Koonibba was a mission established by the Lutheran Church on land acquired in 1899 west of Ceduna, South Australia. At first the early discharge of each of these men might be attributable to the possibility of distrust of the German influence among them arising from the mission having been established by Lutherans. Indeed in his chapter entitled, “Patriotism and Paranoia”, Robson writes that ‘in November 1917 the Lower House in South Australia passed a Bill prohibiting the teaching of the German language in primary schools and closing forty-nine Lutheran primary schools’. While one may agree with Robson that paranoia was rife in Australia in 1917, the men’s records however reveal another reason: race. As their records are very similar, an examination of one man, Edmund Bilney,

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66 Robson, The First AIF, 151-152.
reveals the process by which Indigenous men could be found to be unsuitable for service in the AIF.

On enlistment Edmund Bilney was 21 years. Following his initial medical examination he was found fit for active service and his conduct was recorded as being ‘good’, yet Edmund Bilney was medically discharged on 5 September 1917. The reasons for his discharge are also clearly stated: Edmund Bilney had a ‘physique too poor for military service, [he was] an aboriginal too full blooded’ (see Figures 7 and 8 below). His is a clear example for how the provisions of the Defence Act regarding enlistment by First Australians could be put into place. It was a process dutifully followed for the other Koonibba recruits.

Robson highlights the bitterness that gripped Australia in 1917 and argues that the system of voluntary enlistment was totally unable to meet the numbers required to sustain the AIF. Noting that the casualty figures for Messines, Bullecourt and Third Ypres were 55,000 he wrote, ‘the AIF could only be kept together as a national force if adequate reinforcements came. They were not coming’. Nevertheless as the case of the Koonibba men unequivocally demonstrates, a man initially found to be fit for active service and of ‘good’ conduct could have his enlistment terminated merely for looking ‘[an Aboriginal] too full blooded’.

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67 Robson, The First AIF, 166.
Figure 7. NAA: B2455 BILNEY E
Figure 8. NAA: B2455 BILNEY E
Robert Bond was another Indigenous man clearly discharged because of his race in the troubled year, 1917. As with the Koonibba men there are no euphemisms or ambiguities clouding the reason for his discharge. On enlistment at Maryborough, Queensland on 5 July 1917, he was 26 years 1 month. He was married and a stockman. As with the Koonibba men, Bond’s initial medical inspection found him fit for active service. However a later ‘detailed’ medical report was to overturn this decision because he was ‘not substantially of European origin’. Again a decision made on the recruit’s appearance as Robert Bond is described as being ‘very dark and of aboriginal type’. The report contains a question which asks if the disability is likely to be permanent. The answer provided is telling, ‘no disability’. Robert Bond was discharged on 21 September 1917.

Figure 9. NAA: B2455 BOND ROBERT 20518

John Cubbo is another case of an Indigenous man who enlisted twice for the AIF. On the first occasion it was on 31 August 1917. Younger than average at 21 years 6 months, he was however taller at 5’ 9½” (177 cm) and had an expanded chest measurement of 35½” (90 cm). However, despite these impressive traits, Cubbo’s appearance seems to have been a telling factor leading to the medical examiners’ reasons for finding him unsuitable for the AIF; for while ‘not absolute black, [he] shows some sign of white blood’, he was still discharged. The reason given in the report for the question: ‘Date of Origin of Disability’ was ‘birth’.

Despite this rebuff, John Cubbo on 1 June 1918 again volunteered; on this occasion successfully. In completing his attestation, John Cubbo made no reference to his earlier attempt. He went on to serve abroad with the 5th Light Horse with the service number 3121A. Following service in the Middle East John Cubbo was discharged, for a second time, on 20 August 1918. John Cubbo’s example clearly demonstrates the negative racism that many Indigenous recruits faced. What in many ways is most remarkable about him is that he was willing to enlist again.

Norman Daley enlisted on 8 February, 1916 at Dubbo, NSW. As with John Cubbo, Norman Daley was a younger man, being 21 years on enlistment, but physically above the average: 5’ 8” (173cm) in height with an expanded chest measurement of 36” (91 cm). For some reason the attesting officer has recorded

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him as being a ‘naturalized British subject’. At first allocated to the 46th Battalion, Norman Daley was discharged on 29 February 1916. The reason is shown on his records as ‘Not substantially European origin’. Enlisting before the AIF’s time on the Western Front may help explain his discharge, although as the case of John Cubbo demonstrates, this was not always the practice.

Harry Grant enlisted at Grafton, NSW, on 21 April 1917. Significantly older than the average at 35 years, he was a farm hand. Being described as ‘Full blood Aboriginal’ on his attestation papers it might not then surprise to find him being discharged on 9 August 1917 for being ‘not [of] substantial European origin’. Harry Grant’s detailed Medical Board’s final comments shows that his discharge was due to a condition which existed prior to his enlistment, ‘Parentage. Aboriginal.’ It goes on to record that this was ‘finally disposed of’ by ‘discharge’. While his medical report also says of Grant, ‘This man is flabby with enlargement of liver – and bad teeth,’ the reason given for his discharge was one of race.

No relation to Harry above, Richard Grant enlisted at Cowra on 13 March 1918. Although from the perspective of 2015 this was relatively late in the war, at the time the war’s outcome was still very unsure. Grant’s attestation papers record that he was 26 years 2 months and a horse trainer. Originally found fit for active service he was later re-examined when his file shows the medical officer has written: ‘flat feet – Aboriginal’. He was discharged on 6 April 1918.

On his attestation papers, another Indigenous man, Allan Jenkins, was described as being ‘very dark, aboriginal’. He was a 28 year old labourer born in Singleton, NSW who had enlisted for the AIF at West Maitland, NSW, on 6 June 1916. Again the records are evidence that a man’s appearance could be used as medical criteria. The description which led to his discharge on 22 May 1916 was that he was ‘not substantially of European origin’.

In the records for Allan Jenkins confirming the reason for his discharge, there is a reference to another Indigenous man who was discharged as being ‘not substantially of European origin’: Lawerence (sic) McKenzie. Older than average, 28 years, McKenzie was also physically larger at 5’ 11” (180 cm), 175 pounds (79 kg) and expanded chest measurement of 40” (102 cm). More telling than these statistics was the comment made when describing Lawrence McKenzie’s complexion: ‘Aboriginal’. Prior to the appalling losses of the Western Front, the authorities did not seem to require the services of men such as these.

William Talbott, also known as, Thomas Talbott, enlisted on 3 January 1917. On enlistment he gave his age as being 18 years I month and his occupation as labourer. Despite his initial medical examination being positive, Talbott was discharged on 4 January 1917 for not being of ‘substantial European origin’.

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Abby Delaney enlisted for the AIF on 16 October 1916. His brother John who died before leaving Australia has been discussed earlier in this chapter. His enlistment papers show that he was 37 years and four months of age and his occupation sailmaker. They also reveal that it was his second attempt. The reason he gave for the earlier rejection was for ‘medical reasons’. Possibly this was because of his Aboriginality, for on the second occasion he appears to be masking his true heritage by declaring that he had been born in New Zealand. Despite success on this second occasion, Abby Delaney on 16 January 1917 was given an early discharge. On this occasion it had much to do with race, as is obvious in the following document.

Figure 10. NAA: B2455, DELANEY A W
To conclude this insight into how a man’s appearance could determine his efficiency as a soldier is the case of William Chatfield. At Mudgee, NSW, on 14 March 1918 Chatfield enlisted in the AIF. Although only 21 he was close to the average: 5’ 6½” (169 cm) in height, 132 pounds (60 kg) in weight with an expanded chest measurement of 33¾” (86 cm). His appearance was similar to many other Indigenous men: complexion ‘dark’, eyes ‘brown’ and hair ‘black’. As with the majority of Indigenous recruits his religious denomination was ‘Church of England’. However on reporting to Victoria Barracks in Sydney on 15 March Chatfield was found to be unfit due to his ‘physique being unfit for English and continental climate’. His medical board had arrived at this decision because of ‘colour’.

![Image of medical certificate]

Figure 11. NAA: B2455, CHATFIELD W W

However William Chatfield was not to be deterred, on 9 June 1918 he tried again, this time at Coonabarabran, NSW. On 17 August 1918 he embarked from Sydney for the Middle East. Now Trooper 57312, in the 1st Light Horse, his military ability resulted in his promotion to ‘Driver’. He returned to Australia and was discharged 8 May 1919.

Figure 12. AWM Collection; P01246.001. Wedding portrait of William Wallace Chatfield and his bride, Mary Jane Cain. Coonabarabran, 1920. Public Domain.

**Conclusion**

Of the cases highlighted in this chapter a recurring theme has been that many Indigenous men were discharged because of their appearance: their
Aboriginality. This often seemed at odds with their physical abilities as reflected on their attestation papers. Sometimes it seems to coincide with a time when the need for recruits was less demanding, but as has been shown, this was not always the case. For those whose discharge was due to race the procedure was in line with the 1909 amendments to the Defence Act. Discharge orders were carried out by medical authorities where it seems to have been based mainly on a recruit’s appearance, for example, whether or not he was of an ‘Aboriginal type’. While for other Indigenous men a link between a known Aboriginal location, such as a mission, also presented a hurdle. Nevertheless, the fact that nearly 700 Indigenous men did serve overseas demonstrates that it was a practice not always followed. While some Indigenous recruits did not fit the stereotype of a ‘coloured man,’ some did and yet were enlisted even in 1914 and 1915 well before the Armageddon that was the Western Front. In the next chapter the focus will centre on those who did serve overseas and in doing so paid the supreme sacrifice.
CHAPTER 5

Indigenous Sacrifice 1914-19

It is impossible to think of the Great War and not address the concept of “sacrifice”. It is an abstract concept captured in the words of then Prime Minister, Paul Keating for the funeral of Australia’s Unknown Soldier on Remembrance Day, 1993, at the Australian War Memorial (AWM), Canberra:

The Unknown Soldier honours the memory of all those men and women who laid down their lives for Australia. His tomb is a reminder of what we have lost in war and what we have gained. We have lost more than 100,000 lives, and with them all their love of this country and all their hope and energy. We have gained a legend: a story of bravery and sacrifice and, with it, a deeper faith in ourselves and our democracy, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be Australian. It is not too much to hope, therefore, that this Unknown Australian Soldier might continue to serve his country - he might enshrine a nation's love of peace and remind us that in the sacrifice of the men and women whose names are recorded here there is faith enough for all of us.¹

These are words which capture how the human cost suffered by the nation in times of war has helped shape the creation of Australian identity. This nexus between sacrifice and nation is embodied in the fabric of the AWM. The return of an unknown soldier from the Western Front while considered as early as the

1920s was not realised until 1993. His return is clear evidence of the bond between Australian identity and the blood shed during the Great War.

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Figure 1. AWM Canberra: The tomb of the Unknown Soldier, May 2014.
The AWM is a very powerful visual metaphor. Situated in the national capital, the Memorial’s importance in the national psyche is reinforced by its location: facing the Australian parliament. Its design, as can be seen in Figure 2, is similar to that of a Byzantine cathedral; therefore arguably a design intended to create a sense of reverence and sacredness in the visitor. It is a building described by James Brown in *Anzac’s Long Shadow* as one of “stark beauty”, one which “commands reverence and contemplation”. At its heart is the Commemorative Area, a space described on the AWM’s website as being surrounded by “the names of the fallen on the bronze panels of the Roll of Honour” (Figure 3). On these panels are the names of “102,000 Australian men and women who died serving their country

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and to those who served overseas and at home”. For Brown it is “the most sacred place in the most sacred building in our capital”.


7 Brown, Anzac’s Long Shadow, 10.

60,000 of these names belong to men of the First AIF, 18.75% of those who served abroad. Included in these stark statistics are the names of 124 Indigenous diggers. For Indigenous men they represent a similar proportion, 17.4% of those who served abroad (five had died before embarkation). Yet, despite this human cost, the role of Aboriginal men in the war has not, until recently, been acknowledged.
In an attempt to address this aspect this chapter will provide details for each of the 124 men who lost his life during the course of the war, and by highlighting the experiences of some, it will argue that Indigenous men played a role in many of the battles central to the creation of AIF’s formidable reputation. In the following chart (Figure 5) the deaths suffered by Indigenous men reflects both the changes which occurred over time with Indigenous recruitment and the frightful cost to the AIF of its time on the Western Front. These are statistics which closely mirror those for the AIF as a whole (see Figure 6 below). The rates for 1917 and 1918 are the years of greatest loss. That these coincided with falling rates of enlistment also helps explain why restrictions on Indigenous recruitment were eased. For
example, they provide some of the likely reasons as to why David Garland, Chapter 4, was desperately attempting to recruit at Barambah.

![Figure 5: Deaths per year 1915-1919 for Indigenous diggers.](image)

![Figure 6: Casualties and enlistments for the AIF as a percentage during World War One.](image)
Indigenous Sacrifice 1914-19

124 Indigenous men were to die during the Great War: 75 or 61%, were killed in action (KIA); 29 or 23%, died of wounds (DOW) and 20 or 16%, from disease (DOD). The majority perished on the Western Front: 68 or 55% in France and 32 or 26%, in Belgium. For the Dardanelles’ campaign, seven died at Gallipoli and one in Egypt. Two died during the campaigns in the Middle East, five in hospitals in the United Kingdom and a further six in Australia. During their evacuation to Australia, two died at sea. The age at time of death for Indigenous men is recorded in the following graph.

The youngest was Geoffrey Archer, an 18 year old mariner, who was KIA in France in April 1917. The oldest, 42 year old shearer, Thomas Bowen, who was KIA in Belgium in September 1917. The majority, 83 or 67% were aged between 18 and 29. 12 were aged 22, while 11 were aged 19 and 23.

The data for Indigenous members largely reflects that of the First AIF as a whole. In the following table (Table 1) statistics for theatre and year bear a strong correlation for those of its Indigenous members. Perhaps most surprising is that 75% of all deaths in the AIF were for those KIA. While lower at 61% for Indigenous
men, it is still much higher than figures for either DOW or DOD. That so many were KIA likely reflects the technology which produced increasingly deadly weapons, especially artillery, and the brutality of trench warfare which characterised this industrialised war. The lower figure for DOW, 20%, may well be attributed to the advances in the medical care casualties received. This table also demonstrates just how pivotal 1917 was for both the AIF and its Indigenous members. Taken with the dramatic fall in recruiting as demonstrated in Figure 6, it seems clear as to why restrictions on the recruitment of Indigenous men were relaxed in light of the frightening casualty rates experienced in 1917. Data for the AIF and its Indigenous members shows that in the Middle East where fighting was far more mobile, casualty rates were significantly lower, although the percentage for DOD is higher. For comparison the statistics for Indigenous men (except those who died in Australia) have been included in brackets.

Table 1: Deaths in the AIF, 1914-1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>KIA</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>DOW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>DOD</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>Gallipoli</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>9,095</td>
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<td>2,616</td>
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<td>7 June 1917</td>
<td>Messines, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William NAPOLEON</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2966, 49&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Battalion</td>
<td>DOW</td>
<td>21 June 1917</td>
<td>Passchendael, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred O’NEILL</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5394, 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Tunnelling Company</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>1 October 1917</td>
<td>Passchendael, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas PEHOW</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2695, 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>18 September 1918</td>
<td>Peronne, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William PERROTT</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3704, 49&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Battalion</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>1 November 1918</td>
<td>Le Treport, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman PRIESTLEY</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2786, 47&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>7 June 1917</td>
<td>Messines, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William PUNCH</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5435, 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Battalion</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>30 August 1917</td>
<td>Bournemouth, England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy PURCELL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7813A, 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Battalion</td>
<td>DOW</td>
<td>19 September 1918</td>
<td>Peronne, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Service Number/Unit</td>
<td>How died</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>William RAWLINGS</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3603, 29th Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>9 August 1918</td>
<td>Villers Bretonneux, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward RAWSON</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29999, 14th FAB</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>2 October 1917</td>
<td>Passchendael e, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William REID</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4362, 31st Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>22 March 1918</td>
<td>Wytschaete, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William RHODES</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>941, 33rd Battalion</td>
<td>DOW acciden tal</td>
<td>10 May 1917</td>
<td>Boulogne, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyril RIGNEY</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2042, 43rd Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>3 July 1917</td>
<td>Messines, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rufus RIGNEY</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3872, 48th Battalion</td>
<td>DOW as PoW</td>
<td>5 December 1917</td>
<td>Feldlazarett Iseghen, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred ROBINS</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1426, 4th Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>2 May 1915</td>
<td>Gallipoli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William RUTTLEY</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3897, 13th Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>29 August 1916</td>
<td>Pozières, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert SAYERS</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3215, 5th Railway Unit</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>15 December 1918</td>
<td>Quarantine station, Woodman’s Point, WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James SLATER</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6563, 20th Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>28 April 1918</td>
<td>Warloy, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert SMITH</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12407, 4th FAB</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>18 September 1918</td>
<td>Hindenburg Line, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie SMITH</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>64382, 6th GSR</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>19 November 1918</td>
<td>At sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James SMITH</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1599, 53rd Battalion</td>
<td>DOW</td>
<td>11 April 1918</td>
<td>Villers Bretonneux, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard SMITH</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1303, 19th Battalion</td>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>3 May 1917</td>
<td>2nd Bullecourt, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert STEPHEN</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7564, 5th Battalion</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>14 September 1919</td>
<td>11TH AGH, Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George SYRON</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2165, 34th Battalion</td>
<td>DOW</td>
<td>3 June 1917</td>
<td>Messines, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John TALBOT</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5220, 56th Battalion</td>
<td>DOW</td>
<td>9 December 1916</td>
<td>Somme, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor THOMPSON</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1644, 51st Battalion</td>
<td>DOW</td>
<td>13 September 1916</td>
<td>Mouquet Farm, France</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the stories of each of these men deserves to be told, as foreshadowed earlier, a selection will demonstrate that Indigenous men were present at all of the iconic battles of the war, while the stories of others illustrate the human cost of Australia’s involvement. This analysis will begin with the Dardanelles’ Campaign because of its importance in Australia’s foundation myths. The overall importance of the Great War to Australia is noted by Brown who writes that in commemorating its centenary, “Australia will outspend the United Kingdom … by
more than 200 per cent”. Overall he believes the cost to be as much as “two-thirds of a billion [Australian] dollars”. “ANZAC” has become so deeply embedded in the nation’s identity that the vast majority of this money will be spent in commemorating Gallipoli, 1915. When the writer made his first trip to the Dardanelles in 2008, he was told by the tour leader that it was a “pilgrimage”. At the Dawn Service that year were approximately 10,000 young Australians; evidence then of its importance in the national psyche. However this was overwhelmed by what was planned for 2015. Just the issuing of tickets for the Dawn Service cost “more than a half a million dollars”. For Brown it is symptomatic of Australia’s desire to connect with its military, but he warns against the growing commercialism surrounding the centenary, “a discordant, lengthy and exorbitant four-year festival for the dead”. For him it should be remembered “with a respectful silence and quiet reflection”. Regardless of the merits of Brown’s arguments it will be commemorated on a grand scale, a reflection of its importance in the perception of national identity.

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11 Brown, Anzac’s Long Shadow, 18.
Indigenous soldiers on Gallipoli

The records show that 46 Indigenous men fought at Gallipoli and that seven were to die as a result. One of these men, John Miller, who was in the “First Wave” to
land on 25 April 1915, has been highlighted in Chapter 2. Although long
overlooked, the history of Aboriginal diggers is now being addressed but it is still
very much a work in progress as reflected on the AWM's website:

There are only five known Aboriginal servicemen buried at Gallipoli, however, it is estimated that 500-800 Aboriginal diggers served in the First World War. Ethnicity was not recorded in the enlistment process and research into indigenous service can involve trawling across many different sources, sometimes we may never know who these servicemen were.\(^{13}\)

The rapidly changing scholarship now being conducted is soon apparent from information to be found on the site. It presently displays the photographs of the graves of four of those who are said to have died on the peninsula. However the work of Scarlett shows that three of the four - R. Maynard, J. Lucas and G. Day - have not been established as being Indigenous men. The need for ongoing revision is also reflected in Timothy Winegard's, *Indigenous Peoples and the First World War*:

The government of Australia and the policy disseminated to military recruiters whole-heartedly rejected Aboriginal applications for service. Only two half-castes are known to have successfully enlisted in 1914.\(^{14}\)

Winegard, an acknowledged expert in the area, had first published his text in 2011 and so is unlikely to have had the benefit of Scarlett’s work. Now, following the research conducted by both the “Bringing Them Home” team at the National Archives of Australia and Philippa Scarlett, it can be demonstrated that there were

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in fact 28 Indigenous men who did successfully enlist in 1914. Later Winegard writes, “The overall numbers of Aborigines who enlisted in 1915 and 1916 … was still relatively low”.¹⁵ Yet of the 835 of the Indigenous men who did enlist, 24% did so in 1915, while for 1916 the figure is 35%.

One Indigenous man who was killed in the early weeks at Gallipoli was Alfred Robins.¹⁶ A 25 year old shearer, Robins enlisted at Liverpool on 12 December 1914. With the service number 1426, he was in the second reinforcements for the 4ᵗʰ Battalion. His records show that he was reported missing on 30 April 1915. It was a time when the 4ᵗʰ were involved in the struggle for 400 Plateau. Austin provides some insight into this bitter fighting when citing the Battalion’s casualties. “The cost of the April operations to the 4ᵗʰ Battalion was 50 killed or died of wounds, with a further 67 men missing.”¹⁷ One of the missing was Alfred Robins. Perhaps his fate mirrored that of a wounded Australian left in No Man’s Land. In citing an account by Robert Kenny,¹⁸ Austin gives an insight into the desperation of their situation at this time:

Immediately in front of us was a gulley running roughly parallel to our trenches. All night a wounded Australian somewhere down there was singing out ‘Water! Water! For God’s sake cobber, bring me water! Don’t let a man stay here!’ His cries were heartrending. I saw Captain Simpson and asked to be let out to fetch him in or at least give him a drink. He said

¹⁷ Austin, The Fighting Fourth, 46.
it would be madness. Of course our side was shooting at any one in front of our trenches, and being night, friend could not be distinguished from foe.\textsuperscript{19}

At a subsequent court of enquiry Robins was reported as having been “Killed in Action”. His records also contain correspondence from his mother which shows that Alfred Robins had two brothers who also served in the First AIF. It would seem that his body was never found as he is commemorated on the Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli.\textsuperscript{20}

Another 1914 enlistment was Charles Waller.\textsuperscript{21} Born on Kangaroo Island, South Australia, 23 year Waller enlisted on 14 September 1914 at Morphettville, South Australia. Given the service number, 1337, he was a member of the 16\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. As with Robins, Waller was firstly reported as being “missing”. As a result of the precarious position of the Australians on the second ridge and to provide cover for Monash Valley it was decided an attack be mounted by the New Zealand Brigade and the 4\textsuperscript{th} Australian Brigade to capture Baby 700. The importance of holding Baby 700 had been recognised on April 25 as reflected in Chapter 2 with the story of John Miller. In the new plan the 16\textsuperscript{th} Battalion was to seize a strategic point, the Bloody Angle.\textsuperscript{22} Of this strongpoint with its emotive name, Austin writes that it was at “the head of a steep gulley between Quinn’s Post and Dead Man’s

\textsuperscript{19} Austin, \textit{The Fighting Fourth}, 46.
Ridge. The scrubby summit of Bloody Angle was a mere 50 yards wide."\(^{23}\) The *Official History* says of the attack, “It was the first occasion on which the 4th Brigade had been launched in an assault, and the men were eager”. Yet things did not go to plan, a supporting NZ battalion, the Otago Battalion, failed in its attack and although the 16\(^{th}\) Battalion “was holding very nearly the position intended for it, its left was not beyond the end of the Bloody Angle.”\(^{24}\)

The desperate nature of the 16\(^{th}\)'s ordeal is captured by Bean when he describes firstly attempts to keep ammunition supplied and secondly the difficulties of communication:

> Again and again the volunteers were shot as they scrambled up with the heavy cases; others took their places, only to fall dead across the boxes they were dragging, or to roll down the steep side to the valley. Communication with the line of the 16th digging on the crest of the Bloody Angle became, towards morning, almost impossible.\(^{25}\)

The 16\(^{th}\) maintained their position until ordered to withdraw to Monash Valley at 1500 on May 3.\(^{26}\) The Turks then quickly re-occupied Bloody Angle and held it despite later attempts to wrest it from them. The deadly effects on the 16\(^{th}\) are again supplied by Bean:

> The 16th Battalion, upon which the brunt of the fighting fell, had landed on April 25th about 1,000 strong. It had entered the assault on Sunday, May 2\(^{nd}\) with strength of seventeen officers and 620 men. On May 3rd it came

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\(^{23}\) Austin, *Gallipoli*, 41.


out of the fight with nine officers and 290 men, having lost eight officers and 330 men in the night.  

Robins and Waller died early in the Dardanelles’ Campaign, both involved in desperate actions which helped establish the ANZAC legend. Both had firstly been reported as “missing” and if not killed outright, the privations they may have experienced are captured by the case of the wounded man begging for water. Both had been 1914 enlistments, at a time when recruitment was difficult for all, let alone for Indigenous men. Both men’s records reflect the human cost to their families, especially the unknowns associated with initially being reported missing.

![Figure 10. Lone Pine Memorial, July 2012, where Robins and Waller are commemorated.](image)

When he enlisted for the 5th Light Horse on 19 September 1914 Arthur Homer would hardly have considered fighting as an infantry man at Gallipoli. However, as the 12th Battalion war diary indicated, casualties were high and so elements of the Light Horse were used to reinforce the infantry, one of these being the 5th. Although born at Bathurst, NSW, Homer’s attestation occurred at Enoggera,

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Queensland. He was in the first reinforcements for the 5th and was allotted the service number, 115A.

The war diary for the 5th Light Horse shows an attack on the Balkan gun pits on 28 June. The aftermath for the operation was 28 killed, 79 wounded and 2 missing. The diary also makes clear that as a result of an error in their orders, the 5th attacked understrength, which led to their upset Colonel requesting a meeting with Anzac commander, Birdwood. Of this attack Bean was to write that both feints were costly expeditions. The severity of the fighting when Arthur Homer was killed is reflected in his records; his mates had to initially leave his body unburied near their target, the Balkan gun pits. However they also show that after the War he was reburied in Shell Green Military Cemetery with other men from the 5th who had died in the attack.

Figure 11. The grave of Arthur Homer at Shell Green Military Cemetery (July 2012)

James Dickerson was a 31 year old labourer when he enlisted at Guildford, Western Australia on 19 October 1914.\textsuperscript{30} With a service number of 392 he was an original member of the 10\textsuperscript{th} LH. However, as with Arthur Homer, Dickerson’s war began as an infantryman at Gallipoli. His unit was to be involved in two of the bloodiest battles at Gallipoli: the Nek and later Hill 60.

The disaster which resulted from the attack by the 8\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} LH at the Nek is the centre piece of Peter Weir’s 1981 film, \textit{Gallipoli}. Arguably what occurred at Gallipoli for many in contemporary Australia is framed by the continuing popularity of this movie. Paul Byrnes writes that as early as 1915 two films, \textit{Within Our Gates}, or \textit{Deeds that Won Gallipoli} and \textit{The Hero of the Dardanelles} were made to satisfy “public demand for images of Gallipoli”.\textsuperscript{31} In his view \textit{Gallipoli}, is a “masterpiece”\textsuperscript{32} where Weir has “returned some sense of accuracy and truth to

\textsuperscript{32} Byrnes, “Gallipoli on Film”
our collective vision of what Gallipoli looked like” while continuing the theme of “young heroes pounding up the cliffs”.

Arguably Gallipoli has done much to re-establish the Anzac myth.

As part of a series of feints to draw Turkish defenders from British troops landing at Suvla Bay, two Light Horse regiments, the 8th from Victoria and the 10th from Western Australia were to attack at the Nek. Following an artillery bombardment four lines, two from each regiment, would attack the nearby Turkish defenders. However, for some unknown reason the bombardment finished minutes earlier than scheduled and the Turks were waiting. Bean describes what then occurred:

There burst upon them a fusillade that rose within a few seconds from a fierce crackle into a continuous roar, in which it was impossible to distinguish the report of rifle or machine-gun. Watchers on Pope’s Hill saw the Australian line start forward across the sky-line and then on a sudden grow limp and sink to the earth “as though,” said one eye-witness, “the men’s limbs had become string.”

Despite the virtual destruction of the 8th’s two lines, the 10th were to continue the plan. Bean describes how the men of the 10th “went forward to meet death instantly, as the 8th had done, the men running as swiftly and as straight as they could at the Turkish rifles”. Bean goes on to argue that on no other occasion would attacking Australian troops face such concentrated fire as they had at the

33 Byrnes, “Gallipoli on Film”
One of the results of the film Gallipoli’s success has been to make the events of the Nek more accessible so that the virtual destruction of the two light horse regiments has come to illustrate for many the heroism of Australians in the face of certain death and the incompetence of British officers; even though the decision to continue the attack had been made by Australians.\(^{38}\)

Although James Dickerson’s records do not show definitely that he was involved in the 10th’s attack at the Nek, he had been on the Peninsula from the regiment’s arrival, so it seems reasonable to assume that he participated. What his records do confirm however is that he was wounded in action on 29 August 1915. On this date the 10th LH were involved in desperate fighting at Hill 60. Austin writes that located in the southern Suvla sector, Hill 60 was the objective of several Allied attacks in August 1915.\(^{39}\) On 22 August, the struggle for Hill 60 had begun with an attack by the 18th Battalion with the 10th LH later committed on the 28th. What then unfolded is captured on the AWM’s site which states that “the 10th Light Horse Regiment gained special distinction by holding the captured trenches which had previously been recaptured twice by the Turks.”\(^{40}\) It was in the defence of these trenches that the 10th’s Lieutenant Hugo Throssell was to win the Victoria Cross (VC).\(^{41}\)

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39 Austin, *Gallipoli*, 117.


41 Austin, *Gallipoli*, 117.
The intensity of the struggle is made even clearer by Austin citing the account given by one of its participants, Lance-Corporal Macnee:42

They [the Turks] came in waves, crying, ‘Allah, Allah’ … They came right up to the muzzles of our rifles, and were only kept out by rapid rifle fire and bomb-throwing. They managed to smash down our first barricade, but another was built at the next traverse, and a stand was made there.43

It is likely that it was during this defence that James Dickerson was wounded. He was to die on a hospital ship travelling to Malta the next day, 30 August. Consequently, just as John Miller had been in the first wave on April 25, James Dickerson represents how Indigenous Anzacs had fought in key moments of both the AIF’s campaign and of national myth-making on the Peninsula.

On 21 May 1915 Edward Maynard, a 28 year old farmer enlisted at Claremont, Tasmania and was given the service number 2294 for the 15th Battalion. His records reveal that soon after his enlistment, Edward Maynard joined the 15th at Gallipoli on 2 August 1915, a mere six days later he would be dead. The speed with which this happened suggests that the Battalion had suffered heavy casualties and needed to be quickly got up to strength to be ready for the August offensives. The 15th Battalion as part of Monash’s 4th Brigade, was part of a force to attack Hill 971. Owing to its dominant position, it had been one of the original objectives on 25 April. The defence of Hill 971 in this early stage was led by Colonel Mustafa Kemal. However, it was not until early August that it was seriously threatened by the Allies.44 Of the attack Bean wrote, “the difficulties had

43 Austin, Gallipoli, 117.
44 Austin, Gallipoli, 118-119.
been enormously underestimated by all the leaders concerned”. 45 Subsequently no further attempts were made to capture Hill 971.

The 15th Battalion War Diary for August 8 is extensive and provides an insight into the task that confronted men like Edward Maynard:

The advance was continued … for about 600 yards which brought us to a slope covered in dense thorny undergrowth where at 0415 our advance line of scouts came in contact with enemy patrols … there immediately followed a heavy outburst of rifle and machine gun fire from the enemy on the high slopes of our front. … [later] meeting with strong opposition and incurring heavy casualties which were due mainly to machine gun fire.

Opposing the advance were 8 enemy machine guns in action on our left front. 46

It is hardly surprising that in the face of this fierce resistance the Australians were forced to retire. The cost to the 15th as recorded in its war diary was: 100 killed, 188 wounded and 102 missing. Edward Maynard was among those killed and as he has no known grave, he is commemorated on the Lone Pine Memorial (see Figures 13 and 14).

Edward Maynard’s records also reflect the human cost of his death. His mother, despite being told of his death, clung to hope that he might still be alive as she had received a postcard which seemed to have been sent after his reported death.

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45 Cited in Austin, Gallipoli, 119.
Figure 13. Lone Pine Memorial: 15th Battalion (July 2012)47

Figure: 14. Lone Pine Memorial: Edward Maynard (July 2012)

47 NAA: B2455 MAYNARD EDWARD LEWIS
Another mother, Alice Bindoff, was to lose two of her sons in the War; the first was Edgar Bindoff, who was allocated to the 1st Battalion with the service number 1720 when he enlisted on 28 January 1915. He was 20 years old and a dairyman. His records show that he was taken on strength by the 1st Battalion on 30 May 1915 and was seriously wounded on 4 September. Evacuated to Egypt, Edgar Bindoff died on 14 September at Alexandria.

The war diary for the 1st Battalion on 4 September consists of only three lines, but does report, “Small bomb attack by Turks. Lieut Parkes wounded”. As is the norm for most war diary entries, details are provided for officers, not enlisted men. As Bindoff’s records describe his injuries as “bomb wounds”, there seems a strong correlation with the diary entry.

Edgar Bindoff’s records also illustrate the communication between the authorities and the soldier’s family. Firstly the telegram advising his mother of his injuries, her reply and later correspondence indicates that any changes would be quickly notified. Edgar Bindoff was buried at Alexandria (Chatby) Military and War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt.

**Indigenous soldiers in France: “the vital theatre”**

By 19/20 December 1915 the evacuation of Anzac and Suvla beachheads had been completed and from March 1916 the AIF’s infantry divisions began to arrive.

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in France, “the vital theatre” of the War.\textsuperscript{50} In northern France and Belgium the AIF would soon experience the ordeal of the Western Front. Their role in this theatre and its importance for Empire and nation are provided by Bean:

He [the Australian soldier] went to his new task with a stern consciousness that he was now facing the principal enemy. The Germans more than any other had been responsible for the war, were the most formidable in the struggle, and were likely to be by far the most dangerous in case of an adverse finish. Australian soldiers had no doubt that this enemy, if victorious, would dismember the British Empire, and so bring ruin to most of its constituent countries, including the southern homeland to which they were so passionately attached.\textsuperscript{51}

Now in France the AIF was first deployed to the Armentieres sector, a relatively quiet section of the Western Front and the 1 Anzac Corps suffered relatively light casualties.\textsuperscript{52}

Bean says of this period that it gave valuable time for Australian commanders and staff for training and organisational matters. One of the casualties at this “quiet time” was the first Indigenous soldier to be killed on the Western Front: Herbert Eagles.\textsuperscript{53} On 4 August 1915 19 year old Herbert Eagles enlisted at Cootamundra, NSW. Eagles was taller than the average at 5’ 9’’ (175 cm), but lighter in weight at 138 pounds (62.5 kg). He gave his religious denomination as

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Stanley, Bad Characters, 62.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Salvation Army. He was a member of the 10th reinforcements for the 1st Battalion with the service number 3300.

In June 1916, the 1st Battalion relieved the 5th in the front line at Fleurbaix, France. The Battalion’s war diary shows that for the period 16 – 22 June, “Enemy quiet, except in retaliation to our artillery”. On 19 June 1916 Herbert Eagles was wounded in action and as a result of his injuries, died on 20 June 1916. There is nothing in his records as to cause of his injuries, but in light of the war diary entry, a likely cause was enemy artillery.

When Herbert Eagles had enlisted on 4 August 1915 he had done so with his brothers Thomas and William. The brothers were given consecutive service numbers 3300, 3301 and 3302 and all saw service with the 1st Battalion. Although three brothers serving in the AIF may not be unique, it does reflect the high human cost of the war for families. The Eagles family was to lose one brother, Herbert, early in the AIF’s time on the Western Front and another, William, in the last months of the war. Previously wounded in action on two occasions, William Eagles was killed in action on 12 July 1918. The Battalion, fighting near Strazeele, France, was involved in an action which brought praise from its commanding officer, Lt. Col Stacy. The details can be found in the Battalion’s war diary:

The Commanding Officer wishes to congratulate the Company Commanders of “B” and “D” Coys. For their success attained during the recent tour in the line and to express his appreciation of the fine work done

by all ranks including the tactical ability displayed and the daring which was needed to carry it out. ... The pleasing feature to him was that all ranks participated but in particular he wishes to thank the following for work done during the whole tour in the line.

One of those chosen for this praise was William Eagles.\textsuperscript{57} He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France.\textsuperscript{58} The third brother Thomas survived, although he was invalided out of the AIF because of injuries he sustained in action on 25 July 1917. He returned to Australia on 25 November 1917. This chapter began identifying the abstract term “sacrifice”, the stories of the Eagles brothers are concrete examples of how it can be understood in human terms.

The sacrifice of Indigenous members of the AIF can also be seen in many of the iconic battles in which the AIF was engaged on the Western Front. As Table 1 illustrated the AIF’s greatest casualties were to occur on the Western Front and this is also true for its Indigenous members. The cases of the Aboriginal men discussed at this stage show them to have been killed in fighting in battles which occurred in a relatively small part of Northern France and Belgium as illustrated in Figure 15.

\textsuperscript{57} AWM: War diary, 1st Battalion, http://static.awm.gov.au/images/collection/bundled/RCDIG1008893.pdf#page=37&zoom=70,0,1\textsuperscript{326} (1 March 2014)

The first of these was fought at Fromelles, France on 19 July 1916. Stanley wrote of this battle:

> In a single night attack, at Fromelles, in July [1916], the 5th Division lost over 2,000 dead and thousands more wounded, rendering it unfit for battle for the rest of the year.\(^5^9\)

Although a battle of which many Australians were until recently unaware, it was very much a tragedy which occupied the thoughts of those involved immediately post war. A man closely related to what transpired was the commander of the AIF’s 5th Division, Major – General McCay. On 29 June 1929, *The Reveille* published an article on Fromelles. While in the main dealing with Bean’s recently published account for the *Official History*, it has a foreword by McCay where he commented that:

> The abiding impressions left on my mind are two – The first is the unfading memory of the heavy losses sustained by the 5th Division, a memory that has deepened with the passage of the years. The second is the recollection of the unflinching courage of the Australians who fought in the battle, a courage not surpassed on any later and more successful field.

\(^5^9\) Stanley, *Bad Characters*, 63.
Fromelles was a failure, and so the heroism there displayed has largely passed unrecognised.⁶⁰

One of the outcomes for the battle was that 1,299 Australians were listed as missing, their names recorded on the memorial at VC Corner Australian Cemetery.⁶¹ Following a lengthy campaign the bodies of some of the missing were located at nearby Pheasant’s Wood in 2009. Subsequently the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was to complete in July 2010, Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, the first new war cemetery to be built in fifty years.⁶²

However not all of the 1299 were found and one soldier still listed as missing is Indigenous man William Daley.⁶³ He had enlisted at Narrabri, NSW, on 10 August 1915. Originally intended as a reinforcement for the 18th Battalion, he was transferred to the 54th where he was taken on strength on 3 April 1916. His attestation papers show his age as 28 years 6 months and his trade, “boundary rider”. The move to the 54th saw William Daley as a member of the newly formed 5th Division.

Fromelles had been intended as feint to draw German defenders away from the British offensive which had begun on 1 July 1916: the Battle of the Somme.⁶⁴ It

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⁶¹ Patrick Lindsay, Fromelles (Richmond, Vic.: Hardie Grant Books 2007), 229.
was at the Somme that the AIF was next to be involved. Four days later [after Fromelles] the 1st Division entered the battle of the Somme, the great Anglo-French offensive launched to relieve the French, hard-pressed at Verdun. The 1st Division attacked at Pozières, followed by the 2nd and 4th Division. Around Pozières and nearby Mouquet Farm, AIF units made chaotic attacks over shattered ground, seizing acres of craters for no clear purpose or result. Men cowered helplessly in craters while shells mangled bodies and deranged minds. After six weeks the Australian front line had advanced less than 3 kilometres, at a cost of some 23,000 dead and wounded.65

Alice Bindoff had lost a son, Edgar, at Gallipoli and now was to lose another, David, at Pozières. David Bindoff had required his father's consent to enlist on 18 July 1915 as his age was only 18 years 2 months.66 Given the service number 2249, he became a member of the 19th Battalion. A small man, his attestation papers give his height as 5' 3" (160 cms) and weight at 118 pounds (53.5 kg). David Bindoff was killed in action on 27 July 1916. Unfortunately the war diary for the 19th Battalion does not have an entry for July 1916 but at the beginning of August it reveals the grim details of casualties suffered from 26 July until 3 August: “131 officers, about 500 other ranks”.67

More about the fighting which claimed David Bindoff's life can be found in the *Official History* which shows that on 27 July the Australians were engaged in the fight for Munster Alley and that the chief weapon used was the bomb:

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65 Stanley, *Bad Characters*, 52.
The instrument - above all others - of heroic combat, when the two sides stood face to face under equal conditions and fought it out as men, was the bomb - seconded by the rifle or the light machine-gun. With these the battle in Munster Alley was fought, the men on each side being as dependent as the Homeric Greeks and Trojans on their sheer strength and endurance.

The struggle had lasted twelve and a half hours; the Germans had used every sort of grenade, cricket-ball, stickbomb, egg-bomb, in thousands, as well as rifle-grenades, some of which fell among the Australians at a considerable range. On the British side 15,000 bombs had been thrown.68

Having paid dearly for their capture of Pozières, the AIF’s next objective was the nearby Mouquet Farm. Its close proximity to Pozières is reflected in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16. AWM Collection: J00146. From a tracing by 10347 Staff Sergeant Arthur Edward Scammell; map of Pozieres and Mouquet Farm area. Public Domain.69

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The ferocity of the fighting which was to then occur is implied in the following description from the Australian War Memorial site:

Mouquet Farm was the site of nine separate attacks by three Australian divisions between 8 August and 3 September 1916. The farm stood in a dominating position on a ridge that extended north-west from the ruined, and much fought over, village of Pozières. Although the farm buildings themselves were reduced to rubble, strong stone cellars remained below ground which were incorporated into the German defences. The attacks mounted against Mouquet Farm cost the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions over 11,000 casualties, and not one succeeded in capturing and holding it. The British advance eventually bypassed Mouquet Farm leaving it an isolated outpost. It fell, inevitably, on 27 September 1916.\textsuperscript{70}

Alec Raws\textsuperscript{71} of the 23\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion captured how it was when he told a friend that he had “never seen a body buried in days … and the wounded could not be got away. They stayed with us and died pitifully … and then rotted”.\textsuperscript{72} For Stanley, Mouquet Farm became for the AIF an ordeal and that withstanding this trial became the AIF’s central test. He describes it as being “Sustained shell fire [which] tried men’s nerves as did no other horror”.\textsuperscript{73} Stanley claims that for some, it was a test which could not be endured, “Ordered into the attack for the ruins of Mouquet Farm on 14 August men of three battalions seem to have refused to go over the top”.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{70} AWM: “Mouquet Farm,” \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/units/place_885.asp} (11 June 2013)
\textsuperscript{72} Cited by Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 63.
\textsuperscript{73} Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 63.
\textsuperscript{74} Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 63.
Arthur Walker, an Indigenous man, was among the AIF’s casualties at Mouquet Farm. He had enlisted at Keswick, South Australia on 29 March 1915 and was given the service number, 2466. Originally a member of the 10th Battalion with whom he served at Gallipoli, he was transferred briefly to the 4th Pioneers before finally being allotted to the 50th Battalion. His posting to the 50th would seem to coincide with the “doubling of the AIF.” Taken on strength by the 50th Battalion on 11 March 1916, Arthur Walker was firstly reported as “Missing” on 16 August and finally ten months later on 1 June 1917, as “Killed in Action”. Arthur Walker had died in the fighting at Mouquet Farm. Although his records show that he was buried at Mouquet Farm, later his grave could not be identified and so he is commemorated at the Villers Bretonneux Memorial.

1917 was to prove even more demanding of the AIF, and for Peter Stanley, 1917 is “The year of slaughter”. This description is especially relevant to the Indigenous diggers as it was the year of their greatest loss: 49 (see Figure 2). To better comprehend the AIF’s experience, Stanley again provides a succinct overview:

The year 1917 tested the AIF’s resilience like no other. More Australians died in battle that year than any other in the nation’s history – over 20,000: a third of the losses for the entire war. As the snow and ice of the Somme winter eased, the German army withdrew to the heavily defended Hindenburg Line.

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76 Stanley, Bad Characters, 94.
77 Stanley, Bad Characters, 94.
In April 1917, the Australian 4th Division was part of an Allied offensive on the Hindenburg Line. Their objective was Bullecourt, a heavily fortified and defended village, near Arras, which had been incorporated into the German defences. Details of Bullecourt’s defences are given in Michael Lawriwsky’s biography of Albert Jacka, *Hard Jacka*:

The wire protecting the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt consisted of three belts, each eight yards [approximately eight metres] wide, in close proximity to one another. Then there was an open space of fifty yards [approximately fifty metres], and, very close to the parapet of the trench, a fourth band of wire ten-feet thick [approximately three metres].

At what is now known as the First Battle of Bullecourt, the AIF were committed to an attack where untried tanks were used to deal with the wire instead of the traditional artillery support. As the troops advanced they were confronted by swathes of uncut German wire, the tanks had failed:

As the troops neared the great wire belts, the fire of rifles and machine-guns had suddenly intensified. The wire (as one man said) seemed to swarm with “fireflies” where the bullets glanced from it.

Although they had succeeded in breaching the Hindenburg Line the Australians were unable to hold their gains and had to retreat. While much has been written about who was responsible for the defeat, the realities for the men involved were stark.

The six and a half battalions and accompanying units of the 4th Division engaged lost over 3,000 officers and men, of whom 28 officers and 1,142

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78 Michael Lawriwsky, *Hard Jacka* (Chatswood NSW: Mira Books, 2007), 208
men were captured, much the largest number of Australians taken by the
ever in a single battle. As few men who were wounded beyond the first
wire escaped, the number of prisoners includes a great part of the
wounded. 80

One of those killed was an Indigenous soldier, Wallie Johnson. 22 years old and
5’ 11½” (181.6 cm) Johnson was killed on 11 April 1917. He had only been taken
on strength by the 47th Battalion on 23 March 1917. The war diary of the Battalion
for 11 April is extensive; describing Bullecourt’s defences, the failure of the
supporting tanks, the initial capture of some of the objectives and the retreat
which followed. It also gives the Battalion’s casualties for the “engagement”: 21
killed, 71 injured and 56 missing. 81 Wallie Johnson firstly reported “Missing” was
later listed as having been “Killed in Action”. Johnson has a file with the Wounded
and Missing Enquiry Bureau of the Australian Red Cross for the First World
War. 82 This valuable resource provides eye witness accounts concerning Wallie
Johnson’s fate. Firstly there is a statement from a stretcher bearer who believes
that Wallie Johnson died at Bullecourt, that it was “generally known”. The file also
contains a request for information from his foster father, Phil Cowley. In answer
to this request, a friend of Wallie Johnson, Corporal J. M. Ryan, explains what
the likely circumstances were – “terrible machine gun and rifle fire”.

80 AWM: “The First Battle of Bullecourt”
81 AWM: War diary, 47th Battalion,
82 “2444 Wallie Johnson – 47th Battalion, “ Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry
Bureau files, 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428,
193
Figure 17. "2444 Wallie Johnson" Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428

Figure 18. "2444 Wallie Johnson" Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428


These are records which reflect the terrible uncertainty a soldier’s family experienced when he was listed as “Missing”. On 3 May 1917 the AIF was again committed to an attack on the Hindenburg Line – the Second Battle of Bullecourt. It involved two AIF brigades – the 5th and 6th. Yet the battle was to hold varying outcomes for the two Australian brigades. In its chapter on Second Bullecourt, the *Official History* states that on the morning of 4 May 1917, the only Australian troops to successfully hold any territory won in the battle was the 6th Brigade. What then of the 5th Brigade? Earlier in the chapter Bean writes about the difficulties experienced by the 5th Brigade. It is an account which carries an implied criticism of its commander, Brigadier-General Smith. There is a suggestion that when things went wrong, Smith failed to pass on the information to divisional headquarters, for example when 400 unwounded men were seen streaming back from the attack, Smith failed to report it. Although Bean writes, “precisely what happened to his [Smith’s] brigade will perhaps never be known”, there seems to be criticism of senior leadership. As a result the 5th failed to meet its objectives. However if senior leadership was lacking, it was not the case for more junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Bean writes that many had been hit trying to move the men forward. It would seem that deprived of this leadership many “of the troops would now not leave cover”. Interestingly

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85 In World War One a brigade in the AIF was made up of four infantry battalions. The battalions in the 5th were the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th. While for the 6th they were the 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th. Units, “First World War, 1914–1918”. https://www.awm.gov.au/units/ww1/ (18 March 2014)
90 Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Volume IV, 541
despite the failure of his brigade on 15 May, 1917, Brigadier Smith was to be awarded a bar to his Distinguished Service Order.91

As previously noted, one of the battalions in the 5th Brigade was the 19th and one of the 19th’s senior NCOs killed on 3 May was Leonard Smith.92 A 19 year plaster, Smith had enlisted at Liverpool, NSW on 2 March 1915. A member of the 19th Battalion’s original D company with service number 1303, his war began at Gallipoli where he suffered shrapnel wounds to both thighs on 2 September 1915. Despite his youth, it would seem that Leonard Smith’s military acumen was the cause of him being promoted firstly to corporal and later sergeant. As a senior NCO it is highly likely that Smith was one of those killed trying to rally his battalion. The 19th Battalion’s war diary gives the cost of Second Bullecourt: 5 officers and 16 OR’s killed 5 officers and 216 OR’s wounded and 2 officers and 115 OR’s missing.93 Leonard Smith had paid the supreme sacrifice at Second Bullecourt, an Indigenous man rewarded for ability and one who died bravely.

Later in June 1917 the AIF played an important role in the Battle of Messines, Belgium. It was the first time the AIF had been involved in a large scale attack in Belgium and the battle was an important lead up to Third Ypres.94 In preparation for the offensive, tunnellers had been working for years to place explosives under

91 NAA: B2455, SMITH R,
92 NAA: B2455, SMITH L G,
93 AWM: War diary, 19th Battalion,
the German positions. On 7 June 1917 nineteen mines were detonated with devastating results. A graphic description is provided by Bean:

At 3.10 a number of big guns began to fire and then the trench-walls rocked; to the left, near Wytschaete, a huge bubble was swelling, mushroom-shaped, from the earth, and then burst to cast a molten, rosy glow on the under-surface of some dense cloud low above it. As its brilliance faded two more bubbles burst beside it. During twenty seconds the same thing happened again and again, from the right to the far left. The nineteen great mines had been exploded.

Among the Australian troops who then attacked the German lines was the 43rd Battalion. Cyril Rigney, a young Indigenous man, was a member of the 43rd. 19 year old Rigney had enlisted on 26 April 1916 and was given the service number, 2042. His records are quite sparse, showing only four days confined to barracks for not having a clean rifle and five days in hospital for influenza. However after re-joining his battalion on 15 March 1917 he was soon to be killed in action on 3 July 1917. Photographs of Indigenous diggers are quite rare so Figures 19 and 20 depicting the Rigney brothers are valued resources which enable more empathy with these soldiers of the Great War.

On attestation Cyril Rigney had originally answered “No” to question 7: Are you married? However this has been later amended, suggesting that before he left Australia, he did marry.

The 43rd’s War Diary entry for 3 July describes German activity as “Artillery very active … machine gun fairly active … snipers very active. Casualties Killed 3 O.R. Wounded 1 officer, 18 O.R.” Unfortunately there is nothing in the diary entry which gives the cause of Cyril Rigney’s death. What is clear however is that he was killed after participating in the main battle which had been fought between 7 and 14 June. Apart from showing that his wife, Constance, received his effects...

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and was granted a pension, we learn little of the lasting effects of his sacrifice for her.

Messines had been the prelude to the Third Battle of Ypres, the major British offensive in Flanders in 1917. The British commander, Field Marshall Haig, planned to break out of the Ypres salient and seize the German submarine bases on the Belgian coast.99

In September all five A.I.F. divisions entered the Ypres battles. They joined five massive attacks in the gruelling offensive. While the first attacks succeeded, by the time the autumn rain set in, the entire offensive became bogged down as they waded through slimy, gluey mud straight into shell and machine gun fire.100

During these battles 23 Indigenous men were to die. While each deserves to have his story told this thesis will centre on Rufus Rigney.101

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100 Stanley, Bad Characters, 94-6.
Australian participation in Third Ypres or Passchendaele effectively came to an end on 12 October. In what had been intended as the final thrust “the 3rd and 4th Aust. Divisions were unlucky to be assigned to the almost hopeless task of capturing Passchendaele”\(^\text{102}\). The struggle for this village with its strangely evocative name, which had raged for four months, ended with “AIF casualties [totalling] 39,093 officers and men … without a decision”\(^\text{103}\). It was the direct result of his involvement in this battle that resulted in Rufus Rigney’s death.

On his enlistment at Adelaide on 7 August 1916, Rufus Rigney gave his age as being 19 years, 1 month. Being under aged, permission for him to join the AIF was given by the South Australian Protector of Aborigines. At this point one is reminded of the words of Kartinyeri, “I feel strongly that the then Protector of

\(^{103}\) Timbrell, “Passchendaele, a Costly Blunder,” 24.
Aborigines should have stepped in and stopped them from enlisting”.  

However, Rufus Rigney may have been even younger than 19 when he enlisted. “Connecting Spirits” argues that when he died on 16 October 1917, Rufus Rigney was only 17 years and 11 months. 

Taken on strength by the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion with the service number, 3872, Rigney was wounded on the first occasion on 4 March 1917. The War Diary of the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion for this date shows them to be in the frontline at Trones Wood, France and makes the note that, “Frontline heavily shelled during the afternoon”. On his recovery Rufus Rigney was transferred to the 48\textsuperscript{th} Battalion on 29 June 1917.

In 1917, the 48\textsuperscript{th} had earlier been involved in the battles for First Bullecourt and Messines, now its time at Third Ypres culminated in the 12 October attack for Passchendaele. The 48\textsuperscript{th}'s war diary entry for 12 October records the conditions that awaited them, “The ground was particularly bad and the conditions owing to heavy rain previously and during the time of moving forward were very trying”. How any movement could be made in the quagmire that was now the battlefield is difficult to imagine.

Later in the diary entry, we learn of the awful cost, “During the attack and subsequent operations the Bn sustained heavy casualties … the casualties

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{104} Doreen Kartinyeri, \textit{Ngarrindjeri Anzacs} (Adelaide: Aboriginal Family History Project, South Australian Museum and Raukkan Council, 1996) 9.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Connecting Spirits, “Rufus Rigney,” \url{http://connectingspirits.com.au/pages/resources/ngarrindjeri-soldiers/rufus-rigney.php} (14 June, 2013) At this point I would like to acknowledge the generous support of Julie Reece of Connecting Spirits which has enhanced Rufus Rigney’s story. Connecting Spirits is a project that involves students travelling to the World War 1 battlefields, cemeteries and memorials of France and Belgium to learn first-hand the role that Australians played in the battles of the Great War and to understand the sacrifices made. While there, the students commemorate individual soldiers from their own families and communities.
\item \textsuperscript{106} AWM: War diary, 32\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm4/23/49/awm4-23-49-20.pdf} (14 June 2013)
\end{itemize}
amongst O.R. was 359 killed, wounded and missing out of a total strength of 21 officers and 600 O.R. which took part in the operation”.

Despite all of this sacrifice the war diary tells us that, “Both the 48th and 47th Bn gained the objective [but with insufficient support] we were unable to hold on when counter attacked by the enemy at 4 p.m. and the subsequent withdrawal to our original line was carried out”.

In the Red Cross records for Rufus Rigney there is a statement by 2656 G.W. Fox, recorded on 13 July 1918, which places Rufus in this tragedy.

There was a man of that name [Rufus Gordon Rigney] in my bombing section of A Coy, a coloured chap, like an Australian Aboriginal. … Then [later] while following me … he got shot through the lungs. He was left in another shell hole, nearer the objective, where no doubt he died, for he was very bad. A man named Doran of B Coy who got killed later on put a bandage around him. We won out (sic) objective after that and dug in, but the Germans counterattacked and we had to retire after holding for about 10 hours to where we started from. Nobody got buried that day, and the wounded who could not walk were not brought in.

107 AWM: War diary, 48th Battalion  

108 AWM: War diary, 48th Battalion (14 June 2013)

109 “Rufus Rigney” Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War, Australian War Memorial  
However, in one respect Fox was to be proven wrong; Rufus Rigney did not die on the battlefield. In one of the many ironies of war, although his mates could not bring him in, his enemies did. Taken to a German field hospital, Rufus Rigney died of his wounds four days later. Originally buried at Isegham, Belgium by the Germans, he was to be later reburied in 1924, at Harlebeke New British Cemetery.

![German death certificate](image)

**Figure 21. NAA: B2455 RIGNEY RUFUS GORDON - German death certificate.**

Rufus Rigney was one of eleven Indigenous men who were to become a prisoner of war (PoW). He was however, the only one who died as a PoW. Given his youth and military experiences Rufus Rigney is a fitting representative of the Indigenous men who were to die at Passchendaele.\(^\text{110}\) It is also possible that he is the only Indigenous servicemen buried in Flanders to be commemorated with an Aboriginal ceremony as shown in Figure 22.

The final year of the war was to prove another costly one for Indigenous diggers, with 35 killed. Labelled by Stanley as “The year of victory”, 1918 was to begin with the challenge of the German spring offensive. Following the collapse of Russia the Germans banked on a major offensive, "Kaiserschlacht" (Kaiser's Battle), to force a favourable outcome on the Western Front before the imminent deployment of American forces. The first part of this strategy was an attack in March on the British Fifth Army in the Arras sector. With the British in retreat it was in the stemming of the German advance that the AIF was to play a key role.

A key German objective was the city of Amiens. On 27 March 1918 the 12th and 13th Brigades of the AIF were involved in desperate fighting in defence of Amiens.

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111 Stanley, Bad Characters, 154.
at Dernancourt, a village on the River Ancre in France. In fighting which lasted
until the early evening, the Germans were eventually defeated, with
approximately 550 casualties, and at a cost of 137 to the Australians.\footnote{AWM: “Attacks on Dernancourt,”
point so desperate was the Australian defence that, having run out of bombs, they
threw stones.\footnote{Bean, \textit{Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918}, Volume V,
https://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first_world_war/AWMOHWW1/AIF/Vol5/ (30 April 2015), 416} In bitter fighting which was to last until 5 April 1918 the AIF had
successfully beaten off the German attacks which in Bean’s words represented
“the strongest ever met by Australian troops”.\footnote{Bean, \textit{Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918}, Volume V,

One of those KIA on March 28 1918 was an Indigenous soldier in the 47th
March 2014)} Martin had enlisted on 17 December 1914, and
fought at Gallipoli as a member of the 15th Battalion. He seems to have explained
his Aboriginality by claiming to have been born in Dunedin, New Zealand, Richard
Martin was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1. He was yet another
Indigenous man who died in a battle which helped establish the AIF’s reputation
in the war.

Hastily summoned from Flanders where they had resting over the winter of 1917-
18, AIF divisions were later to meet the German advance in two battles, in April
and May, around Villers-Bretonneux. For Stanley, Villers Bretonneux was one of
the AIF’s most decisive contributions to the war.\footnote{Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 154.}
The importance of the AIF’s fighting at Villers Bretonneux was also the subject of an article in *Reveille*, 1 August 1936 by British Brigadier General, G. W. Grogan, VC, CB, CMG, DSO and bar. He began by describing the significance of the action at Villers-Bretonneux in stemming the German threat, especially to the strategic city of Amiens:

The German attack at Villers-Bretonneux on April 24 1918, though limited in time and extent, was nevertheless a very violent one. Had it succeeded, it would have been a disaster for us [the British].

He goes on to attribute the overcoming of “impending calamity” to the gallantry and leadership of the 13th and 15th Australian brigades. For the highly decorated Grogan “the fight at Villers-Bretonneux has importance in the records” of World War One:

It will ever be remembered for perhaps the greatest individual feat of the war – the successful counter-attack by night across unknown and difficult ground, at a few hours *(sic)* notice, by the Australian soldier.

One of the battalions in the 15th Brigade was the 60th Battalion. The war diary for the 60th gives its casualties for the action at Villers-Bretonneux as being 34 killed in action, 114 wounded and 5 missing. One of those killed was Indigenous soldier, William Egan.

Enlisting at Melbourne on 3 August 1915, he was 32 years 3 months old and a labourer. Allocated the service number 5675, Egan was originally a reinforcement

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119 Grogan, “Villers- Bretonneux April 24, 1918”
for the 8th Battalion. On arrival in France he was transferred to the 60th Battalion, being taken on strength on 17 November 1916. In 1917 William Egan was treated for 51 days at Parkhouse hospital for venereal disease (VD). On return to his battalion Egan was wounded in action (gunshot wound left thigh) at Torreken Farm, just south of Wytschaete, Belgium. The war diary for 12 December has the entry “The Bn suffered two casualties whilst holding the line”.122

Re-joining his battalion on 25 January 1917 William Egan was killed in action on 25 April 1918. Having played an important role in blunting the German offensive the AIF was now to be at the centre of an Allied counter attack. Central to this role was the appointment of General John Monash as the commander of the Australian Army Corps. One of the reasons for Monash’s appointment was his record for meticulous planning, a trait which is soon evident from the detail given to his preparations for the Battle of Hamel.123 In addition to battalions from the AIF the attacking force was to employ for the first time American troops as reflected in the date chosen; 4 July.124 Monash says that as there had been no Allied offensive of any appreciable size since Passchendaele, it was now time to “think offensively” and that the first troops to begin this should be Australians.125

In the event the battle proved to be a great success:

No battle within my [Monash’s] previous experience, not even Messines, passed off so smoothly, so exactly to timetable, or was so free from any kind of hitch. It was all over in ninety-three minutes. It was the perfection of team work. It attained all its objectives; and it yield great results.126

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122 AWM: War diary, 60th Battalion. (17 June 1917)
124 Monash, The Australian victories in France in 1918, 34.
125 Monash, The Australian victories in France in 1918, 26 – 27.
126 Monash, The Australian victories in France in 1918, 38.
One can forgive Monash’s use of superlatives as the battle was both the success he claimed and his successful coordination of infantry, tanks, aircraft and artillery, arguably underpinned the strategy and tactics adopted by the Allied forces for the final 100 days of the war.

One of those Australians who contributed to Monash’s reputation was 3533, Private James Harris. An Indigenous man, Harris enlisted on 15 November 1916 at Warrigal, Victoria. At 28 years 2 months on enlistment, he gave his trade as “driver”. Originally a member of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion, on arrival in France on 5 February 1918 he was transferred to the 59th Battalion. James Harris was KIA 4 July 1918 fighting at Hamel. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Villers Bretonneux Memorial. The Battalion’s casualties for 4/5 July were: KIA – officers 1, ORs 14, DOW – officers 1, ORs 1, Wounded – officers 4, ORs 44.

With his reputation now established by his victory at Hamel, Monash was to lead an attack employing for the first time, the five divisions of the AIF at Amiens on 8 August 1918. It is a battle to which the majority of The Australian victories in France in 1918 is devoted. Of it Monash was to write:

The tactical value of the victory was immense, and has never yet been fully appreciated by the public of the Empire, perhaps because [of] our censorship at the time.

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He then cites Ludendorff, Chief of Staff of the German Army, who was reported on 22 August 1919 to have said, “August 8 was the black day of the German Army in the history of the war. This was the worst experience I had to go through”. To Monash, Ludendorff had at that time given up all hope of a German victory.\footnote{\textsuperscript{131} Monash, \textit{The Australian victories in France in 1918}, 109.}

In Monash’s account it is soon apparent that it was he who had formulated the tactics and strategy which had resulted in the victory and that other Empire forces, such as the Canadians and British, were in support. It is a view which has been challenged, particularly by Canadian historians. One such view was expressed in S F Wise’s paper, ‘The black day of the German army; Australians and Canadians at Amiens, August 1918’ given at the 1998 Chief of Army History Conference.\footnote{\textsuperscript{132} S F Wise, “The black day of the German Army: Australians and Canadians at Amiens, August 1918”, 1998 Chief of Army History Conference, “1918: Defining Victory” \url{http://www.army.gov.au/Our-history/Army-History-Unit/Chief-of-Army-History-Conference/~/media/Files/Our%20history/AAHU/Conference%20Papers%20and%20Images/1998/1998%201918%20Defining%20Victory.pdf} (11 March 2014).}

National priorities and preoccupations have obscured the fact that Amiens was a joint operation, directed broadly by General Rawlinson and his Fourth Army staff, but essentially dependent upon the Australian and Canadian Corps as the key actors. It is remarkable that this aspect of the battle has been given so little attention.\footnote{\textsuperscript{133} Wise, “The black day of the German army; Australians and Canadians at Amiens, August 1918”, \url{http://www.army.gov.au/Our-history/Army-History-Unit/Chief-of-Army-History-Conference/~/media/Files/Our%20history/AAHU/Conference%20Papers%20and%20Images/1998/1998%201918%20Defining%20Victory.pdf} (11 March 2014).}

This comment seems to address Monash’s belief that it has been a victory overlooked by historians of the war. A possible reason given by Wise is that for many British academics, such as Paddy Griffith, “colonial historians” have given Australian, Canadian and New Zealand troops and their leaders an elite status and contrasted this with a portrayal of the British officer corps as amateurish.
Consequently to downplay this trait, the victory at Amiens has been often ignored.\textsuperscript{134}

However, even if Monash has overplayed his account, the victory did see the start of an Allied advance and the end of the war. It is also a battle which saw an Indigenous man, John Firebrace, give his life.\textsuperscript{135} On enlistment John Firebrace’s age is shown as being 18 years 9 months. He joined the AIF on 24 March 1916 at Bendigo, Victoria. His is a case of successful enlistment at a relatively early date despite there being a comment on his Aboriginality. Evidently, John Firebrace was “white” enough. Originally intended for the 38\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, Firebrace, service number 1637, was later transferred to the 59\textsuperscript{th} where despite his relative youth he was promoted to Lance Corporal. Having recovered from trench foot, he was to return to France, to be KIA on 9 August 1918 at Amiens.

There is an Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau file for John Firebrace. One entry from Private R Hoskin, 3413, 59\textsuperscript{th} Headquarters states that he had been killed by a “whizz bang”, a German 77mm field gun. He also states that “Firebrace was a very dark (like half caste Indian) man, tall, thin and very wiry about 23 years”. Another by 3165 C. P. Hughes says he was killed by machine gun fire. “He was about 5 ft. 7 or 8 inches and appeared to have black blood in his veins”. Another, by Private H Day, 2580 reads very like that highlighted in Chapter 1, when Henry Raine was describing “Mick King” [William King]. Raine writing in 1931 had struggled with King’s race. For Raine although


King was black, he was still a “dinkum Aussie”. In his account Day states “[Firebrace] Was half an Aboriginal but a very fine fellow”.

In the account of Lance Corporal Coyle, 1879, we learn more of Firebrace’s character. He states that Firebrace was in the advance at Harbonnieres. He relates how Firebrace was a leader, “a machine gun corporal [who] was leading his machine gun over in attack” when in this version he was killed by a piece of high explosive shell. Despite the variations in the way he was killed, the accounts all describe him as older than his real age of 20 years, perhaps reflecting the effects of combat. Apart from their race being recorded on some Indigenous men’s attestation papers, there appears to no reference to it while serving in the AIF. What is clear from these Red Cross files however is that it was noted by some of their comrades but for some such as Day, it was not an issue.\textsuperscript{136}

A mere six days after John Firebrace was KIA, his brother William was also KIA at Villers Bretonneux on 17 August 1918.\textsuperscript{137} As for many Australian families, the sacrifice for the Firebrace family had been high.

Following Amiens the major obstacle confronting the Allies was the Hindenburg Line. A defensive line described as being on a “stupendous scale” by Monash, it had previously proven to be “an impregnable barrier against the assaults of the French and British”.\textsuperscript{138} In Monash’s view “every sacrifice must be made to overthrow these defences before the end of 1918”.\textsuperscript{139} It was his view that had

\textsuperscript{138} Monash, The Australian victories in France in 1918, 192-193.
\textsuperscript{139} Monash, The Australian victories in France in 1918, 192.
defensive line held, then the Allies might not have been able to continue the
war.\textsuperscript{140} In the battles to overcome the Hindenburg Line 13 Indigenous soldiers
were killed. One of these was Thomas Pehow.\textsuperscript{141}

On 18 September 1918 the battle to “vanquish” the Hindenburg outline post had
been successful. Monash’s plan had resulted in a “great victory”.\textsuperscript{142} He writes that
there was “no record in this war of any previous success on such a scale, with so
little loss”.\textsuperscript{143} He notes that the AIF’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Division had gone into battle with a “total
strength of 2,845 infantry” and suffered only 490 casualties.\textsuperscript{144} Such had been
the AIF’s losses on the Western Front that to Monash 490 can be described as
“so little”.\textsuperscript{145} It is also interesting to note that normally the infantry strength of a
division was about 12,800, yet the 1\textsuperscript{st} went into this battle with only just over 28%
of this number. The figures reflect the failure of the voluntary system of
recruitment to maintain the men needed by the AIF and raises the question as to
how much longer could the AIF operate as a viable autonomous fighting force.
(See Figure 6)

Thomas Pehow was a member of the 12\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, one of the battalions in the
1\textsuperscript{st} Division. He was one of the 490 casualties. Thomas Pehow enlisted for the
AIF on 5 August 1915. He did so at Brisbane and originally was to be in the 6\textsuperscript{th}
reinforcements for the 26\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. He was a relatively small man: 5’ 3½” (161
cm) in height, 122 pounds (55 kg) in weight with an expanded chest measurement

\textsuperscript{140} Monash, \textit{The Australian victories in France in 1918}, 192.
\textsuperscript{141} NAA: B2455, PEHOW THOMAS WILLIAM, 
March 2014)
\textsuperscript{142} Monash, \textit{The Australian victories in France in 1918}, 209.
\textsuperscript{143} Monash, \textit{The Australian victories in France in 1918}, 210.
\textsuperscript{144} Monash, \textit{The Australian victories in France in 1918}, 210.
\textsuperscript{145} Monash, \textit{The Australian victories in France in 1918}, 210.
of 34½” (88 cm). His physical description was: “complexion – dark, eyes – brown and hair – black”. On enlistment he was 25 years, one month and as with the majority of Indigenous recruits, he was a labourer.

Before embarkation he was transferred to the 12th Battalion with the service number, 2667. On 27 June 1916 he was wounded in action and suffering shell shock. Later when on leave, 27 August 1917 he was admitted to Bulford hospital suffering from VD. His recovery was slow as his records show the time taken was 188 days. On 25 August 1918 he was wounded in action for the second time with gunshot wounds to the left knee. On recovery he rejoined his unit when he was KIA on 18 September 1918.

A 1915 enlistment Thomas Pehow had been killed in one of the AIF’s final battles on the Western Front. His records, as with many members of the AIF, show the physical impact suffered by many in the AIF, the physical injuries caused by shell and bullet as well as the new horror of shell shock. As with many members of the AIF, Thomas Pehow contracted VD. The meagre reminders of his existence reflected in the possessions: a coin, wallet, chevrons, two cloth badges, photos, cards, a hymn book and YMCA wallet returned to his only relative, his sister, after his death.¹⁴⁶

Indigenous soldiers in the Middle East

In addition to those who died at either Gallipoli or the Western Front, two Indigenous troopers of the Australian Light Horse were to die while on active service in the Middle East.

![Locations where the two Indigenous troopers died.](image)

The first was Ernest Frith, born at Pilliga, NSW and enlisting on 1 September 1915 at Liverpool NSW. On enlistment Firth was 28 years, 11 months old and a labourer. In the 11th reinforcements for the 1st Light Horse Regiment, he was allocated the service number, 1696. Figure 24 below is one of the few photographs of Indigenous diggers from the war.

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On 31 October, elements of the Light Horse had been responsible for the capture of Beersheba.\textsuperscript{148} Having lost this critical source of water, the Turks, pivoting on their strongholds at Sheria and Hareira, withdrew their left and rested it on Khuweilfe, which gave them a stout flank merging into the stronghold of the Judean hills. The Australians had to either deny them occupation or if occupied drive them from it.\textsuperscript{149} Its importance is highlighted in the \textit{Official History}:

Tel Khuweilfe is a dominating, bare, flat-topped hill flanked by rough ranges on either side, but open to the south up a wide valley. It commanded the country to the west; if held by the enemy, therefore, it

\textsuperscript{148} Beersheba was a heavily fortified town 43 kilometres from the Turkish bastion of Gaza. It anchored the right end of a defensive line that stretched from Gaza on the Mediterranean coast.\textsuperscript{149} Bean, \textit{Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918}, Volume VII, \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first_world_war/volume.asp?levelID=67893} (19 June 2013), 414.
would be a menace to the right flank of the British infantry and mounted troops as they struck for Hareira and Nejile, but its capture by the British would leave the enemy’s left flank completely open.\textsuperscript{150}

The \textit{Official History} later describes how the 1\textsuperscript{st} Light Horse dismounted and covered 800 metres of rough fire-swept ground. Unfortunately their advance was not supported on their flanks and they were to find themselves a mere 300 or 400 metres from the Turks, but isolated. The cover was scarce, Turkish snipers active. The 1\textsuperscript{st} Light Horse lost 16 and 44 were wounded. Among those killed was Ernest Firth. He was buried in Beersheba Military Cemetery.

The second Indigenous soldier to die was Trooper John Johnston.\textsuperscript{151} On enlistment Johnston was 26 years 5 months, his trade was listed as station hand. He joined at Townsville, Queensland on 8 October, 1917. In earlier chapters the easing of restrictions regarding Aboriginal men has been discussed. John Johnston is clearly an example of a man whose Aboriginality had prevented his earlier enlistment. Previously judged as being “half caste” he was not wanted. Now with difficulties maintaining reinforcements for an AIF which was experiencing a crippling casualty rate he was taken on strength by the 11\textsuperscript{th} Light Horse Regiment on 29 May 1918. A mere four days later, 1 June, he was wounded in action. Johnston succumbed to his injuries later that day. In its entry for 1 June, the war diary for the 11\textsuperscript{th} Light Horse records:


1600 Enemy shelled led horses, two shells were dropped and inflicted casualties, one other rank seriously injured and died of wounded (sic) on admission to Field Ambulance.  

Although not named it seems clear that John Johnston was the soldier concerned. His records have his next of kin as being his mother, Lucy Johnston, but his will is made in favour of a friend, Walter Millar. This repeats a pattern seen with other Indigenous soldiers. Again communication with the soldier’s relatives was an issue. Consequently, his mother did not receive photographs of his grave, a pension, medals or memorial plaque and scroll; these were recorded as “untraceables” and presumably still are.

Just as Rufus Rigney’s youth and innocence puts into focus the nightmare of Passchendaele, John Johnston represents the sacrifice of those Indigenous men firstly rejected because of race, yet despite the obvious humiliation, applied again at a time when it suited the recruiting officials to accept them. In the ultimate irony having overcome these hurdles John Johnston was to die in a matter of days of reaching the front. It is then compounded by his family receiving nothing for his sacrifice. Originally buried at Jericho, John Johnston was later re-buried at Jerusalem Military Cemetery. Although he died in what might almost be described

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as a random act of fate, John Johnston’s sacrifice is no less than those killed in the battles which established the AIF’s formidable reputation as elite troops.

**Conclusion: the cost of sacrifice**

This chapter concludes with the story of a man which may well now be seen in a way somewhat different than it was in 1917. It is the story of George Lavender.\(^{153}\)

Although born in Wellington NSW, he enlisted at Townsville, Queensland on 20 September 1915. Physically close to the average, he was 5’ 5” (165 cm) in height, 135 pound (61 kg) in weight and an expanded chest measurement of 36½” (93 cm). Unlike the stereotype his complexion was noted to be “complexion – fair, eyes - grey and hair – brown”. At 27 years 2 months he was older than average. He was a single man and gave as his trade “labourer”. The NAA records suggest that he was one of five brothers, Andrew,\(^{154}\) Clements,\(^{155}\) Clive\(^{156}\) and Victor\(^{157}\) to enlist in the AIF. A member of the 12th Reinforcements for the 9th Battalion he was given the service number, 3822. The war diary for the 9th Battalion for February, 1916 shows the Battalion as part of the defensive line for the Suez Canal at Habeita, Egypt.

The records show that George Lavender died on 17 February 1916. They do not reveal whether he had been taken on strength by the 9th at this time, but they do give cause of death. He died of a gunshot wound to the head and it had been

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self-inflicted. Unfortunately there is nothing in his records to show how the authorities had arrived at this conclusion. However his file does include correspondence with his mother where she is told baldly that he had shot himself.

Figure 25. NAA: B2455, LAVENDER GEORGE

The story of George Lavender is a fitting conclusion to this chapter on sacrifice. Whatever the reasons for taking the actions he did can only be the subject of speculation. He had not fought on the Peninsula, in fact there is nothing to show that his military experience was anything more than the training which all recruits experience. Whatever the reasons, there can be no disputing the outcome; he had reached a point where it seems he took his own life. The issues of self-harm, especially of suicide, are not the topics one associates with the Anzac legend. Another consideration must have been the effects of George Lavender’s death on his family. How one deals with news such as that received by his mother is difficult to imagine. The deaths of all of these Indigenous men, regardless of the circumstances, give some insight into understanding sacrifice. In October 2015

158 NAA: B2455, LAVENDER GEORGE,
the writer was in France, Flanders and England and photographed the graves or memorials for many of these men. These can be found in Appendix 1, A1.

This chapter represents another piece in the jigsaw concerning the story of Indigenous men in the First AIF. In explaining our celebration of the war’s centenary, it may appear easy to accept what Brown postulates: “In a young country there aren’t many talismans that can conjure up the line of history, nor connect us to something bigger than ourselves”. Yet Anzac is a history which is Eurocentric, one seemingly oblivious to the First Australians. However even in this Eurocentric view Aboriginal men played a part. This chapter is an acknowledgement of what until recently has been ignored: the extent of family loss and men’s sacrifice to the engine of the war and the manufacture of a sustaining national myth. The focus for the next chapter will be the bravery displayed of Indigenous men serving in the First AIF which was to result in official recognition.

159 Brown, Anzac’s Long Shadow, 14.
CHAPTER 6

The Good and the Great

Australia’s military heroes

As it is impossible to consider a nation’s foundation myths and not address its heroes, this chapter aims to highlight the heroism displayed by Indigenous men in the Great War. Writing for the Australian War Memorial’s *Wartime*, Peter Burness claims, “Australians have always had heroes and they have often been military men”.¹ Support for this argument can be found in the work of Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue. Following their interrogation of the 2003 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes in “Colonial and post-colonial aspects of Australian identity”² they concluded that for 90% of Australians, Anzacs were a “substantial component” of national identity.³ It is hardly surprising therefore that populating the pantheon of Australian heroes are men of the First AIF. The deeds of men such as Albert Jacka, Harry Murray, Hugo Throssell and Joe Maxwell, names once familiar to past generations and the subject of recent biographies,⁴ will likely be given renewed prominence as Australia commemorates the war’s centenary. Each of these men had won the

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³ Tranter and Donoghue, “Colonial and post-colonial aspects of Australian identity.”
⁴ Michael Lawriwsky, *Hard Jacka*, (Chatswood, N.S.W.: Mira Books, 2010), George Franki and Clyde Slatyer, *Mad Harry: Harry Murray, VC, CMG, DSO and Bar DCM C de G: Australia’s most decorated soldier*, (East Roseville, N.S.W.: Kangaroo Press, 2003), John Hamilton, *The Price Of Valour: The Triumph And Tragedy Of A Gallipoli Hero, Hugo Throssell, VC*, (Sydney, NSW Pan Macmillan Australia, 2012), John Ramsland, *Venturing into no man’s land : the charmed life of Joseph Maxwell VC, World War I hero*, (Melbourne, Vic: Brolga Publishing Pty Ltd, 2012). Each of these men was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for acts of bravery in wartime. Although from 1975 Imperial awards began to be replaced by Australian medals, the Victoria Cross was kept. Despite a change in name, the Victoria Cross for Australia, it is identical to the British award.
Victoria Cross. Until 1973, Australia had acknowledged acts of heroism in the military with Imperial awards. Under this system the “highest award for acts of bravery in wartime” was the Victoria Cross. So rare is this award that since its inception in 1856, there have been only 1,356 recipients. Of this total, 100 have been won by Australians and the majority of these, 64, were won in the Great War. Although renamed the Victoria Cross for Australia in 1991, it is identical to the Imperial award, and so in essence is the only Imperial award for gallantry for Australians. In appearance it is a rather unassuming medal, made from bronze with a crimson ribbon as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. AWM Collection: H15655. Portrait of Captain Albert Jacka, winner of Australia's first VC in the war and a recognised hero of the Great War. Public domain.

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In 2011, the VC’s role in the formal acknowledgement of heroism resulted in the Australian Government directing the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal to examine the issue of “Unresolved Recognition for Past Acts of Naval and Military Gallantry and Valour”. Over the following two years the Tribunal examined the cases of fourteen servicemen who many believed had not been adequately acknowledged. Perhaps the most prominent of these was Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick (also known as John Simpson).

Figure 2. AWM Collection: P09300.001. Ottoman Empire: Turkey, Marmara, Chanak, Gallipoli Peninsula, 1915. 202 Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick (who enlisted as John Simpson), of the 3rd Field Ambulance, he was known as ‘The Man with the Donkey’. He is seen here working in Shrapnel Gully at Anzac Cove, with a wounded soldier on his donkey. Public domain

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11 AWM Collection: P09300.001. Ottoman Empire: Turkey, Marmara, Chanak, Gallipoli Peninsula, 1915. 202 Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick (who enlisted as John Simpson), of the
26 pages of the Tribunal’s report examine the case for awarding Simpson a posthumous Victoria Cross. In doing so it made the following observation, “Some submitters suggested that Simpson deserved a VC because he represented what it means to be Australian, and there was strong community support for such recognition”.12 It also highlighted the recognition Simpson and his donkey have already received in Australia. It relates how early in the war their exploits were reported in numerous newspaper articles, including one by Bean and that, as early as 1916, their story was incorporated into the curricula of many Australian schools. The image of Simpson and his donkey was chosen for postal stamps issued in 1965 to mark the 50th anniversary of the landings and the Anzac

3rd Field Ambulance, he was known as ‘The Man with the Donkey’. He is seen here working in Shrapnel Gully at Anzac Cove, with a wounded soldier on his donkey. (24 March 2014)

Commemorative Medallion issued in 1967 employs the man and donkey motif. Simpson and his donkey are also the subject of six prominent statues; they appear on the $100 Australian bank note issued in 1996 and a $5 dollar Gallipoli commemorative coin produced in 1990. They are also commemorated in three paintings; three plays, three movies and documentaries, and are associated with two competitions.\(^\text{13}\) With this formidable recognition as an archetypal Australian hero it is not surprising that many campaigned to have Simpson formally recognised by being awarded the highest honour with the Victoria Cross.

The importance of the man with the donkey in Australian history is the subject of Peter Cochrane’s 1992 text *Simpson and the donkey: the making of a legend*.\(^\text{14}\) He argues that it is a legend which has been invoked over the past one hundred years for a variety of purposes. When launched in 1915 he sees it used to promote enlistment in the AIF, later in the 1930s he argues it was invoked against pacifists, while in the cold-war era it served as a model of “single-minded commitment to Christian (anti-Communist)” values.\(^\text{15}\) With the unveiling of a full sized statute on 25 April 1988 at the Australian War Memorial he believes:

> Simpson’s current place in public culture was established, not by the Great War, but by circumstances some fifty years later … his connection with the national tradition reached its zenith in the bicentennial year when his commemoration was tied into two hundred years of Australian history.\(^\text{16}\)

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\(^\text{14}\) Peter Cochrane, *Simpson and the donkey: the making of a legend* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press; Portland, Or.: International Specialized Book Services, 1992)

\(^\text{15}\) Cochrane, *Simpson and the donkey*, 9.

\(^\text{16}\) Cochrane, *Simpson and the donkey*, 238.
The importance of this statue, Figure 4, is reflected in its location, near the main entrance to the Australian War Memorial. It is a focal point for many of its visitors.

Figure 4. The statue of Simpson and his donkey adorned with commemorative poppies at the AWM. May 2014.

However, not all submissions were in support of a posthumous VC. When writing that the Tribunal had concluded that “the stories associated with Simpson are ‘largely a myth inflated and exaggerated by the sloppy work of journalists, amateur historians and jingoistic politicians’” James Brown seems to have been paraphrasing a little harshly. The tribunal does relate that one submission had at

17 Brown, Anzac’s Long Shadow, 148
its core, “Much of the story of Simpson is based on myth and hearsay”\textsuperscript{18} and later after detailed forensic examination, the Tribunal was to find:

No records of any acts of gallantry that can be attributed specifically to Simpson that might raise his conduct significantly above the actions of the many other soldiers present at Gallipoli, and, therefore, lead to a conclusion that he should have been awarded a VC.\textsuperscript{19}

Brown concludes his treatment of the inquiry by citing in part the submission of journalist and historian, Les Carlyon: “Simpson became a folk hero and this is never going to change and perhaps this is not a bad thing”.\textsuperscript{20} Perhaps Carlyon is correct, despite evidence to the contrary, Simpson's place in the foundation myth is fixed and as the Tribunal noted for many, “Simpson is the personification of Anzac and what it means to be Australian”.\textsuperscript{21}

Although the Tribunal was to ultimately recommend that none of the fourteen be given a posthumous award, the process represents a powerful argument for the position of military heroes in our national myths. Their stories of extraordinary courage providing for many the hallmarks of what it is to be Australian and to establish our worth on the international stage. Consequently once established, the myth, as in the case of Simpson, does not need to have a strong correlation with historical facts.


\textsuperscript{20} Brown, \textit{Anzac’s Long Shadow}, 148

It must be remembered that a soldier was expected to behave well when performing his duty, a point of view made very clear in a submission to the Tribunal arguing against Simpson’s bravery being singled out. The crux of the argument is that “all members of the Field Ambulance [Simpson’s unit] were equal: Simpson was just doing his job”. To receive extra recognition, a man had to be seen to be doing more than might reasonably be expected of him. So it is in this light that for each of the Indigenous men recognised for special mention; this chapter will endeavour to include the recommendation written at the time. They represent the closest account of what actually happened and have not been coloured by the passage of a hundred years.

Indigenous military heroes: the case of William Irwin

But what do Australians know of William Irwin? A shearer nearly 38 years old, William Irwin enlisted at Narrabri, NSW on 6 January 1916. Unlike Simpson, there is ample evidence to show that Irwin was a hero. However, as with 23 other Indigenous men to receive awards while serving with the First AIF, his is largely a previously untold story. In his records are entries detailing his exploits as a soldier, a warrior.

An original member of the 33rd Battalion, service number 792, William Irwin’s first major battle was at Messines. The 33rd’s war diary contains a sketch of the crater left by one of the huge mines detonated at the start of the battle, suggesting its close proximity to the battalion. The war diary tells us that “all companies moved

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forward without the slightest hesitation on the explosion of the mines and the opening of the barrage”. Following early success it then notes that “Enemy machine guns and snipers became more active on the afternoon of the 7th June”. Later it details the battalion casualties: 79 killed, 252 wounded, gassed and shell shocked 34, and 3 missing. Nearly all of the casualties were caused by shells. One of the 252 wounded was William Irwin.

In the *Official History*, Bean was to write of the 33rd’s role at the start of the advance:

> So far the only point at which resistance worthy of the name had been felt was, as had been expected, on the extreme right. The 33rd Battalion, an especially fine unit commanded by a young veteran of Gallipoli, Lieutenant-Colonel Morshead, had been picked for this position, and its advancing troops were from the first under the fire of distant Germans, who took long shots at them from safe trenches many hundred yards beyond the flank.

While later convalescing in Britain, Irwin seems to have contracted Venereal Disease (VD), the treatment of which took 34 days. Then he re-joined his unit on 29 November 1917. On 4 April 1918, he was wounded for a second time when the 33rd were defending Villers Bretonneux in the face of the German Spring Offensive. The 33rd has a very detailed war diary and it shows that for the battalion, 4 April was a perilous day:

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At 5.30 a.m. the enemy opened up a very heavy bombardment on our front and on VILLERS BRETONNEUX; the Battalion stood to arms shortly after. The enemy launched his attack at about 6 a.m. 28

The war diary then makes it quite clear that because of the retirement of various British units the Australians were unable to hold their line and the Germans were to seriously threaten Villers Bretonneux. It goes on to describe an incident which seems at odds with one’s associations with trench warfare:

The O.C. [Officer Commanding], 17th Lancers, rode forward and asked us to co-operate in restoring of the line. He said the Cavalry would charge with the lance when the enemy came over the railway into the open, and it was agreed that the 33rd Battalion would participate with the bayonet. A squadron quickly came to our assistance on our right flank and dismounted. The whole line then advanced, the enemy thereupon fell back at 6 40 p.m. … most of our casualties occurred during this advance. 29

The war diary records the casualties as “comparatively light and were mostly caused by rifle and machine gun fire”. The numbers were: killed in action 72 and 78 wounded. 30 Perhaps Irwin was wounded during this advance, but nevertheless he was again sent to Britain for treatment.

Although Irwin had participated in two major engagements there is nothing at this point to greatly differentiate him from many others in the AIF. Why his is a story

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demanding attention, are the events which were to occur soon after he re-joined his unit on 6 June 1918. After the AIF’s audacious capture of Mont St Quentin 24th – 27th August, Monash sought to consolidate the position by the capture of Bouchavesnes on its northern flank. “In order to do so an attack by the 3rd Division had been arranged at short notice after a day exhausting to both infantry and artillery, and in face of other particular difficulties.”31 Bean gives a graphic account of the 33rd’s role in what was to unfold:

The 9th Brigade, using the 33rd Battalion, started at the time arranged, 5.40, but the artillery had not yet received its orders and, though it fired, the barrage was thin and machine-guns in the south-west corner of Road Wood stopped the 33rd… A private, George Cartwright,32 stood up and from the shoulder fired at the troublesome German gunner and then walking forward shot him and the two men who took his place. Next, covering his run by exploding a bomb short of the trench, he rushed the gun and captured 9 Germans. The 33rd stood up and cheered him, and then advancing by two’s and three’s entered the wood. Pte. Irwin, an Australian half-caste, after attacking like Cartwright, was mortally wounded.33

For his actions, Cartwright was to be awarded the Victoria Cross

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Bean, for the only time to my knowledge, had written about an Indigenous soldier. He writes that Irwin had attacked like Cartwright and the details are recorded in

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34 AWM Collection: P02939.043 c. 1918. Informal outdoors portrait of Private (Pte) George Cartwright VC, 33rd Battalion. Pte Cartwright was awarded the Victoria Cross for "most conspicuous bravery" on 31 August 1918 at Road Wood, France. Pte Cartwright attacked an enemy machine gun that had held up two allied companies. He shot three of the team, bombed the post and captured the gun and nine prisoners. He was wounded in September 1918 and was hospitalised, returning to Australia in March 1919 where he was discharged on 1 July, later serving in the Citizen Military Forces. [http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P02939.043/](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P02939.043/) (24 March 2014)

his recommendation for the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), Figure 7. It tells of how Irwin “single handed and in the face of extremely heavy fire … rushed three separate Machine gun posts and captured the three guns and crews. It was while rushing a fourth Machine gun that he was severely wounded”. William Irwin was to die soon after on 1 September 1918.

From a reading of both documents it is difficult to see why Irwin, like Cartwright, was not recommended for the Victoria Cross. Perhaps it was felt that Cartwright’s action had inspired Irwin, nevertheless in terms of valour, it is difficult to see why Irwin was not nominated for the highest award, especially since he captured not one but enemy three machine gun posts (Figure 7). It is also worthwhile recording that if Irwin had been killed during the action he could only have been recommended for a Victoria Cross or Mention in Despatches, the DCM could not be awarded posthumously.

For what he achieved on August 31, William Irwin’s valour is exceptional and represents a story that demands acknowledgement. Actions such as his helped
to establish the formidable reputation of the Australians in the War as reflected in the 33rd's war diary entry for 31 August 1918:

The Battalion had its hardest fighting up to date. The 4th Regt. Guards Grenadiers was encountered and only beaten back after very hard fighting. However, our men came out on top and more than proved their fighting qualities.37


![Figure 8. William Allan Irwin, Permission of Pierre Vandervelden. “INMEMORy”, http://www.inmemories.com/Cemeteries/daourscomext.htm](http://www.inmemories.com/Cemeteries/daourscomext.htm)

The extent of the injuries that William Irwin suffered can also be found in his records, (Figure 9) together with details of the difficulties the authorities experienced in contacting his relatives.

Other Indigenous winners of the DCM

In addition to Irwin two other Indigenous men were awarded the DCM during the course of the war. The Australian government website, “It's an Honour”, notes that since the Boer War, the DCM has been given on only 2,017 occasions to Australians.³⁸ During the Great War approximately 1,800 Australians were awarded the DCM.³⁹ Such is the scarcity of this award that this represents only 0.5% of those who served abroad. In World War Two the figure was only 203. It is likely that the greater number for the Great War reflects the bitter nature of trench warfare.

³⁸ “Distinguished Conduct Medal,” It’s an Honour
³⁹ Johnson, Australians Awarded, 44.
William Irwin had won his DCM fighting at Bouchavesnes, northern France. The locations where Indigenous men were to win awards for gallantry are shown in Figure 10. They are clustered around the two main areas in which the AIF fought on the Western Front, Flanders in Belgium and the Somme in northern France.

Figure 10. Sites of Indigenous gallantry.

Under the Imperial system operating at the time (1914-18), the DCM was the second highest award for gallantry and for distinguished conduct in the field (after the Victoria Cross) for all army ranks below commissioned officers.40

The second Indigenous man to receive the DCM was Albert Knight.41 He had enlisted at Dubbo, NSW on 4 November 1915. As with many others in the First AIF, he served in several units. Originally with the service number 5709, he was a member of the 13th Battalion. Taken by strength on 6 October 1916, he was wounded in action on 11 April 1917 when the 13th, as part of the 4th Brigade, were involved in the First Battle of Bullecourt. The cost to the Battalion is recorded in

its war diary: 25 killed, 118 wounded and 367 missing.\textsuperscript{42} It is a cost amplified in the \textit{Official History}:

The six and a half battalions and accompanying units of the 4th Division engaged lost over 3,000 officers and men, of whom 28 officers and 1,142 men were captured, much the largest number of Australians taken by the enemy in a single battle. Much the heaviest loss fell on the 4th Brigade, whose casualties amounted to 2,339 out of some 3,000 engaged.\textsuperscript{43}

On 8 September 1917, Albert Knight was transferred to his brother's (William) battalion, the 43\textsuperscript{rd}, and later promoted to Lance Corporal on 29 December 1917. In September 1918, with the battalion engaged on the Hindenburg Line, Albert Knight's “conspicuous gallantry” in locating the source of enemy fire at great personal risk saw him being awarded the DCM during an attack on the village of Bony in France.

Albert Knight was one of three brothers to enlist in the AIF. One of whom, William, was to be awarded the Military Medal. His story will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. While two brothers in the AIF winning gallantry awards in the course of the Great War is not unique, it is for Indigenous soldiers and as such reflects well on their contribution to the reputation of the Australian digger. Albert's bravery in action is detailed in Figure 11.

\textsuperscript{42} AWM: War diary, 13\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm4/23/30/awm4-23-30-30.pdf} (1 July 2013)
The third Indigenous man awarded the DCM was James Stanton. Enlisting at Bendigo, Victoria on 26 July 1915, he was 25 years 9 months old and unmarried. A member of the 7th Battalion with service number 3265, he arrived in France on 31 March 1916. His records show a regular pattern of promotion, where at the war’s end he was a Company Sergeant Major, class 2, one of only two Indigenous men to attain this rank.

His records also show that in 1917 he attended a rifle course at the School of Musketry where he “qualified as first class with a fair working of Lewis Gun”.

46 AWM: Technology, Weaponry and Communications, 1918. The Lewis Gun was designed by Isaac Lewis in 1911, weighed about 12 kilograms, and could fire at a rate of approximately 500 bullets a minute. It provided the fire-power of 50 riflemen and brought a change to basic infantry tactics. Under the covering fire provided by a platoon (about 40 men) with one or two of these guns, rifle and bombing sections could then assault enemy positions. https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/1918/technology/ (24 March 2014)
It was for leadership in employing this weapon that James Stanton was to be awarded the DCM. His recommendation for the decoration can be found in Figure 12.

The war diary for the 7th Battalion gives further details of the action which was to lead to Stanton’s winning the DCM. It occurred in the operations following the Battle of Amiens at the village of Lihons. His recommendation for the DCM states that “he was in charge of a platoon”. Information on the AWM’s site provides the information needed to better understand the composition of an infantry battalion in World War One. A battalion, at optimum level, was made up of about 1,000 men organised into four companies. Each company was then further divided into four platoons. In each platoon there were three rifle and one

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Lewis Gun sections. A section was a unit of 10 men. This meant Stanton had been in charge of up to 40 men at Lihons, although only a sergeant he had been acting in the role of an officer.

His recommendation acknowledges his “great bravery” in quelling a German counterattack and how in doing so he kept Australian casualties to a minimum. In addition to this inspiring bravery, Stanton’s leadership was praised. Described as “splendid” and “cool”, he had displayed “initiative” and such “tactical knowledge as to totally outwit the enemy”. It seems ironic that when given the opportunity offered by war an Aboriginal man exhibited those traits which are so prized in the military hero. If it had not been for the war, it seems highly unlikely that in the society of the time, that Stanton’s abilities would have been appreciated or acknowledged.

James Stanton returned to Australia and was discharged on 6 July 1919. There is little in his file to reveal what was to happen later in James Stanton’s life, but for correspondence dated 10 February 1960 showing his application for benefits under the Repatriation Act, nothing to show as to whether the skills he had demonstrated in times of war had been followed up in civilian life.

Indigenous winners of the Military Medal

The majority of Indigenous men to win an award for bravery during the war received the Military Medal (MM). Instituted in 1916, the Military Medal was “awarded to NCOs and men of the Army for individual or associated acts of

bravery not of sufficient heroism as to merit the DCM”.50 As with other bravery awards it was given sparingly, with approximately 10,000 won by Australians, about 3% of those who saw service abroad. Of this number 15 were won by Indigenous soldiers.

The first to receive the award was one of only four Indigenous soldiers born in the Northern Territory: Frederick Prentice.51 Born at Powell’s Creek, at 21 years of age he enlisted at Keswick, South Australia on 7 May 1915. As with many Indigenous recruits he is described as complexion “dark”, eyes “brown” and hair “black”. Originally taken on strength by the 12th Battalion, with service number 2597, he was transferred to the 1st Pioneer Battalion on the 13 March 1916.

In July 1916 the Battalion was in action at Pozières, when the 1st Pioneer’s war diary records that on 19 July it “commenced work near Pozières”.52 On their first day at Pozières Frederick Prentice won the MM.

The story of Frederick Prentice on his return to Australia on 28 March 1918 reveals that he applied for a replacement for his MM. In a statutory declaration he states that he had been presented with his medal by then ANZAC commander, Birdwood, at Fricourt, France. He then explains how having sent his medal to his sister back to Australia, it was lost when the SS Mongolia was lost to enemy action.

Frederick Prentice, Australia’s first Indigenous bravery award winner, died in lonely circumstances at Katherine, Northern Territory on 22 November 1957. His file contains correspondence from the Northern Territory police to army authorities enquiring about a “Frederick Prentiss” who had died from “heart failure”. It speaks of him having been in Katherine for only three weeks and that he was known to only one other person. It would seem that he had told this person of his time in the AIF. Although the authorities replied in due course, there is nothing to indicate if attempts to notify his next of kin were successful, nothing to say where he is buried, and nothing to say whether his grave has been marked.

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Another Indigenous man to win the MM at Pozières was Maitland Madge. A small man only 5’ 2” (157.5 cm) in height and weighing 121 pounds (55 kg), Madge born at Cooktown, Queensland was to enlist at Fraser’s Hill, Queensland on 21 October 1915. Taken on strength by the 15th Battalion on 15 February 1916 Madge was soon involved in the bloody struggle for Pozières and Mouquet Farm:

On August 7th orders were issued for the 4th Australian Infantry Brigade, with some assistance on its left from the 12th Division, to launch on the night of the 8th the first of a series of advances along the summit of the ridge towards Mouquet Farm.

The 15th Battalion as part of the 4th Brigade was in this advance and the horrors they faced are also captured in the *Official History*:

The series of battles which ensued, repeating as they did within a narrower area most of the horrors of the Pozières fighting, cannot be described with the minuteness hitherto employed. The reader must take for granted many of the conditions - the flayed land, shell-hole bordering shell-hole, corpses of young men lying against the trench walls or in shell-holes ; some - except for the dust settling on them seeming to sleep; others torn in half; others rotting, swollen, and discoloured.

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Later in his account Bean provides a background for the events which lead to Maitland Madge being awarded the Military Medal. Maitland Madge was a “runner”:

Yet when, during these barrages, the battalion staff called for “runner,” the next messenger on the list would come forward and, receiving his message, climb the dugout stairs and issue in the face of the storm. Fifteen or twenty minutes later, emerging from between the shell-bursts which shovelled in the trenches, he might, if he lived, tumble exhausted, strained almost to speechlessness, down the stairs of some other headquarters to deliver his message, and then quietly curl himself up in the corner like a dog until he was called upon to return with another communication.  

Madge’s records contain the details of what it states to be his “conspicuous bravery” for the period 5 – 11 August 1916. Significantly in the recommendation is the remark that he did so while wounded.

Figure 14. AWM 28 1/180: Pte Maitland Madge, 3483, 15th Bn – recommendation for MM

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Evidence of the ferocity of the artillery exchanges at Mouquet Farm is clearly visible in Figure 15: “Aerial view of Mouquet Farm, after shelling by British artillery, showing the ruins of the farm and destroyed trenches. Insert photograph of the exterior view of Mouquet Farm.” In a type of before and after shot, the landscape has become almost unrecognisable, now pock marked with craters it has a lunar appearance. In some way it helps provide some insight, some empathy for the effects of the relentless artillery barrages which characterised the Great War.

Figure 15. AWM Collection: J00187. Aerial view of Mouquet Farm, after shelling by British artillery, showing the ruins of the farm and destroyed trenches. Insert photograph of the exterior view of Mouquet Farm. Public domain

Maitland Madge was to be wounded in action for a second time, on 4 July 1918 – the Battle of Hamel. Of his victory at Hamel, the newly appointed Australian commander, Monash, was to write:

Its effect was electric, and it stimulated many men to the realization that the enemy was, after all, not invulnerable, in spite of the formidable increase in his resources which he had brought from Russia. It marked the determination once and for all, of the purely defensive attitude of the British front. It incited in many quarters an examination of offensive action on similar lines by similar means – a changed attitude of mind, which bore a rich harvest only a few weeks later.61

Maitland Madge returned to Australia on 24 May 1919. He, as did fourteen other Indigenous men to serve in the 1st AIF, enlisted again at the outbreak of World War 2.62 For Madge it was on 14 June 1940, when with service number QX1836,

61 John Monash, The Australian Victories in France in 1918 (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1936), 45.
he became a member of the 2nd AIF. As part of the ill-fated 8th Division, Madge’s unit, the 2/26th Battalion, became prisoners of war with the fall of Singapore. Maitland Madge died in captivity and is buried at Kranji War Cemetery.
On his attestation papers for World War 2, Madge gave as his birthday, 17 March 1901. If this is accurate then when he enlisted for the 1st AIF he had been only 14 years 7 months old. Although it is possible that he lowered his age to enlist for the 2nd AIF, his physical description from his first enlistment could well support him being under-age for the 1st AIF. Unfortunately his records for World War 2 have no details for height. Nevertheless, regardless of age, his story shows a brave man who served his country in some of its iconic battles and is one that should now be acknowledged.
The next winner of the MM was 21 year old Frederick Briggs who enlisted at Armidale, NSW on 3 December 1915. His service number, 16, indicates that he was an original member of the 33rd Battalion. The obstacles which faced Indigenous men who wanted to join the AIF have been discussed in detail in previous chapters and the records of Frederick Briggs reinforce these hurdles. They contain a Statutory Declaration, Figure 17, which suggests that Briggs had to account for his appearance. Briggs states that his father was a native of New Zealand, perhaps to account for what his attestation papers report as a “dark” complexion, “black” eyes and “black” hair.

Figure 17. NAA: B2455, BRIGGS F J

Frederick Briggs was wounded in action on 24 February 1917. The war diary for the 33rd shows them to have had conducted a raid while in the frontline at

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63 NAA: B2455, BRIGGS F J

64 NAA: B2455, BRIGGS F J
Houplines, near the Franco – Belgium border. It reports a communication from the General Officer Commanding 3rd Australian Division, Major General Monash, commending the Battalion:

I wish to convey my congratulations to the 33rd Bn on brilliant execution of operation which has fully served its purpose besides achieving tangible results. … Raiders showed exemplary determination in entering [enemy trench] against opposition.

It also praised the work of stretcher bearers who rescued men from “NO MAN’S LAND” despite enemy artillery and machine gun fire. Frederick Briggs was awarded the Military Medal for his part in the operation and the nature of the wounds he suffered doing so suggests that he was likely one of those rescued from no man’s land. Briggs was to be wounded in action for a second time on the first day of the Battles of Messines – 7 June 1917. He later re-joined his battalion in Flanders where he was killed in action at Zonnebeke, on 29 September 1917. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres.

Representative of the broad cross section of men serving in the AIF is the next Indigenous MM winner James Couley. Whereas Maitland Madge may well have been under aged, James Couley was 32 years and 10 months. His occupation, as again with many Indigenous men, was in the rural sector: a shearer. James Couley’s enlistment was at Liverpool, NSW on 30 September 1915.

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Taken on strength by the 1st Battalion he was given the service number, 2978. A tall man 5’ 11½’ (181.6 cm), 168 pounds (76.2 kg) in weight and with an expanded chest measurement of 41¾” (106 cm) he was above average and certainly a much bigger man than was Maitland Madge. Heroes do not fit any stereotype and James Couley has a record littered with being absent without leave, drunkenness, disobedience and using “improper language to a superior officer”. Yet when on active service it is a record which also displays the fighting qualities prized in a soldier.

His records show that he was wounded in action on 25 July 1916 with a gun-shot wound to the left shoulder. On this date the Battalion was fighting at Pozières and the ferocity of this action is captured in the battalion’s war diary for 25 July:

Trouble was experienced in evacuating the wounded on account of the shortage of stretchers and the number of the wounded. In some cases 24 hrs elapsed before they could be sent to the dressing station.67

The war diary also provides the cost of the fighting for the Battalion: 7 officers and 100 other ranks killed; 4 officers and 376 other ranks wounded while 48 other ranks were missing and 2 officers had died of wounds – “This was the total loss in personnel of the Bn during the fighting at Pozières”.68 These experiences of the 1st Battalion are yet another graphic insight into the bitter fighting experienced by the AIF in action on the Western Front.

In May 1917 the 1st Battalion was again involved in heavy fighting, on this occasion at the Second Battle of Bullecourt. Details of what occurred can be

found in the 1st’s war diary when it relieved the 17th Battalion at the front line on May 4. Over the next four days the 1st had to defend it from a series of increasingly determined German counterattacks. During one of these, the war diary notes that the Germans employed a “Flanenwerfer” (*sic*) or flame thrower. As the war progressed, the belligerents in an effort to break the stalemate which had come to characterise the war in the West, turned to technology in the hope of a breakthrough, the “Flammenwerfer” was yet another frightening example of these new weapons.

The battalion’s war diary later records that on May 6 the Germans put down a “heavy barrage” and that the battalion on their right was driven back and that the position of the 1st had become “critical”. It was only after an hour’s heavy fighting that the position was restored. It then goes on to describe how the “fighting had been at close quarters” and that the enemy’s shelling had been “exceptionally heavy, destructive and constant”; it concludes with praise for how the men had “coped”.

These then were the conditions under which James Couley was to display “conspicuous gallantry”. As with Simpson, Couley’s bravery concerned the rescue of the wounded. He had been a stretcher bearer, sometimes carrying the men on his back and he had done so for 72 hours.

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Awards for bravery in times of war seem paradoxically split between those who take and those who save life; for James Couley it was for the later. In spite of what might appear to be a chequered time during his time in the army, he had at Bullecourt shown selfless heroism.

On 14 January 1916 18 year old Arthur Byrne\(^7\) enlisted for the AIF at Moree, NSW. His records show that he was a small man, 5’ 2” (157.5 cm) in height, 116 pounds (52.6 kg) in weight and with an expanded chest measurement of 33½” (85 cm); measurements consistent with his occupation: jockey.\(^8\) He was an original member of the 33\(^{rd}\) Battalion’s “C” Company and was allotted the service number of 718. It is highly likely that he knew William Irwin, who had enlisted at nearby Narrabri and who was also an original member of C Company.

During the Battle of Messines, Arthur Byrne’s “conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty” resulted in him being awarded the MM. His recommendation for the MM says of Byrne that “his cheerfulness … had greatly inspired his

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"...comrades". As a battalion in the Third Division of the AIF, Messines had been the division’s first involvement in a major battle. The actions of men such as Byrne were critical in establishing the fighting reputation of battalions in the Third Division and evidence of the role played by Indigenous men in doing so.

Arthur Byrne’s time in the 33rd saw him wounded on two occasions: the first from gas on the 17 April 1918 and the second on 8 August 1918 when he suffered shell wounds to the hand resulting in the amputation of his left index finger. Consequently he was to return to Australia on 6 November 1918. His story represents yet another of Indigenous bravery in the Great War.

Figure 19. AWM28 2/77: Pte Arthur Byrne, 718, 33rd Bn – recommendation for MM

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With the arrival of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the new German commanders on the Western Front, in early 1917 the Germans adopted a bold new strategic plan. Bean writes that in order to strengthen their position in light of a probable Allied offensive, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had decided to shorten their line and make a strategic retreat to highly fortified positions begun the previous September. Bean writes that for the German command it was essential that the operation, code named, “Alberich”, be conducted with the utmost secrecy. In their efforts to give the appearance of normality the Germans needed to appear to continue to be on the offensive. Typical of this strategy was the fighting described by Bean as a “sharp minor action” in a position near Bapaume, France “where the Germans still held a strong outpost in Sunray Trench”.

It was during this “sharp minor action” that another Indigenous man, Charles Goldspink won the MM. His recommendation, Figure 24, highlights his “courage and coolness under fire” as a “runner”.

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Charles Goldspink, one of three brothers to enlist for the AIF, did so at Molong, NSW on 30 November 1915. His trade on enlistment, as with his brother James, was “grocer”, one of the more unusual occupations for Indigenous recruits. A little younger than the average at 23 years and two months, he was attached to the 54th Battalion, with service number 5019 and arrived in France on 12 October 1916. Promoted to Lance Corporal on 11 October 1918 he was to return to Australia on 25 March 1919.

In October 1977, Chris Coulthard-Clark published, “Aboriginal medal winners” in Sabretache. In what is likely the first examination of this topic Coulthard-Clark highlights Harry Thorpe. In describing Thorpe as “a half caste aborigine”, the article demonstrates, even as late as 1977, terminology found so often in World War 1 accounts of the First Australians.

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Harry Thorpe born at Orbost, Victoria, enlisted at Sale, Victoria on 8 March 1916. Taken on strength by the 7th Battalion on 29 July 1916, with the service number, 5459, he was wounded in action on 19 August 1916 at Pozières. The 7th’s war diary places them at this time near “the Windmill”, which it records “forms an excellent mark for his [German] artillery”\(^81\). Of the shelling, the war diary notes that it was “very heavy and accurate”. On this day the casualties for the 7th were “10 OFF, 154 O.Rs.”\(^82\) Promoted to Lance Corporal, Harry Thorpe was wounded for a second time on 29 April 1917 near Bullecourt. After a period of rest and training, the 7th Battalion were committed to the Battle of Third Ypres. On 4 – 5 October the Battalion was involved in action at Westhoek Ridge. An appreciation of what the men of the 7th had to endure even before their attack is captured in the war diary:

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\(^81\) This is the spot where a windmill stood and which marked the highest point of the bitterly contested Pozières Ridge. During July and August 1916 the British Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Haig launched numerous attacks against Pozières Ridge in which Australian 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions featured. It finally fell on 4 August.

At 0530 put down on the Bn assembly position a heavy barrage of all calibres causing many casualties. It was impossible to move the Bn to avoid the barrage. The Bn endured the terrific barrage with great steadiness and courage and when our barrage opened at 0600 the Bn rose and quietly moved forward through the enemy barrage to the attack.\textsuperscript{83}

In the attack which was to follow Harry Thorpe “displayed great courage and initiative in mopping up enemy dugouts and pill boxes”. Originally recommended for the DCM, Harry Thorpe’s “splendid example” saw him awarded the MM and promoted to corporal.

![Figure 22. AWM28 1/34: L/Cpl Harry Thorpe, 5459, 7th Bn – recommendation for DCM\textsuperscript{84}](http://static.awm.gov.au/images/collection/pdf/RCDIG1068298--97-.pdf)

On 9 August 1918, the 7\textsuperscript{th} Battalion was again in action, now at the Hindenburg Line; the war diary describes the obstacles which confronted them:

Immediately in front of the objective the enemy had field guns in action firing point blank at advancing troops, and supported by M.Gs. placed in commanding positions.

Later it provides the cost: 13 officers and approximately 200 Other Ranks. One of these was Harry Thorpe. Wounded in action he died of his injuries that same day, 9 August 1918. Coulthard-Clark writes that after being shot in the stomach,

\textsuperscript{83} AWM: War diary, 7\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm4/23/24/awm4-23-24-32part1.pdf} (27 June 2013)

Harry Thorpe died shortly after being taken to the dressing station. After the War, Harry Thorpe was re-interred at Heath Cemetery, Harbonnieres, France.

Eliza Knight had three sons who enlisted for the AIF one of whom won the DCM and was discussed earlier in this chapter; a second son, William, enlisted at Adelaide on 21 January 1916. With the service number 105, he was an original member of the 43rd Battalion. Knight was wounded in action at Messines, 10 June 1917. The 43rd’s war diary records that on this day the Battalion “advanced under barrage and took up a new front line”. He re-joined his unit on 24 July and was promoted to Lance Corporal, 8 September.

Later the 43rd was to become involved in the campaign to take Passchendaele. On 4 October 1917 the 43rd was part of the British major victory at the Battle of Broodseinde. It had been fought relatively early in the context of Third Ypres and so is a victory overshadowed by the impossible conditions facing the British later in October. Its importance is highlighted by Bean who wrote:

In the air was the unmistakable feeling, not to be experienced again by the AIF until the 8th of August 1918, that the British leaders now had the game in hand and, if conditions remained favourable, might in a few more moves secure a victory which would have its influence on the issue of the war.88

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At Broodseinde William Knight won the MM. His recommendation is recorded in the 43rd’s war diary:

No 105 L/Cpl William Albert Knight

On 4th October N. of Zonnebeke, by the determined and intelligent use of his Lewis Gun, he effectively silenced enemy MGs and facilitated the advance of his platoon.89

In the fighting William Knight was badly injured and consequently discharged from the AIF on 15 July 1918. His files provide an insight into the effects on families in Australia as they contain a letter written by his mother when she asks for news of him and his brother, Albert. The human cost of the war is reflected by her comment, “There is nothing like a son to their mother”. Interestingly despite his bravery award, William Knight did not apply for his medals until 1968.

Charles Hearps90 enlisted at Claremont, Tasmania on 8 March 1916. 19 years 11 months on joining the AIF his physical description shows him to close to average: 5’ 5” (165 cm) in height; weight 130 pounds (59 kg) and expanded chest measurement of 36” (91.4 cm). His occupation, labourer, was that of most Indigenous recruits. He was a member of the 40th Battalion with the service number, 207. During his service in France he was promoted to “Driver”. In an infantry battalion in World War One, 11 privates acted as drivers of the horse-

drawn transport\textsuperscript{91} and so it is likely that Hearps had prior experience working with horses.

It was in this role that Hearps was to win the MM. The war diary of the 40\textsuperscript{th} Battalion for 28 March 1918 records that the battalion as it attacked a German position was subject to heavy machine gun and rifle fire. In addition it records that, subject to heavy German artillery barrages and without supporting from their own artillery, the battalion needed to consolidate its position and resist a strong German attack from Morlancourt.\textsuperscript{92} The role played by Hearps in the battalion’s success is captured in the recommendation he received following the fighting (Figure 23)

![Figure 23. AWM28 1/47: Dvr Charles Hearps, 207, 40th Bn – recommendation for MM\textsuperscript{93}]

Charles Hearps returned to Australia and was discharged on 7 October 1919. His story is one which reveals yet another way Indigenous men made a significant contribution to the AIF.

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\textsuperscript{91} “Makeup & organisation of the first AIF,” http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-conflicts-periods/ww1/1aif/organisation.htm (3 April, 2014)


Another mother to send three sons to the War was Emily Farmer. One of these, Augustus, won the MM. He joined at the ironically named, Blackboy Hill, Western Australia, on 9 December 1915. Given the service number 4808, Farmer, originally a member of the 4th Cyclists Corps, was later transferred to the 16th Battalion. Augustus Framer was one of the 91 Indigenous men to gain promotion whilst serving in the AIF. It is a powerful argument for the army providing Indigenous men the opportunity to demonstrate both leadership and a form of equality, possibly for the first time in their lives.

The war diary for the 16th Battalion acknowledges these traits with details of Augustus Farmer’s recommendation for the MM:

During the attack made on us near HEBUTERNE on 1st April 1918, this non-commissioned officer was in charge of a bombing section. During the attack he did most excellent work. After we had won our objective he bombed up an enemy communication trench: killing a number of the enemy in the process, and established a block. He displayed great fearlessness and excellent leadership and materially contributed to our success on this occasion.

On the morning of the 5th April 1918, he again did most excellent work when on 5 separate occasions he beat off enemy bombing attacks made along the communication trench above referred to. He is recommended for distinction.95

Later Farmer, as did many other Indigenous men, was to fight at the battle of Amiens, 8 August 1918. Its importance captured on this occasion in the war diary of the 16th Battalion:

It was the first time that the whole of the AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALIONS advanced together over the same battlefield, shoulder to shoulder as it were, to win through or die for the honor (sic) of “Australia, the Empire and our Cause”.  

As with all battles there were casualties for the 16th there were: “K.I.A. 3.O/R. Gassed 2. O/R. Died of W. 1/ O/R. Wounded 7 Offrs. 92. O/R.” One of those killed was Augustus Farmer. He has no known grave and is commemorated at the memorial at Villers Bretonneux.

One of Harry Thorpe’s friends was William Rawlings. He too was to win the MM and in another of the ironies of war, he was killed on the same day as his friend. On 14 March 1916, 25 year old horse breaker William Rawlings, enlisted for the AIF at Warrnambool, Victoria. Described in Coulthard-Clark’s article as a “full-blooded aborigine”, Rawlings was a forebear of some prominent First Australians. His younger sister, Adelaide, was the grandmother of renowned boxer, Lionel Rose, while another sister was the mother of famed Indigenous soldier, Reg Saunders. On enlistment papers the attesting officials have described him as a “half-caste aboriginal”.

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A member of the 29th Battalion with service number, 3603, Rawlings was to be admitted to hospital with “trench feet”. The AWM site describes it as an infection and swelling of feet resulting from exposure to long periods of damp and cold. At its worst trench feet might lead to amputation. On 28/29 July 1918 William Rawlings was awarded the MM. His recommendation reads:

At Morlancourt on night 28/29 July 1918. During the attack on enemy system this soldier had the responsibility of first bayonet man in a bombing team which worked down the enemy C.T. [communication trench], routed the enemy and established a block in the trenches. Pte. Rawlings displayed rare bravery in the performance of his duty killing many of the enemy, brushing aside all opposition and cleared the way effectively for the bombers of his team. His irresistible dash and courage set a wonderful example to the remainder of the team.

Figure 24. AWM Collection: P01695.001 Studio portrait of 3603 Private William Reginald Rawlings MM. Public domain.

This attack was mounted by three battalions, the 29th, 30th and 32nd, of the 8th Brigade. Its success was to result in the praise of General Tivey, commanding officer of the 5th Division:

The Australian soldier has made a name that we all have reason to be proud of and your latest exploit is worthy of the best traditions of the Force to which we have the honour to belong.\textsuperscript{102}

William Rawlings was killed in action, aged 27, on 9 August 1918, during the capture of Vauvillers, France. As previously noted it was to be the same day that Harry Thorpe was killed and after the War they were both reinterred at Heath Cemetery. The exact cause of William Rawlings death is difficult to establish as can be seen in the following Red Cross records, figures 25 and 26.

Figure 25. 1DRL/0428: William Rawlings, 3603, 29th Bn
The importance of 8 August 1918 to Australian military history and as a date which marks the beginning of the war's end has been raised on previous
occasions, but it also was the date when two Indigenous men were to win the MM. The first was John Ferguson.¹⁰³

While the records of some men such as for Charles Hearps, provide a minimum of information, others such as those for John Ferguson make it possible to “see” a little more of the man. On enlistment at Cootamundra, NSW on 18 January 1916, he had a physique which suited service in the AIF: 5’ 8½” (174 cm) in height, 150 pounds (68 kg) in weight and an expanded chest measurement of 34¼” (87 cm). His age was 23 years 2 months and he was a labourer. Soon after enlisting John Ferguson contracted Gonorrhoea. While earlier in the war, it seems that it was a reason for instant discharge, Ferguson remained in the AIF and was treated at Milson Island Isolation Camp, NSW for three months. His records state that he contracted the disease from an “Amateur”, presumably not from a prostitute.

Whether his initial treatment proved unsuccessful or if he was reinfected is unclear, but once abroad between 1916 and 1918 he was treated at Parkhurst and Bulford hospitals a further three times, for periods of 12, 26 and 68 days respectively.

Yet illness seems not to have been an impediment to his career in the army. While at the front, John Ferguson’s records show a pattern of promotion: by the war’s end he was a senior non-commissioned officer; a sergeant. This suggests there had been official recognition of both his leadership and fighting qualities and these are clearly demonstrated in his recommendation for the MM, Figure 28.

In this strong “fighting” citation both qualities are highlighted. Apart from revealing that he returned to Australia and was discharged 26 August 1919 there is nothing to give an insight into what the future held for John Ferguson. The army seems
to have provided a world were ability and skill were the main criteria for recognition, whether post-war Australia was to offer it to Indigenous men is rather debatable.

The next Indigenous MM winner, John Gray, is another example of a formidable “fighting action”. It occurred in the great Australian led victory at Amiens on 8 August 1918. As with many other awards to the AIF it centres on the weapon many associate with the Great War, the machine gun. His recommendation, although reversing his given names, tells what occurred.

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John Gray had enlisted on 22 December 1915 at Rockhampton, Queensland. As with James Couley he was a big man: in height 5’ 11” (180 cm), weight 162 pounds (73 kg) and with an expanded chest measurement of 38” (96.6 cm). On arrival in France he was taken on strength by the 26th Battalion on 28 August 1916. Apart from a bout of influenza there is little in his records although the nature of his wounds for which he won the MM are listed. He had suffered a gunshot wound to his right arm. He returned to Australia 23 April 1919.

Although born at Naracoorte, South Australia, Raymond Runga107 joined the AIF on 31 March 1916 at Broadmeadows, Victoria. A 26 year old labourer, his description is given as complexion “black (Aboriginal)”, eyes “black” and hair “black”. Embarking from Australia on 4 April, 1916, Raymond Runga was taken on strength by the 6th Battalion, with the service number, 5476. Remembering that attestation papers did not officially record ethnicity, Runga’s is yet another example where the recruiting officer felt it necessary to record his race.

Raymond Runga’s records reflect two relatively minor misdemeanours, drunkenness and being absent without leave for one day. They also show that he was wounded in action on two occasions. The first was on 26 October 1917. The war diary for the 6th records that on this day the Battalion was engaged in a “minor operation”, an attack on “three pill boxes on line of final objective” during the struggle for Passchendaele. Advancing behind a creeping barrage most of the early casualties were caused by “friendly fire” when the protective barrage fell
short. Having achieved their objective the troops were then subject to a heavy enemy artillery bombardment which lasted six and a half hours. This was followed by a counterattack of 200 German troops. Eventually overall enemy pressure forced the Australians to retire. Unfortunately although providing graphic detail for the attack, the war diary does not specify the casualties for this “minor operation”.

Runga was wounded on a second occasion on 25 August 1918. The war diary shows that the Battalion was involved in an attack at Foucaucourt, France. It also provides evidence of the cost the War had made on the AIF at this time. Remembering that a battalion at full strength consisted of approximately 1,000 men, the 6th attacked with 408. The casualties the 6th suffered on this day were: 30, one of whom was Raymond Runga, who was gassed. However what is most remarkable about his records are perhaps the details of his action which was to win him the MM.

Figure 31. AWM28 1/47: Pte Raymond Runga, 5476, 6th Bn – recommendation for MM

When a “fighting” citation carries terms such as “conspicuous gallantry” and “an heroic example of utter disregard of personal safety” it is hardly surprising that its initial recommendation was for the DCM, however as it unfolded, this was to be downgraded, Raymond Runga was awarded the MM.

On his return to Australia, he was presented with his medal at Melbourne on 24 January 1920. However, later in the day, after passing it around for inspection among a group of about five men it was not returned.111 There is nothing in his files to indicate that he ever applied for a replacement.

Beginning on 30 September 1918, in one of the last battles they would face on the Western Front, the AIF together with US forces, spearheaded an attack on the central defences of the Hindenburg Line; four days later they had succeeded.112 One of the Australian battalions involved was the 53rd. In providing detail of what had occurred, Bean writes of a German counter attack to retake Le Catelet trench, held by a company of the 53rd and the “furious” fighting which had flowed to and fro. He goes on to say that as a result the Australians while close to despair in breaking the German resistance had eventually prevailed.113 It was a battle in which Indigenous man, James Phillips,114 won the MM.

Older than the average at 30 years and six months he had enlisted for the AIF at Armidale, NSW on 28 February 1916. He was also physically above the average:

5' 10½” (179 cm) in height, 162 pounds (73.4 kg) in weight and with an expanded chest measurement of 38½” (98 cm). On arrival in France, with service number 1643, he was taken on strength by the 53rd Battalion on 30 September 1916.

Accidentally wounded in the frontlines, Phillips was sent to England where he, as did many others, contracted VD. His return to his unit in France resulted in his promotion to Lance Corporal. Soon the 53rd was fighting at the Hindenburg Line.

It has previously been noted that recruitment in Australia had failed to maintain the AIF’s numbers late in the war and this is reflected in the war diary of the 53rd battalion. Its entry for 30 September 1918 gives the unit’s strength as being 388. It was to go into action then with only 38% of its optimum strength.

Originally recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal as seen in Figure 36, James Phillips was to be awarded the MM. The practice of “downgrading” a recommendation was not uncommon in the AIF and is alluded to in “The Report of the Inquiry into Unresolved Recognition for Past Acts of Naval and Military Gallantry and Valour” which notes that there are at “least 70 instances on record in the Australian War Memorial of soldiers who were nominated for VCs but were not approved”.

Nevertheless this recommendation is an example of a truly outstanding “fighting” citation.

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Figure 32. AWM28 2/94: L/Cpl James Phillips, 1643, 53rd Bn – recommendation for DCM

His files however tell us little of what later life was to hold for James Phillips. He returned to Australia and was discharged on 4 September, 1919. In 1961 he lodged a claim for Repatriation benefits, but there is nothing else.

The case of Ewan Rose and the Croix de Guerre

While a man’s time in the military may well have been years, the events which saw him win an award, even a Victoria Cross, might have happened in a matter of minutes. Yet this was not the case for Ewan Rose. Enlisting at Liverpool NSW on 16 September 1915 Rose’s attestation papers show that while physically his height at 5’ 5½” (166 cm), weight 152 pounds (69 kg) and expanded chest measurement 39” (99 cm) may have been close to the average, his age 35 years and 7 months was well above. With the service number 3132, he was designated for the 10th Reinforcements of the 2nd Battalion.
Ewan Rose’s file then show that on arrival in France he was transferred to 54th battalion, but within a month he was a founding member of the 14th Light Trench Mortar Battery, (LTMB). While serving with this unit he was promoted to Corporal and awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre. His record shows that he contracted Venereal Disease in 1918 and that the treatment time was 48 days. He was to return to Australia and was discharged on 25 May 1919. Yet there is more to Ewan Rose’s service than is contained in this file.

In the eyes of his commanding officer, Captain K Brock, he was an exemplary soldier and the evidence for this can be found in the numerous recommendations he made for Ewan Rose. Brock, on enlistment 26 years 1 month, was therefore a much younger man than Rose, but one who had been badly wounded in the tragedy of Fromelles. His records also show that Venereal Disease was not the sole province of enlisted men as he also was treated for 41 days in 1918.

Despite their completely varied backgrounds: Brock’s occupation, “Mercantile broker”, suggesting educated middle class and Rose, Indigenous “horse breaker”, there is a recognition of merit for service in the AIF. In his first attempt to officially recommend Rose, Brock writes that he had been with the 14th LTMB since its formation and highlights his prominence in the fighting at Third Ypres, especially at Polygon Wood and Broodseinde.

Later Brock was again to recommend him, this time for a Mention in Despatches (MiD). In Brock’s handwritten submission we learn that Rose had been prominent in the fighting at Fromelles. It is a submission which helps explain Rose’s later promotion, for Brock writes that while in France, Rose had never had a day’s absence and that he was always someone who could be “thoroughly relied upon”.

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When his recommendation failed to get the recognition he obviously felt Rose deserved, he recommended him, on this occasion successfully, for the Belgian Croix de Guerre.
There is also an unsuccessful recommendation for the French Croix de Guerre.

Figure 36. AWM28 2/96: Pte Ewan Rose, 3132, 14 Australian LTMB - Recommendation for French Croix de Guerre.

The unit to which Rose was attached the 14th Light Trench Mortar Battery were specialists using yet another weapon designed to meet the conditions of trench warfare. It can be seen in Figure 37.
Indigenous men Mentioned in Despatches

The final group of Indigenous men to given an award in the Great War received a “Mention in Despatches”.

The Mention in Despatches (MiD) is the oldest British award and was a device used by commanders at sea or in the field to bring the services of deserving officers to the attention of higher authority.

The MiD is the only form of recognition, apart from the Victoria Cross (VC), that could be made posthumously for gallantry or distinguished service in action or on operations.

Following World War One the device was fixed at a low angle to the centre of the ribbon of the Victory Medal which was awarded to all personnel who served in any operations or at sea.\(^{125}\)


The first of the Indigenous men to win the MiD was William Jonas who enlisted at Stroud, NSW on 11 April 1916. He joined the 34th Battalion with the service number, 2101. His records reveal little of his time overseas, apart for a severe reprimand for being absent from leave for two days. However, this did not prevent him from later being mentioned in despatches.

Figure 39. AWM28 1/177: Pte William Jonas, 2101, 34th Battalion - Recommendation MiD

The next Indigenous winner of the MiD, Frank Stewart\textsuperscript{127} is one of the Indigenous men acknowledged by Coulthard-Clark\textsuperscript{128} who describes him as “a half caste”. Stewart was to serve with the 5\textsuperscript{th} Pioneer Battalion. Born at Wallaga Lake Mission Station, NSW he enlisted on 30 November 1915 at Sydney. Originally a member of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, he was transferred to the 5\textsuperscript{th} Pioneers on 5 May 1916 with the service number 4911. His records show that he was court martialed on 2 February 1917, for removing a duckboard from a dump in Trones Wood. Found guilty, he was originally sentenced to 40 days Field Punishment Number Two, but this was to be reduced to 26 days.

The importance of duck boards, especially in the quagmires which developed during Third Ypres, can clearly be seen in Figure 40. Without them any form of movement would have been virtually impossible.

\textsuperscript{128} Coulthard-Clark, “Aboriginal medal winners,” 246.
Figure 40. AWM: E01220 - Five Australians passing along a duckboard track over mud and water among gaunt bare tree trunks in the devastated Chateau Wood, a portion of one of the battlegrounds in the Menin Road area Ypres salient. Public Domain. It is a photograph by Capt. James Francis (Frank) Hurley

Why Stewart may have taken the duckboard is perhaps is explained in the 5th Pioneer’s war diary entries for January, 1917:

Weather cold, snow all over ground … trenches are pretty well cleaned but require a lot of work – ground getting very hard – has to be all picks and stakes cannot be driven into the ground. Snow still everywhere.  

Perhaps Stewart stole the duckboard for fuel to keep warm and a 40 day punishment might seem quite severe, however it may well have been a deterrent to prevent others following his example. Regardless of his offence Frank Stewart was to be later mentioned in despatches.

The third Indigenous man to be mentioned in despatches was Garnett Wilson.\textsuperscript{130} Born at Point McLeay, South Australia he enlisted at Adelaide on 27 April 1916. Taken on strength by the 43\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, he had the service number, 2049. He was absent without leave on two occasions and admitted to hospital suffering from trench fever:

Apart from the inescapable cold during the winters in France, trenches were often completely waterlogged and muddy, and crawling with lice and rats. Diseases such as trench fever (an infection caused by louse faeces) became common medical problems, and caused significant losses of manpower.\textsuperscript{131}

As with other examples of MiD there seems to be no details of official recommendations, but Garnett Wilson was recognised on April 7 1918. As had Maitland Madge, Garnett Wilson enlisted for World War 2, on 16 June, 1942. In a somewhat chequered time, Garnett Wilson was attached to the 25\textsuperscript{th} Employment Company (Aboriginal detachment) in the Northern Territory. He was discharged on 11 January, 1945.

26 year old Thomas Clark\textsuperscript{132} was born in Singleton, NSW and enlisted at Holsworthy NSW on 13 October 1915. As with several other Indigenous men he was a member of the Remount Units and from the considerable correspondence with the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission and his declared trade of “horse breaker”, it is hardly surprising that he was to continue working with horses. It was a duty to which he seems to have been well suited, not only was his work rewarded with an MiD as seen in Figure 46, but at the war’s end, he had been promoted to sergeant. He is also the only Indigenous man to receive an award for service in the Middle East.


286
The final Indigenous man to receive an honour for the war was Arthur Ruttley. Ruttley was another Indigenous man who enlisted in 1915; he did so at Narrabri, NSW on 17 August. Originally a member of the 13th Battalion, he was to finish the war as a sergeant in the Provosts. His time in the AIF was examined in greater detail in Chapter 2. Although not on the AWM's database for Honours and Awards, Figure 43 clearly shows that he did receive an MiD, possibly its late date 1920 would account for this oversight.
Conclusion

This chapter began with the observation that heroes are a crucial ingredient in a nation's myths. It also made the point that for many Australians they are soldiers of the Great War. Too often the First Australians have been marginalised and
made feel inferior. Some in my own family have been ashamed of their heritage. The telling of stories of Indigenous heroes in the First AIF not only completes another part of the jigsaw but also gives, for those who need it, a reason for pride.

In the next chapter, in an attempt to give a balanced overview, the focus will be on those who fell foul of the military system operating in the First AIF. It will examine that strange dichotomy which surrounds World War One diggers: in one sense there is something reverential, almost religious, in the national regard for them, while in another, the nation celebrates their anti-authoritarian larrikinism.

As the brave Indigenous men whose exploits have been discussed in this chapter built the revered reputation of the ANZACs, so too did Indigenous men of the AIF also play their part in its shadow side of misbehaviours.
CHAPTER 7

“Do you know to whom you’re speaking”

In telling the story of the Indigenous men of the First AIF to this point, this thesis has in many ways followed a traditional path. An analysis of empirical data not only has given an insight into the experiences of these men, but it has also shown how Indigenous soldiers were in many ways, such as age, height and weight, representative of the AIF as a whole. Through personal stories it has established that Indigenous men fought and died in many of the iconic battles of the Great War. Central to the Anzac myth is heroism and so the gallantry displayed by Indigenous men has also been examined and celebrated. But does it tell the whole story or does it risk in the words of Peter Stanley presenting a picture of “cardboard cut-outs Anzac heroes”?¹ For Stanley the finest tribute we can make to the men of the First AIF is to tell their story straight. In development of this point he enlists the words of AIF soldier and journalist, Cyril Longmore, who observed, “No one claims the AIF was made up of angels. They were men with all a man’s virtues and vices”.²

Discipline and a citizen army

Yet it is an area largely overlooked in the many texts devoted to the Anzac myth. Stanley makes the point that prior to his text no one had written a full-length book about the AIF’s discipline,³ although “Crime and punishment on the Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force and British Army discipline” was the title of a

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¹ Stanley, Bad Characters, 11.
² Cited in Stanley, Bad Characters, 21.
³ Stanley, Bad Characters, 11.
Ph. D. thesis by Edward Garstag at Murdoch University in 2009. What then has come to dominate the image of the Anzac is either one which is quasi-religious in nature, as witnessed by the “pilgrimages” made by present day Australians to World War One battle sites, or his portrayal as the cheerful, benign larrikin. Arguably representations such as these have had the effect of masking the real human beings who were the Anzacs. The stories of the following Indigenous men help provide some insights into them as rounded human beings because, in many ways, they are stories which are mirrored in the AIF as a whole. I would contend that in telling their stories our understanding of these men is enhanced not diminished. Importantly they provide an insight into how they attempted to deal with the horrors of what they experienced in the war. The evidence also show that the AIF not only rewarded but also punished all of its members consistently, if sternly, irrespective of race, a fact which is harder to establish for Australian civilian life.

Field punishment and the case of Frank Owen

The story of Frank Owen is one which provides insights into how members of a volunteer force could come into conflict with a disciplinary system and a chain of command originally designed for professional soldiers. The background of the AIF’s system of discipline is provided by Stanley. He argues that the outbreak of war “seemed to catch authorities unaware” and while many of the logistical
problems faced assembling, equipping and transporting an expeditionary force were soon overcome, no one had thought much about how it would be governed. Consequently he writes that it was finally decided that “the AIF could be disciplined under the British Army Act”. Some of the results of this decision can be seen in the stories of the following men.

As has been established in earlier chapters, the average age on enlistment for the AIF was twenty five and so the majority had been working in a wide variety of occupations in country and city for about ten years before enlisting. Not only is it the same average for Indigenous members of the AIF, it also seems reasonable to assume from the nature of the occupations given on their attestation papers, Figure 1, that the vast majority had been in employment for a considerable period of time. Frank Owen, although born at Wallaroo, South Australia, enlisted at Gympie in Queensland on 22 April 1915. Although physically close to the norm: 5’ 6” (167.6 cm) in height, 145 pounds (66.8 kg) in weight and an expanded chest measurement of 38” (96.5 cm), he was markedly older at 36 years and 11 months in age (overall average age). His physical description was recorded as complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”. His occupation, as with most Indigenous recruits, is recorded as “labourer”. And as with most 1915 enlistments there is no reference to his Aboriginality in his records.

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6 Stanley, Bad Characters, 18.
7 Stanley, Bad Characters, 18.
Figure 1 Occupations of Indigenous recruits

Figure 2 Occupations for AIF as a whole
Given the service number 4193, he was originally allotted to the 26th Battalion. However soon after arriving in Egypt he was to be transferred to the 4th Field Company Engineers. Its war diary shows that this was a new unit raised on 7 August 1915. A likely reason for Owen’s transfer was his being absent without leave for one day on 12 July 1915 which resulted in firstly seven days and then 10 days’ detention. Transfers, especially in these early days of the war, were a way for unit commanders to deal with perceived discipline problems. However being removed from the infantry and training as an engineer in Egypt seems not to have been to Frank Owen’s liking. August was a time of heavy casualties for the AIF at Gallipoli: 245 killed and 7,332 wounded. Perhaps Frank Owen saw the casualties from Lone Pine, the Nek and Hill 60 who were brought back to Egypt, for on 28 August he was given 14 days’ Field Punishment No 2. He had left his unit in Egypt and landed at Anzac as a stowaway. Presumably he thought he would have been of greater use fighting than training in the desert. The recording of this offence is shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 3. NAA: B2455, OWEN FRANK EDGAR

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8 AWM: War diary 4th Field Company, Australian Engineers
While it may have been an act in the best traditions of the larrikin, it was one which achieved little. For on 13 September 1915 the war diary for the 4th Field Company Engineers shows them landing at Anzac and soon deployed at Lone Pine.\footnote{AWM: War diary 4th Field Company, Australian Engineers http://static.awm.gov.au/images/collection/bundled/RCDIG1008556.pdf (6 May 2014)}

Following the evacuation of the Peninsula, Frank Owen’s records reflect continued conflict with army discipline. There are more cases of his being absent without leave, often occurring with incidents of drunkenness. One of the more colourful incidents in his records centres on his attempt to sell military equipment – riding breeches. When apprehended he had refused to give his name, resisted arrest and found not in possession of his identity disc. For these offences he was awarded 28 days’ Field Punishment No 2. Later in France on 11 November 1916 he was charged “when on active service drunk in NZ lines”. On this occasion he was given 14 days’ Field Punishment No 1.

Stanley makes the comment that while there is a widespread belief in contemporary Australia that the AIF did not award field punishment, it was in fact used throughout the war. The records of Frank Owen show how it was used as punishment. While his earlier minor offences were mainly dealt with by Field Punishment No 2 he was also awarded the more severe Field Punishment No 1. Field Punishment No 1 entailed placing the prisoner in irons and then tying him to an object such as a post or a limber wheel for several hours a day, often with arms outstretched.\footnote{Stanley, Bad Characters, 101.}

For Garstag Field Punishment No 1 was a punishment used reluctantly by Australian authorities who he argues believed it to be a degrading
measure which was “an affront to a man’s dignity”.\textsuperscript{12} As it was carried out in view of the soldier’s comrades Garstag sees its purpose as both to humiliate and act as a deterrent.\textsuperscript{13}

Later in 1917 following charges of using abusive language to an NCO and neglecting to comply with an order, Owen was awarded 28 days’ detention at Parkhurst Detention Barracks. Being located on the Isle of Wight, Parkhurst was both isolated and a place from which escape was difficult. It is Stanley’s belief that compounds such as these exacerbated a man’s vices and that ultimately issues surrounding punishment as a means to enforce discipline was a problem the AIF never solved.\textsuperscript{14}

It would seem to be a conclusion echoed by the records of Frank Owen. Despite an obvious escalation in their attempts to deal with issues such as drunkenness and insubordination, nothing seems to have worked, not even a transfer in 1918 to the Australian Mobile Veterinary Section. Here he again was given Field Punishment No 2 for drunkenness. His relatively early discharge and return to Australia on 2 January 1919 seems a quick way for the army to resolve its problems with Frank Owen. While his files provide some insight into Frank Owen’s time in the AIF, there is nothing that tells us of his life post war.

What they do reveal however is the story of a complicated man, one who had enlisted early in the war, the day before the Gallipoli invasion. A man of nearly 37 years, he was may well have had a working career of over 20 years. Perhaps his

\textsuperscript{12} Garstag, “Crime and punishment on the Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force and British Army discipline”, 87.
\textsuperscript{13} Garstag, “Crime and punishment on the Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force and British Army discipline”, 33.
\textsuperscript{14} Stanley, Bad Characters, 105.
enlisting at a place so far from that of his birth may well have been his attempt to escape the hurdles that confronted an Aboriginal man enlisting. His actions in stowing away to get to Gallipoli in August seem driven by the desire to do what he saw as a priority: fight. While his problems with alcohol may have preceded the war, it is also likely that they were aggravated by what he saw and experienced during the war. While obviously an army must have a system to enforce its discipline, the escalation which Frank Owen received clearly shows that those measures in place at the time did not work. An Anzac because of his service on the Peninsula, the story of Frank Owen is more than that of a cardboard cut-out.

Hard labour – the case of George Aitken

The story of George Aitken\(^\text{15}\) provides further insights. Born at Taroom, Queensland, he enlisted on 5 April 1916 at Cloncurry, Queensland. As with Frank Owen he was in many ways representative of recruits for the AIF: 5’ 6” (167.6 cm) in height, 144 pounds (65.3 kg) in weight and an expanded chest measurement of 38½” (97.8 cm); but at 22 years and 5 months he was younger than average. His physical description was complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”. He was a stockman.

A further insight into George Aitken is revealed by the will, Figure 4, found in his service record. While the issues of what awaits us after death and the importance

of friendship may have been more eloquently examined by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, there is a power in their treatment by Aitken. Despite his likely having received little formal education, they are reflections by a man of high intelligence, sensitivity and wry humour.

Figure 4. NAA: B2455, AITKEN G R

His will is addressed to “No 2441 Pte D T Hampson”16 and the bond between the two men is explained in the file of Denis Hampson. It contains a letter to the authorities from his sister, Mrs Lily Turner, in which she writes that George Aitken had been raised by the Hampson family. She also tells authorities that George

Aitken’s mother was “Princie” and that she was living at Barambah Mission Station, Maryborough, Queensland. Denis Hampson’s records also show that he had enlisted on the same day and place as his friend George Aitken.

A member of the 52\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion with service number 2367, George Aitken arrived in England on 19 December 1916. However in a little over a month he was in conflict with military authority. While on leave he disobeyed Anzac provosts’ orders and during their attempt to place him under arrest, he struck one in the face. Given that the offence took place at Codford in Wiltshire, a largely agricultural and minor county in southern England, it is likely that the 52\textsuperscript{nd} was at the nearby military camp on the Salisbury Plain.

An insight into what life was like at Codford can be found in a poem by Private Robert Phelan\textsuperscript{17} published in the Box Hill (Victoria) \textit{Reporter}, 23 February 1917.\textsuperscript{18} In the poem Phelan writes of its dreariness; it is “isolated” and “desolated”. He creates a place of monotonous drill and “sludge up to the eyebrows”. Phelan concludes his text with the wry comment that when the war has ended and “Kaiser Billy” has been captured the most appropriate punishment would be to send him to “Mud Camp” amongst the “rats and clay”. The camp at Codford is shown in Figure 5.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} NAA: B2455, PHELAN ROBERT JOHN DAVID, \hfill http://naa12.naa.gov.au/NameSearch/Interface/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=8011829 (9 May 2014)
  \item \textsuperscript{18} "CODFORD CAMP." \textit{Reporter} (Box Hill, Vic. : 1889 - 1918) 23 Feb 1917 \hfill http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article75167073 (9 May 2014)
\end{itemize}
Following his arrest George Aitken was tried under a District Court – Martial (DC-M). Its records are very revealing. There are the statements of the three military police involved in his arrest. In their testimony to the court each stated that “at about 8.15 pm [George Aitken] was on the steps of the George Hotel in company with other Australian soldiers”. Each describes Aitken as creating a “disturbance” and “threatening to fight”. After being told to return to camp he is alleged to have said in reference to the military police, “Let me get at the cold-footed bastards”. Then during their attempts to place him under arrest George Aitken was accused of having struck one of them, L/Cpl Roberts, in the face. He was then overpowered, handcuffed and confined to the Guardhouse.

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20 NAA: A471, 20808
Not only was the testimony of the three provosts almost word for word the same, which strongly suggests collusion, each made the telling comment that at the time of his arrest Aitken was "sober". At his trial George Aitken was not given any legal representation, he did not cross examine any of the military police, nor did he elect to give evidence himself “as a witness”. In his defence he did state to the court that “I must have been drunk and do not remember what took place”. The only other evidence was a character statement from Second Lieutenant Rupert Einsiedel. In his evidence to the court Einsiedel stated that he had known Aitken since “early in July 1916” and that at all times while under his command “his behaviour had been extremely good”. He also testified that he had also been “a good soldier especially on the troopship when we had a great deal of trouble”.

In their consideration of the case the members of the court martial were also provided with the accused’s overall record while in the army. The records for George Aitken strongly support the evidence given by Lieutenant Einsiedel; there had been no other negative entries. Nevertheless, the court-martial found him guilty and sentenced him “to be imprisoned with hard labour for two years”. As is reflected in an appendix to Putkowski and Sykes, Shot at Dawn and also in a table provided by Garstag, this was the maximum punishment available to a DC-M. The conditions for hard labour were obviously intended to deter and although modified in 1898 still included:

For twenty-eight days employment on hard manual or bodily labour in strict

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24 Garstag, "Crime and punishment on the Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force and British Army discipline", 33.
separation, after which hard labour prisoners worked in association with ordinary prisoners pursuant to what was, in effect, the reversion to the silent system recommended by the Gladstone Report. For the first month of a sentence of hard labour the prisoner had to sleep on a plank bed without a mattress. The period of separate confinement was abolished during the first war; the period without a mattress was reduced to a fortnight before the requirement was totally abolished in 1945.25

Such punishment had strong similarities with the separate system at Port Arthur convict prison in early colonial days in Tasmania as Van Diemen’s Land.26 In light of the severity of his sentence, George Aitken appealed. Given his use of English as seen in his will, it seems highly unlikely that it was George Aitken who composed the appeal, more than likely it was the work of Lieutenant Einsiedel. It states that as he was drunk at the time “the punishment was excessive for the crime committed”. It also highlights the evidence of Lieutenant Einsiedel on his behalf. A further matter concerned the makeup of the Court-martial members, where it seems that one officer, Lieutenant Griffin, had insufficient service to sit as a member of a DC-M, being only a Second Lieutenant in the AIF, not a full Lieutenant.

In its reply the Judge Advocate General makes the point firstly that while “there is no right of appeal” the case would be reviewed by the Army Council and secondly, that while Griffin was only a Second Lieutenant in the AIF, he was

nevertheless “a full Lieutenant in the military forces of Australia”. The sentence was later remitted to 12 months’ detention. As a result of the appalling casualties experienced on the Western Front, in June 1917, see p206, the unexpired portion was remitted and George Aitken was taken on strength by the 52nd on 22 July 1917.

The war diary for the 52nd shows the battalion to be engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres during October 1917 where they were in the front line on Broodseinde Ridge in Belgium. On 19 October 1917 the battalion had three killed in action, one of these was George Aitken; he has no known grave but is commemorated on the Menin Gate, Ypres. Some of the appalling conditions faced by Australian troops during Third Ypres in October 1917 can be seen in Figure 6. While George Aitken did not survive the war, his friend Dan Hampson did, despite being taken prisoner of war in October 1917. He returned to Australia 16 May 1919.
The story of George Aitken has many tragic elements. It seems likely that when he enlisted with his friend Denis Hampson that they saw the war as an adventure as many recruits did. While Beaumont writes that it is “hard to know” what individual Australians thought at the outbreak of the war, the reason some enlisted was “to be part of the stoush to have ‘a dig at the Germans’”.

On arrival in an English winter the dismal conditions at Codford must have been anticlimactic. The circumstances of what happened that night of 13 January 1917 are not really clear. If the accounts of the provosts are to be believed then his

27 AWM Collection: E01049. Scarcely anything was left at Remus Wood, except mud and shattered tree stumps, after the battle for Broodseinde Ridge, in the Ypres Sector. The German pillbox in the central background, alongside a well, withstood the shells. To the left of the photograph (which was taken the day following) is a sunken hedge full of German dead; whilst the duckboard track shown in the bottom left hand corner, leads to the crater in Broodseinde Ridge. [link](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E01049/) (23 May 2014)

accounts of being drunk make more sense, but they all state that he was sober. In a previous section the negative attitudes of many in the AIF to the military police has been explored and that many saw them as avoiding the real fighting. Is it possible that their evidence that Aitken had wanted to fight them and called them “cold footed bastards” been an overreaction to his taunt about their “bravery”? Was it a comment influenced by the other Australians with whom he was mixing? There are many unanswered questions.

The case of George Aitken also highlights the flaws in the discipline system and its administration operating at the time. Although the records of the court-martial shows it to have been a mechanical process as seen in the annotation “Rule 83B been complied with” which followed the evidence of each of the provost witnesses, it was a process weighted heavily in favour of the prosecution. While they were familiar with process, Aitken, unrepresented, was not. Why for example did he not call as witnesses the other men with whom he was mixing outside the hotel when the incident occurred? His previously unblemished record did not prevent him being given the maximum sentence available. It is also a concern that the decisions of courts-martial were not subject to appeal. Following his time in gaol he was to become one of the many to die in the horror that was Passchendaele. For this intelligent, sensitive young man it all seems such a waste. While his court-martial papers show that the court followed due process, there seems to have been little natural justice.

“Conduct to the Prejudice”

A provision contained in the Army Act which allowed a certain amount of flexibility was the charge of “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and Military discipline”.

305
In his thesis Garstag cites information from the Australian Provost Corps for the period 1 January 1917 to 31 December 1918. It establishes that from a total of 44,925 cases dealt with by the system, 2,635 were for “Conduct to the Prejudice”. An Indigenous man charged with “Conduct to the Prejudice” was Archibald Leonard.

Born at Wee Waa, NSW, Archibald Leonard enlisted at Narrabri, NSW, on 29 May 1917. His age was 28 years 11 months and his trade “labourer”. His attestation papers record his complexion as “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”. At 5’ 9” (175.2 cm), 164 pounds (74.4 kg) and expanded chest measurement of 38½” (97.8 cm) he was above the average.

On arrival in Egypt, 5 January 1917, he was taken on strength by the 4th Light Horse Regiment with the service number 3662. In March 1918 he was transferred to the 3rd Light Horse Field Ambulance (3rd LHFA). On 7 July 1918 he was charged with being “drunk whist on leave in Jerusalem” and deprived of 14 days’ pay. At this point there is nothing to distinguish him from many other members of the AIF. There was a most common tendency to become drunk while on short leave through perhaps a combination of such factors as combat stress and peer pressures.

However on 30 November 1918 he was charged with “Crime In the Field 27.11.18. Conduct to the prejudice of good order & Milty (sic) discipline”.

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29 Garstag, “Crime and punishment on the Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force and British Army discipline”, 97.
details of what had occurred are captured in the war diary for the 3rd LHFA. Its entry for 27 November 1918 begins with what it describes as a “disappointing incident”. It goes on to relate how 14 drivers had “declined to carry out their work on the harness”. An insight into how this unfolded can be found in Archibald Leonard’s records; for he was said to have been involved in a “Count Out”.

The tactic of the 'Count Out' writes Stanley “was an effective way for men to express their feelings”. When either given an order with which they disapproved or addressed in a manner they resented, a voice from within the group would call out “One!” and this would be taken up by the rest of the men who would then chant down to ten. This would be followed by the group turning away from the officer addressing them and sitting down. Stanley argues that it was a practice common to the AIF, so common in fact that he writes that while such incidents were later barely mentioned by Australians, they were a source of astonishment to British soldiers who observed them. Being done *en masse* it was a tactic designed to protect the individual from later retribution. The war diary for the 3rd LHFA shows however that each of the 14 men involved was to be deprived of 14 days’ pay. In its description of the event, the war diary makes the point that the men were likely motivated by both boredom and ill-founded ideas on events concerning the Armistice of 11 November 1918. The writer of the war diary also notes that it had been the work of an unnamed “agitator”.

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Nevertheless it is an episode which reveals some interesting insights into the men who made up the AIF. Incidents of “Counting Out” show that these citizen soldiers, volunteers to a man, often resented and resisted the constraints of the imperial army’s standards and their relentless chain of command which they regarded as being needlessly imposed at times when they were away from what they saw as their main purpose: fighting the enemy. What in the British army might have been construed as having been mutiny was downplayed as can be seen in the war diary which described the “crime” as one of “declining an order”.

The complexity of the military law used by British and Dominion forces is reflected in the 922 page “Manual of Military Law”\(^{35}\) published by the War Office in 1914. It is a document which makes the point that “gross misbehaviour in the field, mutiny, and insubordination rank first among military offences”.\(^{36}\) While on this occasion the soldiers’ reaction seems driven by a response to an order which they regarded as one designed simply to keep them “busy” following the declaration of the Armistice, it nevertheless was as, Stanley observes, one in common use by the AIF. The relatively light punishment awarded arguably shows how some Australian officers had come to adapt the administration of the Army Act for their volunteer citizen army. It also provides an insight into how others might have come to see the AIF in many ways as an un disciplined force.

How the charge of “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and Military discipline” was used for a comprehensive range of offences can be seen in the records of

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Charles Foley. His are the records of a man who had been in the workforce for a considerable time before serving in the AIF. On enlistment on the 14 September 1915 he was 34 years and six months in age. Born at Stradbroke Island, Queensland, he joined at Brisbane. An oysterman by trade he was 5’ 5¼” (140.3 cm) in height, 115 pounds (52 kg) in weight and an expanded chest measurement of 33½” (85 cm): a relatively small man. His complexion was “Dark”, his eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”, similar to many other Indigenous recruits.

He was a soldier who was to serve in several units; originally a reinforcement for the 9th Battalion, he was transferred firstly in France to the 13th Machine Gun Company, then to the 49th Battalion before returning to England on 1 January 1917 with myalgia. On recovering from what was now rheumatism, Charles Foley was then transferred to the 69th Battalion. This unit was part of a planned 6th Division for the AIF, however following a combination of rising casualties and a marked dip in recruitment; it was to be a short lived concept. In fact the 69th Battalion formed 19 March 1917 was to be disbanded on 19 October 1917.

During his time in the 69th Charles Foley was charged with “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and Military discipline”. It was alleged that on 15 July 1917 “he endeavoured to assemble men on Parade without Authority”. On the 18 July he was awarded 28 days’ detention by the battalion’s commanding officer, Lt Col Deeble. What had led Foley to try and organise this unauthorised assembly is not stated in his records, however it does fit a pattern discussed by Stanley. Recalling that prior to his enlistment Foley had likely been in the workforce for a

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37 NAA: B2455, FOLEY C W,
number of years, it is likely that he reacted as he would have done when
dissatisfied with events in the work environment. Stanley notes, “‘The Australian’,
an officer recalled, ‘is not slow to express his disapprobation of anything he is not
satisfied with’.”38

When the 69th was disbanded, Charles Foley was transferred back to the 49th
and marched out to the Overseas Training Brigade. After yet further illness, this
time mumps, he was medically discharged and returned to Australia on 10 April
1918.

The cases of Archibald Leonard and Charles Foley are of interest as they
highlight how men of the AIF developed strategies in dealing with what they
regarded as the shortcomings of military law. In describing this trait Stanley
writes, “Australian soldiers reacted to what they saw as injustices and impositions
just as they would have done in their former workplaces”.39 Yet for Indigenous
men it was likely a behaviour they had rarely been able to employ in an Australia
which had so disempowered and marginalised First Australians. However these
men now in an army which treated all its members with a stern form of equality,
although involved in actions contrary to military discipline, must have now felt a
sense of worth and comradeship. As post war events were to show it was not a
“right” which was to continue.

A further insight into the AIF’s attitude to military discipline is captured by Stanley
who makes the point that, “Unaccustomed to the automatic obedience of a
regular army, men of the AIF often spoke up, contradicting, satirising or criticising

38 Stanley, Bad Characters, 38.
39 Stanley, Bad Characters, 38.
authority”. It is an aspect that can be found in the records of William Campbell. A blacksmith of 32 years and 11 months, he enlisted for the AIF on 22 May 1917. Born at St George, NSW he joined at Taree on the Manning River on the Mid North Coast of NSW.

Not only older than the average, at 5’ 10” (177.8 cm), 170 pounds (77.1 kg) and expanded chest measurement of 38” (96.5 cm) he was physically larger as well. In appearance he is described as complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”.

Originally a member of the 1st Light Horse Regiment, with service number 3471, he left Australia on 28 October 1917. On arrival in the Middle East he was then transferred to the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC). Then follow a series of routine duties until 13 July 1918. Charged with drunkenness while on leave in Jerusalem, he was deprived of 14 days’ pay. Later on the 23 November 1918, he was charged “when on active service [with] using insubordinate language to a superior officer”. At his following Field General Court Martial it was alleged that on 19 November 1918 he had been in the lines of the 3rd LHFA when Quarter Master Sergeant R C Marshall had told him to calm himself. When this failed to have effect, Marshall asked Campbell if he knew to whom he was speaking. Campbell’s reply is given verbatim, “Yes I do. You are a crawling bastard”. After being found guilty, Campbell was sentenced to 70 days’ Field Punishment No 2, but this was later commuted to 30 days’ Field Punishment No 2. Although Robert

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40 Stanley, Bad Characters, 157.
Marshall had joined the AIF on 18 September 1914 and risen in the ranks to become a senior NCO, he had asked a man, likely under the influence of alcohol, a question which arguably invited the response he received. It is also possible that the length of Campbell's original punishment was influenced by Marshall’s rank and experience.

A trait of behaviour often associated with AIF indiscipline is that of failing to salute officers. In the context of the AIF’s overall wartime experience, the importance placed on the need to salute by senior officers seems a little incongruous. Stanley notes that after the return to Egypt following the Gallipoli evacuation, the senior administrative staff officer in the 2nd Division, Lt Colonel Thomas Blamey⁴³ (in World War Two, Field Marshall Blamey), decided that discipline would be encouraged by “saluting raids” where those who failed to salute were arrested by waiting military police. Their punishment would be to “drill in marching order with full pack for an hour a day for three to five days”.⁴⁴ It was a tactic later endorsed by Lieutenant General William Birdwood,⁴⁵ commander of the AIF for much of the war, and a practice which was to continue when the AIF arrived in France. Stanley notes that for many in the AIF it was a petty matter, irrelevant to “fighting purpose”, a view echoed by Charles Bean who regarded the practice as “mere pin-pricking”.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Stanley, Bad Characters, 77.
⁴⁵ Stanley, Bad Characters, 77.
⁴⁶ Cited in Stanley, Bad Characters, 78.
An Indigenous soldier to fall foul of this regulation was Charles Gallaher. Born at Murphy’s Creek, Queensland, he enlisted at Brisbane on 17 January 1916. A 26 year 11 month old labourer, he was 5’ 9” (175.2 cm), 140 pounds (63.5 kg) and had an expanded chest measurement of 39” (99 cm). His physical description is recorded as complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Brown”.

On arrival in France he was taken on strength by the 25th Battalion with the service number 5023. Wounded in action 4 October 1917 he was evacuated to England with a serious gun-shot wound to his left leg. The war diary for the 25th Battalion shows at the time of his injury the battalion had been fighting at Zonnebeke, Belgium, and from October 4th to 7th it had suffered 38 killed, 195 wounded and 16 missing.

On leave in London following his recuperation, Gallaher was charged with “Failing to salute an officer of H.M. Forces” on 5 January 1918. Only awarded the loss of three days’ pay, he spent 8 days in hospital suffering from VD before returning to France. As a result of the appalling casualties suffered by the AIF and compounded by the failure of recruitment in Australia to maintain its numbers, the 25th Battalion was disbanded on 3 October 1918. Consequently Charles Gallaher was transferred to the 26th Battalion. He returned to Australia on 5 July 1919. His records contain the entry that Charles Gallaher died on 25 September 1949.

The story of Charles Gallaher has been included not because of the seriousness of his “crime”, but rather because in the context of a man who had been seriously

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injured in the fighting at Passchendaele, the offence of failing to salute while on leave in London seems rather trivial. It represents the conflict between citizen soldiers and older, senior officers and as Stanley concludes, it was a battle which was to last for the duration of the war.\textsuperscript{49}

Desertion

While there may be some dispute over the seriousness of offences such as “Failing to salute” that for desertion is another matter. Evident even from 1914, each subsequent year of the war was to see the AIF’s figures for absence and desertion worsen.\textsuperscript{50}

It is a subject that does not sit well with the Anzac myth, yet as seen in a table cited by Garstag for the period 1 January until 31 December 1918; the charge of “Absence” represented 25,890 out of a total of 44,925,\textsuperscript{51} nearly 58% of all charges dealt with by the Australian Provost Corps. While the majority may well have been cases where a soldier overstayed his period of leave, there were many more serious cases.

Under the provisions of the \textit{Army Act} desertion could result in the death penalty. The use of the ultimate penalty by British authorities during World War One is the subject of Putkowski and Sykes’, \textit{Shot at Dawn}. In establishing the context of the 312 executions carried out by the British for military offences, the writers make the point that it was a sentence imposed on 3,080 men for the period 4 August

\textsuperscript{49} Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 79.
\textsuperscript{50} Stanley, \textit{Bad Characters}, 185.
\textsuperscript{51} Garstag, “Crime and punishment on the Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force and British Army discipline”, 97. See also Alistair Thomson, \textit{ANZAC Memories}. 314
1914 until 31 March 1921. For the vast majority of those executed, 268 or 86%, the reason was desertion.\textsuperscript{52}

When Australian authorities had decided that the AIF was to be governed by the Army Act it was a choice made “with such modifications and adaptations as are prescribed”.\textsuperscript{53} The most significant of these applied to sentence of death. Section 98 of the Defence Act stated that in the matters of courts martial, “Australian sentences of death or dismissal had to be ratified by the Governor-General: effectively by the Australian government”.\textsuperscript{54} Yet while history shows that no member of the AIF was to suffer the death penalty, Stanley cites research carried out by Pedersen and Putkowski which found that 120 men of the AIF were sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{55}

The reasons underlying Section 98 have been the subject of considerable speculation. Putkowski and Sykes make the point that while the Canadians were to execute 25 and the New Zealanders 5, it was not by the Australians because of “the Australian soldier’s status as a volunteer.”\textsuperscript{56} However for Eric Andrews, the reason can be attributed to the fact that:

it dated back to the various Acts passed in the Australian colonies in the nineteenth century, based partly on a desire to control their own troops and partly on opposition to capital punishment.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{52} Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes, Shot at Dawn (Barnsley: Wharncliffe Publishing Limited, 1989), 8.
\textsuperscript{53} Stanley, Bad Characters, 19.
\textsuperscript{54} Stanley, Bad Characters, 19.
\textsuperscript{55} Cited in Stanley, Bad Characters, 172.
\textsuperscript{56} Putkowski, Shot at Dawn, 18.
Peter Stanley makes the point that while many in Australia today believe that the reason had much to do with the executions of Lieutenant Harry Harbord ("The Breaker") Morant and Lieutenant Peter Joseph Handcock (both Bushveld Carbineers)\(^{58}\) in Pretoria 27 February 1902 in the Boer War, as depicted in the popular 1980 film *Breaker Morant*, this was not so. For him the reasons were those advanced by Andrews, a history of legislation by colonial parliaments which "consistently rejected execution as a fitting punishment for citizen volunteers" and a policy later maintained by the Commonwealth.\(^{59}\)

The result of this policy for the discipline of the AIF was taken up by Eric Andrews who argues that while Australians did demonstrate discipline in battle, they saw "rigid formal discipline for discipline’s sake" as something that had no purpose.\(^{60}\) He develops his argument by stating that, after Pozières, without fear of a death penalty, many Australian troops dealt with the stresses and trauma of the Western Front "by malingering and being absent without leave (AWOL) and with outright desertion".\(^{61}\)

Early in 1917 the three Australian divisions in the Third Army had roughly twelve times the number of AWOL convictions in the other twenty-two divisions. Indeed, in the first half of 1917 the Australian desertion rate was four times the average of the other Dominions. It has been estimated that 3,803 members of the A.I.F. were court-martialled for desertion, a rate of just below one in a hundred, though before 1916 they were mostly in Australia by men who had changed their mind about enlisting. This is not

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\(^{59}\) Stanley, *Bad Characters*, 173.


true thereafter, however, and some deserters infested the back areas, or the old battlefields where they lived rough and jeered at the authorities.\textsuperscript{62}

In his argument Andrews writes that desertion was a topic “down played” by the official historian, Charles Bean.\textsuperscript{63} It is a claim which seems to have some validity. In “Volume 5, The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Main German Offensive – 1917” of the \textit{Official History} Bean writes of the cost to the AIF of the fighting it had undertaken at the Third Battle of Ypres. In his discussion of the various issues encountered in maintaining the numbers required by the AIF’s five divisions fighting on the Western Front he addresses the very real issue of desertion in the AIF. Often engaged in the hottest contests, Bean writes “the intense strain and of the subsequent winter on the Somme showed in an increasing number of desertions by Australian soldiers”.\textsuperscript{64} However for Bean, the cause was a small group whom the majority of men in the AIF, he argues, regarded as “worthless to any community”,\textsuperscript{65} a view replete with upper middle-class values. In summary it can be argued that to protect the image of the AIF, Bean has attributed the real problem of desertion in the AIF, to a small minority.

Given the problems surrounding desertion in the AIF it is hardly surprising that the Australian government was put under increasing pressure to alter Section 98. Prominent in leading this campaign was the overall British commander in France, Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig. The \textit{Official History} refers to a report by Haig to

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\textsuperscript{62} Andrews, \textit{The Anzac Illusion}, 105.
\textsuperscript{63} Andrews, \textit{The Anzac Illusion}, 105.
\end{flushleft}
the War Office which stated, “That desertion was ‘assuming alarming proportions among Australian troops’ and that the amendment of the Australian law was a matter ‘of grave urgency’”.66 In what seems like support for this view the *Official History* also includes Haig’s point that in the first six months of 1917 out of a total of 677 convictions for desertion in the British Expeditionary Force’s (BEF) 62 divisions, 171 were in the five Australian divisions.67 To demonstrate that it was not just the British who wanted a change to Section 98, Bean then names Monash as just one of the Australian commanders who also gave his support.68

The *Official History’s* treatment of desertion reflects something of a dilemma for Bean. In his presentation of the views wanting a change to Section 98 he seems quite sympathetic. By identifying the cause as being due to a small core of men “worthless to any community” it might be inferred that Bean favoured the judicious use of the death penalty as an effective strategy in combatting the influence of this small majority on younger men and the “more war-worn of their comrades”.69

The political pressure applied by imperial authorities is also a topic for Stanley. He cites the argument by Field Marshall Haig’s staff that, “In the absence of the death penalty, we really have no hold over these men”.70 Even as late as October 1918 the subject of Australian indiscipline was of concern to the British. Garstag

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writes that prior to a visit to the United Kingdom by Australian Prime Minister William Hughes, the British Secretary of State for War, Lord Milner, had a report hurriedly assembled to present to Hughes on the matter. The report contained a script minute from the Adjutant-General’s office which talks of information gathered which “throws a very lurid light upon the conduct of Australian troops” and later argues that “no one wishes to enforce the death penalty, but there is no question that it is the only remedy to restrain even disciplined troops in war time”.71

Bean writes that it was Haig’s belief that “unless the Australians were put fully under the Army Act, their fighting efficiency would deteriorate ‘to an extent which may gravely affect the success of our arms’”.72 Yet this was not to be the case as the AIF’s record for 1917 and 1918 shows it to have remained an elite fighting force, despite its appalling and lengthening problems with discipline.

Despite all of the pressure for change the Australian government vehemently resisted. The loss of the Conscription referenda and with enlistment numbers continuing to flag, the Australian Minister for Defence, Senator Pearce, in a letter to the Australian commander, Lieutenant General Birdwood argued that the introduction of the death penalty would be “disastrous”.73

The attitude of some in the AIF to desertion is captured in an image, Figure 7, from the Australian War Memorial’s Collection74 used by both Andrews and

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71 Cited in Garstag, Crime and punishment on the Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force and British Army discipline” 51.
74 AWM Collection: A03862, France, informal portrait showing ten unidentified Australian deserters which had been forwarded to the Assistant Provost Marshal with an accompanying
Stanley. For Andrews, it appears in the general context of his treatment of desertion, while Stanley has it on the cover of *Bad Characters*.

**Figure 7. AWM Collection: A03862. Australian deserters. Public Domain.**

It is photograph of men whose faces seemingly show the relief of having escaped the hell of the Western Front. They are representative of more than a “small minority”.

Without the death penalty there were undoubtedly some who preferred prison and life as an alternative to the carnage of the Western Front and the strong possibility of death, but for the majority it is likely that they simply could no longer

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letter. The letter reads “Sir, With all due respect we send you this P C (Post Card) as a souvenir trusting that you will keep it as a mark of esteem from those who know you well. At the same time trusting that Nous jamais regardez vous encore. Au revoir. Nous.” Information regarding any of these men should be addressed to Provost Marshal, G H Q reference his No. M/4292/924. As far as we are aware, none of the men have been identified. [http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A03862/](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A03862/) (2 June 2014)
cope. Both sides of this argument can be seen in the following stories of men tried for desertion.

One of the reported 120 Australians sentenced to death for desertion was George Lavender. Although Scarlett’s list of Indigenous members for the First AIF includes two George Lavenders, this George Lavender is not one of them. Yet an examination of his records reveals a largely overlooked insight into how desertion in the AIF was treated. Before serving in the AIF, Lavender was a member of the Australian Naval and Military Expedition Force (AN & MEF) which was sent to capture German New Guinea in 1914 where there was a brief battle in the jungle with the enemy. He enlisted for the AN & MEF on 11 August 1914 and was allocated the service number 22. At the time he was 21 years and two months, 5’8¾” (174.6 cm), 147 pounds (66.7 kg) with an expanded chest measurement of 36” (91.4 cm). His occupation was labourer and interestingly his physical description was: complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Dark”. After 205 days’ service he was discharged from the AN & MEF on 4 March 1915; “Termination of period of Engagement”.

On 28 August 1915 he then enlisted for the AIF. On this occasion he gave as his trade “Controllerman Tramway”. Taken on strength by the 4th Battalion with the service number 2691, he embarked from Australia on 2 November 1915. On arrival overseas he was promoted to Lance Corporal. What then unfolds is telling.

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On 24 June 1916 he was reported “missing in action, France”. On this date the war diary for the 4th Battalion shows it to be in the front line at Fleurbaix, France. However on 5 August a court martial found Lavender guilty of while on “Active service deserting His Majesty’s service”. His punishment was “to suffer death by being shot”. Later this was commuted to 15 years’ penal servitude, by the “Commander in Chief British Army in France”. On August 6, the war diary for the 4th notes Lavender’s court martial and on 5 August it gives the cost of the battalion’s fighting at Pozières for the period 22 July until 5 August. The battalion had suffered 434 casualties, of whom 84 had died and 18 were missing.

The period of 15 years’ imprisonment was later reduced to 2 years’ imprisonment with hard labour, of which Lavender served about half before release in December 1917. With 1917’s horrendous casualties the AIF seems to have needed every man available. In March 1918, the war diary locates the battalion near Verbrandenmolen, Flanders, Belgium. On 15 March 1918 Lavender again deserted and was not arrested until 9 April 1918 in Paris. Again found guilty of desertion by court martial, he was sentenced to penal servitude for life. This sentence was later commuted to 2 years’ imprisonment with hard labour.

On 4 February 1919 Lavender was found guilty of mutiny and awarded 90 days’ Field Punishment No 1. Later in June 1919 his punishment was suspended and he returned to Australia 4 September 1919. After the war George Lavender made several representations for the medals he felt he deserved, yet on each occasion he was informed that due to his unsatisfactory war record he had forfeited the

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76 AWM: War diary, 4th Battalion
(12 June 2014)
322
right. His files also holds correspondence showing that 23 August 1961 George Lavender had lodged a claim for repatriation benefits. While his files do not show if he was successful with his claim they do give, Figure 8, a summary of his conduct which was reviewed by the Medal Board.

Figure 8. NAA: B2455, LAVENDER GEORGE

With the level of desertion in the AIF at almost endemic proportions in the later years of the war it is hardly surprising that there were Indigenous men too in this category. One of those charged with desertion ironically shared his name with the Australian Prime Minister, William Hughes.  

Born at Katoomba, NSW, Hughes enlisted on 24 October 1916 at Bathurst in the Central West of NSW. His age at the time was 23 years and physically he was close to the average. In height 5’ 6” (166.7 cm), weight 126 pounds (57 kg) and expanded chest measurement of 34” (86.3 cm), his physical description shows his complexion as “Dark”, eyes “Dark” and hair “Dark”. As with the majority of Indigenous recruits, his occupation was “labourer”.

On arrival overseas he was a member of the 23rd reinforcements for the 2nd Battalion. With the service number 6987, he was briefly attached to the 15th Field Company Engineers, but following time in hospital for trench fever he was reattached to the 2nd Battalion. On the 23 April 1918 after being absent for a period of 3½ hours he was awarded Field Punishment No 2 for one day. Following this minor indiscretion he was later court-martialled on 2 July 1918 for desertion. Found guilty of being absent from 20 July 1918 until 23 July 1918, the sentence of the court was 10 years’ penal servitude. Although it seems likely that his earlier infringement may have placed a significant factor in this lengthy sentence, it does show how the AIF was struggling to contain increasing desertion rates.

However shortly after on 17 July 1918 his sentence was suspended and so the effectiveness of these long gaol sentences must be brought into question. There

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324
have been many previous references to the parlous state of the AIF in the later part of 1918 and so having potential fighting men in gaol at this time may have been a luxury the AIF could often not afford. Back with his unit Hughes was wounded on 15 August when the battalion were being relieved from the front line at Lihons. Following the remission of his sentence William Hughes returned to Australia 26 August 1919. Unlike Lavender he was granted his medals.

The next Indigenous soldier, Robert Taylor,\(^{79}\) was 19 years and seven months when he enlisted at Melbourne on 8 May 1916. Born at Sale Victoria he gave “Labourer” as his occupation. Close to the average at 5’ 6½“ (168.9 cm), he was however slightly built with a weight of 112 pounds (50.8 kg) and expanded chest measurement of 33½” (85 cm). As with many Indigenous recruits he was described as having complexion “Dark”, eyes “Grey” and hair “Black”. He arrived overseas on 20 December 1916 and was then taken on strength by the 37\(^{th}\) Battalion with the service number 2216.

During the Battle of Messines in Belgium he was wounded, gassed. After recovering he was returned to his unit where on 3 May 1918 he was charged with “Deserting His Majesty service, in that he was absent without leave from his Btn: when in the line from 7.30 p.m. 3.4.18 till apprehended at Querrieu on 18.4.18”. Found guilty he was sentenced to 5 years’ penal servitude, which was then commuted to 2 Years’ Hard Labour. There is a later entry in Taylor’s records which shows that on 10 July 1918 that “the sentence not previously suspended, [now] ordered to be put into execution”. He was then sent to No 1 Military Prison.

Following the Armistice he was released from prison on 19 November 1918 and the remainder of his sentence suspended. On 3 July 1919 he returned to Australia. As with Hughes he was granted his medals.

On the day he deserted the war diary for the 37th Battalion shows it to have been relieved from the front line at Méricourt by the 39th Battalion and moving into the support line.⁸⁰ Taylor had moved quite a distance from where he was stationed for Querrieu is about 89 km away from Méricourt. It would seem quite apparent that the fighting had got too much for him and probably accounts for his incarceration.

Lawrence Young was an Indigenous man who enlisted from Corranderrk Aboriginal Station, Healesville, Victoria.⁸¹ Corranderrk Aboriginal Station was the address used by the mother of a man previously discussed, Joseph Wandin, and one which as a result saw him discharged from the AIF as being “Unsuitable”. While in August 1914 it posed a threat to Indigenous enlistment, for Lawrence Young on 13 March 1916 it did not, due to the poor recruiting figures and the relaxation of previous racist enlistment criteria.

Young’s attestation papers show that on enlistment he was 28 years and 5 months in age and his occupation “Laborer (sic)”. He is also recorded as being a “Widower” and as having been born at Lake Condah, Victoria. Lawrence Young joined at Hamilton, Victoria. While older than average, in other ways he was close to the norm at 5' 6" (167.6 cm), 124 pounds (56.2 kg) and with an expanded chest

measurement of 34” (86.4 cm). As might be expected, his physical description records his complexion as “Dark”, his eyes “Brown” and his hair “Brown”.

In the 20th Reinforcements for the 6th Battalion, with the service number 6376, he arrived in the United Kingdom on 30 October 1916. While his records do not show the cause, Young was soon in conflict with the military authorities. On 13 January 1917 he is shown to have failed to report at “Defaulters parade” while undergoing Field Punishment No 2. Consequently he was awarded a further 5 days’ Field Punishment No 2 and a loss of 5 days’ pay. On 16 February, 1917 he was charged with being absent without leave (AWL) from 10 p.m. 19 January 1917 until 7.30 a.m. 12 February 1917. This resulted in him being awarded 25 days’ detention and the loss of 50 days’ pay.

He was then taken on strength by the 6th Battalion on 12 May 1917, but on 26 May 1917 he was charged with being absent from parade and awarded 120 hours Field Punishment No 2. A similar offence was to occur on 2 July 1917 and on this occasion he was awarded 24 hours Field Punishment No 2 and the loss of 6 days’ pay.

In October 1917 the 6th was involved in the fighting at Third Ypres. During the operation at Broodseinde between 2 October and 9 October 1917 the battalion’s war diary records that it suffered 42 dead, 155 wounded and 48 missing.82 One of the wounded was Lawrence Young, who received a gun-shot wound to his left hip.

On 4 February 1918 George Young was tried by court martial for firstly “being absent without leave from 9 p.m. 5/12/17 till 2.30 p.m. 7/12/1917” and secondly “Deserting his (sic) Majesty’s service from 4.30 p.m. 15/12/1917 till 2 p.m. 27/12/1917”. The court found him guilty of the first charge, while for the second not guilty of desertion, but guilty of being absent without leave. On this occasion he was awarded 2 years’ imprisonment with hard labour.

On 14 June 1918 he was again before a court martial. Again he faced two charges, firstly that while on active service deserting His Majesty’s service and secondly while on active service deserting His Majesty’s service from 3 May 1918 till 5 May 1918. Found not guilty on the first charge he was convicted of the second and awarded 5 years’ penal servitude. On 26 June, 1918 that part of his sentence previously suspended was be put into execution. He was sent to 10 Military Prison, Dunkirk. On 20 July 1918 this sentence was converted to 2 years’ imprisonment with hard labour. On 3 April 1919 he was released from prison and his sentence remitted. On 12 April 1919 he rejoined the 6th Battalion. Lawrence Young returned to Australia and was discharged from the AIF on 2 October 1919 at Melbourne.

His files show some interesting correspondence dated 8 November 1951 when a Mr L Moffatt from the Aboriginal Station at Lake Tyers wrote to the Central Army Records Office in Melbourne. He states that Lawrence Young requests replacements for his medals and returned serviceman’s badge which had been lost. He writes that Lawrence Young states that he had enlisted in 1914 and served at Gallipoli and France. While his records show that he had received them on 17 October 1945 with a duplicate returned services badge, there is no record
of a further issue. Lawrence Young’s records reflect both a woeful discipline record and the ineffectiveness of the AIF’s treatment of desertion. The reality seems to have been that the awarding of long periods of detention for offences such as desertion was often followed by these sentences being either suspended or shortened. The records of Lawrence Young clearly demonstrate that for some men they were ineffective as a deterrent. How military authorities could enforce the oath taken by a recruit on enlistment to serve “until the end of the war, and a further period of four months”, seems to have been an intractable problem for men such as Lawrence Young.

The case of Louis Lacey\(^{83}\) reinforces this point. Born at Bateman’s Bay, NSW he enlisted for the AIF at Sydney on 15 August 1916. Being only 18 he required the permission of his mother, Emily, for his enlistment. A likely reason for his joining is suggested in her letter giving him permission, when she writes that his brother Ernest Lacey\(^{84}\) was a member of the AIF. The records for Ernest Lacey show that he had enlisted two days before Louis on the 13 August 1916.

Louis Lacey’s occupation on enlistment was “Glassworker”. He was 5’ 8¾” (174.6 cm), 130 pounds (59 kg) and had an expanded chest measurement of 34½” (87.6 cm). Physically he is described as having complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”. In the column “Distinctive marks” the recruiting officer has recorded “coloured lad”.


Having left Australia on the troopship, *Ascanius*, he had his first encounter with military law. While still at sea he was charged with being absent without leave and awarded 96 hours’ detention. This was followed by his admission to the ship’s hospital for the treatment of VD. On arrival in the United Kingdom he was charged with being absent from parade and awarded the forfeiture of two days’ pay on 14 March 1917.

Apparently still suffering VD he was treated at Parkhurst Hospital for 30 days. Following treatment he was taken on strength by the 17th Battalion with the service number 6086. On 19 January 1918 he was again in trouble, on this occasion charged with using “insubordinate language to his superior officer” and awarded 28 days’ Field Punishment No 2. On the 20 May 1918 he was court martialled charged with being “A.W.L. from 4 p.m. 8.4.18 to 5 p.m. 14.4.18”. On this occasion he was awarded 28 days’ Field Punishment No 2 and a forfeiture of 44 days’ pay.

On 21 July 1918 Louis Lacey was to face far more serious charges. At his court martial it was alleged that “While on active service deserting His Majesty’s Service in that he when the Btn. was in the forward area at about 5 a.m. on 17/5/18 absented himself without leave and remained so absent until arrested by the M.F.P. at on 27/5/18 at about 5.30 p.m.”. Found guilty he was awarded 5 years’ penal servitude, but this was later commuted to one year’s imprisonment with hard labour. On the 1 August he was admitted to No 5 Military Prison.

The war diary shows that when Lacey deserted his battalion was in the front line near Sailly le sec on the Somme. It also records that on the 14 May 1918 the battalion had repelled an attack by the enemy which resulted in its capture of 69
German prisoners and casualties to the battalion of 17 killed and 36 wounded. On the 16 May 1918 the battalion was relieved from the front line and took up a reserve position near Vaux-Sur-Somme. On the night of the 16 May the battalion area was heavily shelled and one member of the battalion was killed and 11 wounded. On the 17 August Louis Lacey deserted. His records show that he was arrested at Oisemont, a distance of 62.8 km from Vaux-sur- Somme.

It would seem that he was still suffering from VD for on 2 November he was admitted to hospital and then on the 14 November admitted to the VD Prison Annex at Rouen for a period of 21 days. Later transferred to the United Kingdom he was sent to H M Prison Gloucester on 17 June 1919. He was released from prison 27 June 1919, “sentence with good conduct remission expired”. However his conflict with military had yet another twist. On 18 August 1919 he was charged with being “A.W.L. 8.8.19 until 12.8.19 when in lawful custody escaping”. Consequently he was deprived of 29 days’ pay.

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During his return to Australia on the *Port Sydney*, he was admitted to the ship’s hospital for treatment of VD. This was to take 43 days. On the 7 November 1919 he was charged with “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline in that he took part in a disturbance on the Troop Deck”. Found guilty he was awarded 28 days’ detention. On 17 November 1919 he disembarked, under escort, at Sydney. Louis Lacey was to be finally discharged from the AIF on 31 December 1919.

On the 27 December 1928 Louis Lacey applied for a replacement for his discharge and returned serviceman’s’ badge, Figure 9. His address at the time was the Salvation Army Shelter, Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

Yet there is more to his story. His files contain correspondence dated 5 May 1932 requesting details of Louis Licey’s (sic) records. At the time he was in Long Bay Prison NSW serving a sentence of two years’ hard labour. The correspondence notes that he was under observation at the gaol in relation to mental health.
issues. It relates the garbled version of his service given by Louis Lacey where he claims among other unlikely events to have served in the “17th Battalion Light Horse”. The military officials supplied correct details for Louis Lacey and attached a summary of his record.

His is a poignant story, enlisting with his brother when just 18; it is a record of a man who was obviously totally unsuited to military life. Clashes with authority introduced him to the harsh realities of prison and likely established a trait which was to continue post war. It is also likely that his history of treatment for VD shows that the disease may never have been cured and possibly accounts for the mental health issues noted while he was in Long Bay Penitentiary.

In using the records of men such as Lawrence Young and Louis Lacey, it has never been my intention to sit in judgement concerning their war history. Stanley employs the phrase “retrospective righteousness” when discussing present day attitude to military discipline which employed the death penalty. It seems to me that is also an appropriate description to those inclined to sweep away any reference to men of the AIF who failed to live up to the image created in the Anzac myth. They were men who, for one reason or another, could not cope with the realities which confronted them during the war. As this thesis has endeavoured to show, in so many ways the Indigenous men of the AIF were representative of the AIF as a whole and some of them couldn’t cope. It is also quite apparent that the AIF did not have adequate strategies in place to meaningfully deal with the problems men such as Young and Lacey represented. This is particularly true of Louis Lacey. Virtually a boy on enlistment his experiences in the war were to have
disastrous consequences on his return. While these are not men to be judged, by telling their stories they might be a little better understood.

Figure 10.
NAA: B2455, LACEY LOUIS,
(4 June 2014)
In an Anzac myth so often dominated by the laconic hero and cheerful larrikin, the reality of the psychological cost confronting the men of the AIF can easily be lost. Sometimes even the brave could not cope. The story of one Indigenous soldier, Edward Rees, may help create empathy for these men.

On 2 September 1915 Rees, a 25 years 3 months year old clerk, enlisted at Claremont, Tasmania. He was 5’ 8” (172.7 cm), 154 pounds (70 kg) and had an expanded chest measurement of 38” (96.5 cm). Unlike many Indigenous recruits his physical description was complexion “Fair”, eyes “Blue” and hair “Fair”. In the 13th Reinforcements for the 12th Battalion, his service number was 4356.

Taken on strength by the 12th Battalion in France on 24 June 1916 he was soon wounded in action on 24 July 1916. This date reflects the battalion’s engagement in the bitter fighting at Pozières. The war diary for the 12th Battalion records that on the 22nd it received orders for an attack on Pozières. The attack began at 1030 the next day when tasked with the third objective, the war diary records that the “12th Btn secured its objective on the outskirts of Pozières” with “fairly heavy casualties”. For 24 July the war diary says: “Fighting still continues and heavy casualties but still making progress consolidating our position”. The ferocity of the fighting at Pozières has been highlighted on several occasions in previous chapters, but any retelling of what occurred is never diminished by later references. For the 12th Battalion its casualties as recorded in the war diary were:

“3 officers killed, 4 wounded, 1 gassed, 2 shell shock. OR 67 killed, 235 wounded and 63 missing”.\(^{88}\) One of the wounded was Edward Rees.

He was to be wounded again on 27 February 1917 with a shell wound to his right elbow. This is a date which corresponds to the planned German retreat to the Hindenenburg Line. The Allies, fearing that the withdrawal was a ruse to lure them into a vulnerable position before a German counter attack, decided to move forward cautiously. During this measured advance on 27 February the 12\(^{th}\) were ordered to take the German – held village of Le Barque. Bean describes the 12\(^{th}\)’s advance into the village. “The 12\(^{th}\) had sent three companies into the village, without artillery support, just as the day was breaking”.\(^{89}\) While their dawn attack was a success the battalion suffered casualties of “Killed 1 officer and 27 other ranks. Wounded 9 officers and 61 other ranks. Missing 2 other ranks”.\(^{90}\)

On 25 May 1917 it seems as Rees was regarded as a potential leader and he was firstly promoted to Lance Corporal and later sent to a Lewis Gun training course on 17 June 1917. Following his being granted leave on 18 August 1917 he contracted VD and was treated at Shorncliffe and later Bulford military hospitals for a period of 46 days. Then on 20 December 1917 he rejoined his battalion in France. Later sent to the 3\(^{rd}\) Infantry Brigade School his time in the AIF to this point his story reflects a soldier who fits the profile of the Anzac myth, but on 24 May 1918 things went awry.

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On this date he and Lance Corporal Frank Coles\textsuperscript{91} faced a Field General Court Martial charged with “WOAS (while on active service) Desertion (Period of absence from 17/4/18 to 21/5/18).” The two accused agreed to be tried together and were offered assistance in their defence. The first witness for the prosecution Sergeant W Vickers,\textsuperscript{92} 1480, 12\textsuperscript{th} Battalion stated that on 17 April 1918 D Company, 12\textsuperscript{th} Battalion was in the trenches between Pradelles and Strazeele. He testified that “About 9 a.m. that day the enemy shelled the dug outs. The Company scattered into the adjoining fields”. Later after calling the roll and conducting a search he found “no trace of them [Cole and Rees]”. The war diary for 17 April highlights the bombardment which it records as having lasted two hours and inflicted 30 casualties.\textsuperscript{93}

The second witness, Corporal C J Dann, P1953, MFP (Military Field Police) stated that while on duty at Morbecque on 2 May 1918, he had firstly stopped Cole and Rees, then “put them under arrest”. The distance from Pradelles to Morbecque is about 14 km.

Although they were tried together the two men gave separate defences. Cole testified because of the bombardment “I got a bad shaking up”. When ordered to

\textsuperscript{91} NAA: B2455, COLE F, \url{http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/NameSearch/Interface/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=3267481&isAv=N} (5 June 2014)


\textsuperscript{93} AWM: War diary 12\textsuperscript{th} Battalion \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RCDIG1005672/?image=4&fullscreen=true&display-image} (6 June 2014)
scatter he said that he had taken shelter in the cellar of an estaminet where he had “some drink”. He said that as a result he had lost his senses for about two days and wandered about. He concluded by stating, “I did not like to return after being absent, but I had no intention of staying away permanently. I made up my mind to return to my battalion but I kept putting it off day after day”. He also gave in evidence his history in the AIF. He says how he had served continuously in France since April 1916, been wounded once and being awarded the Military Medal (MM) in March 1918 for his role in repelling a raid on an outpost at Hollebeke.

Details for Rees’ defence are very similar. Suffering the effects of the alcohol he had consumed in the cellar of the estaminet, he “did not like the idea of returning and facing my pals after having been away”. As with Cole he raised his record, highlighting having been wounded twice and also his involvement in the fighting at Bullecourt and Lagnicourt.

A character statement for each man was given by Lieutenant F E Priddey,94 12th Battalion. Of Cole he said that he was “a good soldier and a man of good character”. He made reference to Cole’s gallantry in winning the MM and that he had been likely to receive early promotion. Of Rees, who he had only known since March 1918, he said that “he is a very good man in the line”.

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Sergeant C P Lansley,²³⁶⁹, 12th Battalion said of Rees that “he is a good honest soldier”. He added that in the Line when given a duty he always “does it willingly and well, however dangerous it may be. He never grumbles or complains”. Both Rees and Coles were found guilty and awarded two years’ imprisonment with hard labour. However, on 20 July their sentences were suspended. The files of Cole, a 1915 enlistment, show nothing of note until his return to Australia 1 June 1919. Although his court martial resulted in Cole at first denied his war medals, these were later restored. Perhaps a lasting effect of his army experience is suggested by his not claiming them until 1963.

However, for Edward Rees there was a further twist to the story. On 1 August 1918 he was again before a court martial. At this time he was charged with “WOAS absent without leave from 9 p.m. on 27/5/18 until 6 a.m. 5/6/18”. This reflects an offence a mere three days following his first court martial for desertion. On this occasion he was awarded one year’s imprisonment with hard labour. In his statement to the court Rees states that following his original court martial he had been released under open arrest. Crucially he also says that he was “not warned for the line” and that “no definite promise of suspension [of original 2 years’ hard labour] was given”. Following his failed attempts to get his pay book and stating that his colonel “wouldn’t listen to me”, he said that “I went away from the Company”. Cross examined following this statement he replied, “Mr Newton didn’t tell me I was going up to the line. He asked me if I would play the game”.

In evidence for the prosecution Lieutenant L M Newton, the 12th Battalion’s adjutant, stated that he had told Rees that his sentence had been suspended and that “he would move into the line with his company during that tour”. Cpl C T Wintle,97 987 12th Battalion gave evidence of Rees being absent at a roll call and Newton when later recalled, told the court that it was at 4 p.m. that he had told Rees that he was going back into the line.

A third witness, Trooper E Wilson,98 989, Australian Provost Corps (APC), stated that “On June 5 1918 about 6 a.m. I saw accused in a field near SERCUS”.99 He also gave evidence that Rees had admitted being AWL. Sercus had been the location for the 12th Battalion on May 26, the day before it went back into the front line at La Kreule, the day Rees deserted for the second time. This time the sentence was put into force and it was not until 12 April 1919 that he was released from No 1 Military Prison back to his battalion. Returning to Australia Edward Rees was discharged from the AIF on 13 January 1920. Unlike Cole he was granted his war medals in 1924.

Cases such as Rees challenge Bean’s assertion that desertion was the effect of a small majority of men “worthless to any community”. It seems unquestionable that on the day of their desertion neither Rees nor Cole had acted as the result of the urgings of such men. Based on the evidence it would seem as though,

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99 Sercus is a small village in northern France, about 8 km from La Kreule.
when under yet another artillery barrage, they made a spur of the moment decision to desert: they simply had had enough. Both had long service careers, both been involved in some of the AIF’s bitterest fighting, both had been promoted, reflecting their ability as soldiers, and Cole had recently been awarded a medal for bravery in the field. After the suspension of their sentences, Rees seems to have made a decision that he would fight no more. From the evidence of his second court martial it is clear that he did know that his sentence had been suspended and that he was soon to go back into the line. Lieutenant Newton had asked him if he “would play the game”, and from his conduct it is abundantly clear that Edward Rees had decided that he would not. If men such as Rees and Cole had reached their breaking point, it also seems likely that they were not alone. With maintenance of the image of the AIF paramount, it is little wonder that desertion was played down by Bean. Yet as with the cases of Young and Lacey, telling their stories does not diminish the AIF, rather by providing insights into how some human beings put into the crucible of the Western Front were overwhelmed, a fuller understanding is possible.

**Questioning the Anzac myth**

In his article "Gallipoli: second front in the history wars,"100 Mervyn F Bendle takes to task academic historians who have a “commitment to an elitist agenda of national self-laceration”. In particular he seems critical of those who question popularly held views surrounding Anzac. He regards Robin Prior’s *Gallipoli: The End of a Myth*,101 as a text which “exemplifies the revisionist attacks on core

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components of the Anzac tradition”. He later argues that Prior “doesn’t fully comprehend the genuine depth of feeling that exists in the Australian community about Anzac”. While it is an article which moves to a larger canvas, it nevertheless raises some valid points. In his conclusion Bendle maintains that the “Anzac legend is far too precious to be left to the mercy of these ideologues [those academics he regards as left leaning]”. I agree the story of Anzac is a legend, but arguably a legend which during its evolution over the past 100 years has become one which has lost much of its humanity and truth. Telling the stories of men such as Rees, Young and Lacey are essential to restore balance. I would also agree that this history is too precious to be left to ideologues, and this includes those from the right. It is a story which should, as far as possible, be inclusive.

An Indigenous man, whose service in the AIF is yet another example of the problems faced by authorities with desertion, was Elijah Coe. Enlisting at Dubbo, NSW, on the 3 January 1917 at 38 years, 8 months Coe was much older than the norm. He gave as his trade, “Labourer” and his place of birth as Cowra, NSW. He was also above the average in height, 5’ 8” (172.7 cm), weight 140 pounds (63.5 kg) but not expanded chest measurement as he is recorded as 34½” (87.6 cm). Physically he was described as having complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”.

On arrival in England in April 1917 he was admitted to hospital suffering mumps. A member of the 9th Reinforcements for the 54th Battalion he was taken on

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102 Bendle, "Gallipoli: second front in the history wars.", 9.
103 Bendle, "Gallipoli: second front in the history wars.", 14.
strength, with service number 3360, on 21 July 1917. In September 1917 the war diary for the 54th Battalion shows it involved in the fighting for Westhoek Ridge near Glencourse Wood, Belgium. This was a part of the Battle of Menin Road in the early stages of Third Ypres.

While engaged in this fighting Elijah Coe was gassed. It occurred on 25 September 1917 when the war diary notes, “The enemy showed extreme artillery activity during the day”. It goes on to state that the German artillery was active for the whole day, with “periods of quiet not lasting for more than half an hour”.

For Coe his injuries were such that following treatment in England, it was determined that he be returned to Australia. During his return his story took an unexpected turn. When the troop ship returning him to Australia stopped at Cape Town, South Africa, Elijah Coe failed to return following shore leave on 19 January 1918. On 4 February 1918 he appeared before a court martial charged with “Neglecting to obey troopship orders in that he failed to return to carrier ‘R’ on expiry of leave 10.30 p.m. and remained absent without leave until arrested by Anzac Police at the Ry. Stn. At 6 p.m. on 2/2/18”. While under close arrest he then “cut himself out of the Guard Room and escaped”. In statements given by witnesses it seems as if Elijah Coe had somehow come into possession of a broken knife which he used to unscrew the lock of the detention room. Additionally several witnesses claim to have seen Coe strike another of the inmates, a Private Boshoff, leaving him “covered with blood”. From the statement

of Boshoff it would seem as though Coe felt he had betrayed his escape plans as he is alleged to have called Boshoff “a ratter”. Although there is a reference to his alleged assault of Boshoff, there does not appear to be any formal charges arising from it.

Then after a considerable period he reported to authorities at 9.20 p.m. on 2 April 1918. It was noted that at this time he was “dressed in plain clothes”. Again he was placed under close arrest. On 26 April 1918 he was tried by court martial on four counts. Firstly with “When on active service deserting His Majesty’s Service”, secondly “Conduct to the Prejudice of Good Order and Military Discipline”, thirdly “When on Active Service Deserting His Majesty’s Service” and lastly with “Losing by Neglect his Clothing”. Coe pleaded not guilty on each charge.

The court found him not guilty of charges one and three, but guilty of “Absence without Leave”, guilty of the fourth charge with the exception of his shirt and not guilty of the second charge. As a result he was awarded six months’ imprisonment and a stoppage of pay until he had made good the value of the military equipment he had lost. It also seems that during his period of absence, Elijah Coe had contracted VD as he was committed to hospital for treatment before being sent to “Detention Barracks, Wynberg.” On 4 May 1918 Coe, under “Close Arrest” embarked for Australia on His Majesty’s Transport Borda.

On arrival in Sydney, Elijah Coe was committed to the Detention Barracks at Darlinghurst, NSW where he completed his sentence of six months. On 1 June 1918 a letter to the authorities, written on Red Cross stationery, begins “I respectfully beg for my discharge”. Given the source of the stationery and level of usage contained in the letter it seems more than likely to have been written on
his behalf. It outlines his service in the AIF and that he had missed the boat in Cape Town “quiet accidentally and with no intention of desertion”. In pointing out the period of detention he had already served, he asks that the remainder be suspended. He gives as additional reasons “the financial and physical condition of my wife”. He goes on to say that he is not asking for personal reasons, he is not “using my wife as a stepping stone to liberty”, but for the duty he owes her. He concluded by adding that he hopes that his appeal “will meet with your approval and earliest consideration”. It is signed “Yours in anticipation, Elijah Joseph Coe”. However he was to serve out the complete six months’ sentence. While given the evidence it seems more than likely that Elijah Coe had deserted, his reasons for doing so are very unclear. He was on the last leg of his return to Australia and so his motive is difficult to understand. Unlike the earlier case of George Aitken, Coe’s alleged assault did not seem to have been addressed. What the case does make clear however, is how the authorities seemed to have lessened the seriousness of desertion by replacing it with the offence of being absent without leave.

The file for Elijah Coe does provide some information for his life after the war. On 20 July 1931 the Honorary Secretary of Wellington, NSW, Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia (RSL) wrote to the authorities requesting a copy of Elijah Coe’s discharge. On 14 January 1952 a similar request was made, this time from the Forbes NSW, RSL. Then there is a third request, this time from the Bathurst NSW, RSL on 2 May 1960. In this letter, mention is also made of Elijah Coe’s ongoing claim to the Repatriation Department.
Elijah Coe lived to old age. In an earlier letter dated 1 April 1960 from Bathurst RSL to the authorities, it gives his age at the time as being 85 years. Each case of desertion by Indigenous members of the AIF which has been discussed shows it in a different light. Arguably they represent actions by men who for varying reasons no longer could manage the strains of life in the army and the horrors they experienced in the bitter fighting on the Western Front, although for Elijah Coe the reason is less clear.

**Venereal disease**

The story of Albert Sproles\(^{107}\) sheds light on other aspects of the AIF. Born at Terror’s Creek, Queensland, Sproles enlisted at Brisbane on 29 December 1915. His attestation papers show that he was 28 years of age and a labourer. Shorter than the average at 5’ 4” (162.5 cm), his weight was 141 pounds (64 kg) and his expanded chest measurement 38” (96.5 cm). His physical description was recorded as complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Brown”. With service number 482, he was a member of No 2 Australian Remount Unit, but then reallocated to 4\(^{th}\) Machine Gun Company he left Australia for the United Kingdom on 25 October 1916. At first transferred to the 5\(^{th}\) Machine Gun Company but when sent to the front again allocated to the 4\(^{th}\) Machine Gun Company. Apart from a short time with Australian Corps Gas School there is little in his files to add to the picture of Albert Sproles.

However his file does contain an entry for 13 May 1919. Sproles had been hospitalised for sickness. The hospital was the Australian Dermatological Hospital, Bulford. Stanley writes that Bulford had soon acquired a nickname, ‘the College’ “because some many Australians had ‘graduated’ from it”.108 Its main role was the treatment of VD.

In his discussion of matters related to discipline, Graham Wilson’s “A prison of our own: the AIF Detention Barracks 1917-1919” addresses the subject of VD and the AIF.109 While he acknowledges in the early years of the war men suffering from VD were treated as “outright criminals” and sent home “in disgrace”, by 1916, while still a “chargeable offence”, it had become largely “decriminalised” in the AIF. In the next phase Wilson writes that a man’s pay was stopped from the disease’s diagnosis until its cure. In addition all allotments to spouses and next of kin ceased for the period of treatment. However in 1916 he notes that this was amended so that a man being treated in a dermatological hospital was entitled to a payment of one shilling a day and “all allotments continued”.110

In its discussion of sexually transmitted diseases, Australian defence : sources and statistics notes that they posed a major health problem for the Australian defence forces in terms of discipline, personnel wastage and cure.111 For the

108 Stanley, Bad Characters, 112.
110 Wilson, "A prison of our own: the AIF Detention Barracks 1917-1919." http://www.thefreelibrary.com/A+prison+of+our+own%3a+the+AIF+Detention+Barracks+1917-1919.-a0134162657 (13 June 2014)
111 Beaumont, Australian defence: sources and statistics, 442.
period 1915-1919 a total of 52,538 members of the AIF were admitted to hospital suffering from VD.\textsuperscript{112} For a fighting force experiencing a diminishing rate of enlistment and involvement in some of the hottest battles on the Western Front, they are disturbing figures. They nearly match the total of deaths in action for the 1\textsuperscript{st} AIF.

While these figures can be a little overwhelming, they are given a human perspective by the story of Albert Sproles. On 4 August 1918 he married Nelly Rosina Watts. At the time of her wedding Nelly Watts was 22 years of age and a spinster. The wedding was “solemnized” at the registry office in Croydon in England. Overall 22 Indigenous men were to marry a British women while serving in the AIF, as will be shown in the next chapter, my grandfather George Wenham was another.

The date for Nelly and Albert's wedding noticeably preceded Albert Sproles’ admission for VD. On 20 August 1919, Nelly Sproles wrote to the military authorities. Her letter says that she had written earlier “asking for further particulars of him”. She then adds she received a reply telling her that he was a patient at the 1\textsuperscript{st} Australian Dermatological Hospital, Bulford. She then writes that when she had contacted the hospital she was advised that her husband had left for Australia on the \textit{Argyllshire} on 1 August 1919. The hospital authorities likely finding themselves in something of a dilemma did not provide her with the true nature of Albert Sproles’ admission and referred her to Base Records in London.

\textsuperscript{112} Beaumont, \textit{Australian defence: sources and statistics}, 443.
Her words describe the harrowing situation in which she now found herself. She writes:

Sir I beg of you to tell me, for I have always tried to live a good clean life, tell me all you can, don’t let me travel all those thousands of miles to have my whole life ruined. I will be anxiously awaiting a reply from this letter, trusting you will help me all you can. Yours truly Nelly. R. Sproles.\textsuperscript{113}

Her letter was received 7 October 1919 and Base Records replied on 9 October. Although it confirms her worst fears, the speed of the reply seems a genuine human response to her moving letter. Base Records tells Nelly Sproles that her husband had been “in hospital at Bulford, England with VD for a period of 60 days”. It also goes on to confirm that he had left for Australia at the end of September on HT Argyllshire.

Albert Sproles' file shows that on 22 October 1919 at Brisbane he disembarked from HT Argyllshire. Unfortunately there is nothing in his records which show what life was to hold in store for either him or his wife Nelly. As to whether he left for Australia without any contact with his wife because of embarrassment can only be a subject for conjecture. From the context of Nelly Sproles' letter it seems very unlikely that he had contracted the VD from her. It would also seem highly unlikely that given the response from Base Records that she ever joined him in Australia. The story of Albert Sproles is moving, not because it conforms to the Anzac legend, but for the insight it provides into the often devastating emotional cost that the war had on a soldier's family.

The case of Arthur Andrews

The records of Arthur Andrews[^114] also shed light on the subject of a man’s marrying overseas. Born at Milton, NSW, Arthur Andrews was an example of an Indigenous man enlisting early in the war. For him it was at Lismore NSW on 2 February 1915. His attestation papers show that he was 30 years and two months in age, 5’ 7½” (171.5 cm) in height, 125 pounds (56.7 kg) in weight and an expanded chest measurement of 33¾” (84.4 cm). Physically he was described as having complexion “Dark”, eyes “Brown” and hair “Black”.

In the 8th Reinforcements for the 15th Battalion, with service number 2554, he ran foul of military discipline before leaving for overseas. On 23rd April 1915 he was charged with “Making a false accusation against an NCO which he is not able to substantiate” and reported to the commanding officer. In what was likely the outcome he was awarded “four days’ with duty” for bringing “intoxicating liquor into camp”, 21 May 1915. Later on 15 June 1915 he was given three days’ detention for “Disobedience of orders”. As these “crimes” happened so early in Andrews’ time in the AIF, they reflect early remarks concerning both the AIF’s volunteer citizen nature and composition of men whose time in the work force often resulted in an abrasive attitude towards those in authority. Given his occupation as “Labourer”, Arthur Andrews at 30 years of age was likely to have found himself in situations where he needed to defend himself to the “bosses”. Nevertheless his behaviour seems to have marked him as a trouble maker as evidenced in Figure 11.

[^114]: NAA: B2455, ANDREWS A G


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Often a note such as this was enough to terminate a man’s time in the AIF, especially so early in the war, but Arthur Andrews was soon on his way overseas.
Despite yet another encounter with authority for “not complying with an order” and awarded “14 days’ detention” on 31 December 1915 he was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal (L/Cpl) on 19 March 1916.

On 8 June 1916 L/Cpl Andrews arrived at Marseilles, France. However soon after on 11 June 1916 he was involved in an incident which almost claimed his life. Ironically it occurred not at the front, but well behind the lines. Andrews lost a leg in an accident with transport wagons. The incident left Arthur Andrews “Dangerously ill” for a little over a month. The incident required a formal investigation as some men sought to terminate their time in the AIF by self-inflicted wounds, hence the importance of this inquiry ending with the conclusion that “he is not to blame for the accident”.

Following his initial treatment in France, Andrews was then sent to Beaufort Military Hospital, England, for further rehabilitation. There his treatment lasted a further year, which resulted in his return to Australia on 4 August 1917 and subsequent discharge from the AIF. However Arthur Andrews’ story has not been included in this chapter for any of the events described. True his behaviour had raised hackles with some in authority and the loss of his left leg was life changing, but the reason for his inclusion deals with what occurred in England during his year of recovery. It was during this time of rehabilitation that he married on 21 March 1917 Ethel May Beesley at Uxbridge.

While not in itself unusual, remembering that 22 Indigenous members of the AIF married British women, a letter from his wife to army authorities dated 20 June 1918 does provide an unexpected angle. She asks for information concerning his “present address” and “what he is doing” as she had received no correspondence
from him since November 1917. She also refers to their two children and writes that the pension she receives of 25 shillings a week is insufficient.

Details for the two children are revealed in a war pension claim for firstly, “Alex. Henry Beesley”, who is recorded as “illegitimate son” and secondly, Phyllis Blanche Andrews, “Daughter”. While the claim for Phyllis was granted, that for Alex was not. Given the time frame, Arthur Andrews was unlikely to have been the father of Alex, but he clearly had taken responsibility to support his wife’s son born before they had met.

The reply Ethel Andrews received seems to offer little assistance. She is informed that the last known address for Arthur Andrews was “C/o. Post Office, LISMORE. N.S.W.”, that he had been was discharged on “4.8.17” and that “No information is available here regarding his movements subsequent to the date of his discharge”. At the time of this reply, 23 August 1918, Ethel Andrews and the two children were still at 5 Roses Cottages, Dorking in Surrey, England. Despite there being no records of Ethel Andrews or their two children having ever arriving in Australia the story of Alec Beesley suggests that they did.

On the Australian War Memorial’s Roll of Honour is recorded the name of Alex Henry Beesley. A Flight Sergeant, in the Royal Australian Air Force, he was serving in 103 Squadron, Royal Air Force, when he was lost in action 5 September 1942. The young child for whom Arthur Andrews had accepted responsibility was a member of Bomber Command. Alec Beesley’s record at

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the NAA gives his place of birth as “Camberwell, England” on 31 May 1916. His mother is shown as “Esther May Danke”. While the spelling of names may seem an issue, the files for Alex/Alec Beesley show both variations.

The stories of Arthur Andrews and Albert Sproles give another insight into the human cost of the war. While that for Sproles seems likely to have had an unhappy outcome for his British bride, the story of Arthur Andrews is less clear. His records suggest a complex person, one who seems fortunate given his disciplinary issues, not to have been given an early discharge; on the one hand a man often at odds with authority and yet one selected as a potential leader. For a man whose previous occupation had been labourer, the loss of a leg must have been devastating. It is the story which highlights his humanity when he marries a woman, a single parent with an illegitimate child, and then accepts responsibility for the young Alec Beesley. What is less clear however, is what occurred after his return to Australia. Alec Beesley’s application to join the RAAF in World War Two suggests Ethel and the two children did migrate to Australia. Alec Beesley’s application forms established that he attended Glenmore State School, Rockhampton, Queensland from 1927 until 1930. Alec Beesley’s files make no mention of Arthur Andrews and given that his mother is recorded as Esther May Danke, it does not seem to be drawing too long a bow to conclude that Arthur Andrews had died before Alec Beesley’s enlistment. The complications of a leg amputated at the thigh are likely to have resulted in a premature death. Perhaps this part of the story will never be known. The loss of Alec Beesley in a bombing raid during the war is yet another of the sad ironies of war. While often the Anzac story seems centred on the men, the cost to their families must not be forgotten.
Conclusion

In describing the power of the Anzac myth Bendle writes that it has “a tight grip on popular consciousness” and cites Paul Ham who wrote:

The sheer volume of books about Australians at war reflects an extraordinary, possibly unique, facet of our national identity: a hunger for and veneration of war heroes [of unparalleled] intensity.\(^{117}\)

Yet it is flawed vision. As the stories of the men in this chapter show, any representation which is so selective as to only present heroes worthy to be “venerated” is one which denies the humanity of the men involved. The aim of the preceding chapters has been to tell the stories of the Indigenous men of the AIF. My hope has been that by highlighting individual stories their humanity has not been lost in a discussion of abstracts. The next chapter seeks to not only highlight my grandfather, George Wenham,\(^{118}\) but also to locate him in the context of the themes established in previous chapters.

\(^{117}\) Bendle, "Gallipoli: second front in the history wars." 6.
In telling the story of my grandfather, George Wenham, this chapter will largely employ the methodology described by Leonard Cassuto as being “the effort to reconstruct a life from which little information has survived”: a silhouette biography. For Cassuto these are “biographies [which] are essentially inductive: they are largely conjectural creations of a subject based on limited fragments of concrete evidence”.¹ There are two reasons for its use, firstly there is the issue of time; my grandfather died in 1928 from the tuberculosis he contracted while serving in the AIF’s 30th Battalion in France and Belgium. Secondly his enlistment application indicates that he was functionally illiterate. A note by the recruiting officer states that “Applicant can only sign his name”.² A copy of his signature forms the heading for this chapter. So, unlike the stories of many men of the AIF, that of George Wenham cannot rely on first-hand accounts that he might have recorded.

At its heart it is a story which reflects the outcomes of the contact between two cultures: that of the First Australians and the early European settlers. While this chapter will show how both these cultures became one in my family, it will in the main examine the European background. Through an interrogation of written

history it will provide half of George Wenham’s story. To achieve balance the Coda will seek to tell the Indigenous story of our family through oral history.

Henry and Mary Wenham

On 6 November 1838 the emigrant ship *The Maitland* (see Figure 1) arrived in Sydney, NSW. Departing from Gravesend, England, the voyage had taken 134 days and for many of those on board it had been a time of disease and death. A despatch from the Governor of NSW, Sir George Gipps to Lord Glenelg, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, gives some detail of what had befallen its passengers.³ Gipps writes of how the vessel had arrived in a “very dirty state” and that during its time at sea 35 people had died: six adults and 29 children. Quarantined on arrival a further two women and two children had also died. In referring to the 286 cases of disease recorded by the ship’s surgeon, Gipps notes “the same individual may in some cases have been reckoned more than once”. Clearly the trip had been a harrowing experience for all on board. Gipps further notes that while scarlet fever was the first disease to break out, “various others afterwards made their appearance”.⁴

One of the families who had made this hazardous trip on *The Maitland* was that of my great, great grandfather Henry Wenham. A 35 year old farm servant, he had left the village of Benenden, Kent, in England with his 36 year old wife, Mary; their daughters, 15 year old daughter Frances, 12 year old Mary, 10 year old Eliza, 8 year old Harriet; and sons, 5 year old William, 2 year old George and 1

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⁴ *Historical Records of Australia*. Series 1, Governors' despatches to and from England, Volume 19, 684.
year old John. The records show that Eliza and John were two of the 29 to die at sea and William was one of the two who died in quarantine.\(^5\)

The likely reason why Henry Wenham and his family had made this dangerous voyage can be found in Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé’s, *Captain Swing*.\(^6\)

This text examines a time of major social unrest in Great Britain, one characterised by a series of riots, beginning in 1830, centred on English agricultural labourers. It was a period when the traditional lives of British agricultural workers had come under severe stress. Hobsbawm and Rudé argue that while its cause was due to a number of factors, the opportunities for work

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\(^6\) E. J. Hobsbawn and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969)
and therefore the survival of many agrarian workers and their families, were at the heart of the matter. The situation was aggravated when at the end of the Napoleonic wars large numbers of demobilised men had sought employment on the land where available opportunities had been diminished by the increased use of agricultural machinery and enclosures. The effects of this major dislocation to traditional English rural life were later used by Victorian novelist Thomas Hardy in his 1891 novel, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Writing 60 years after the outbreak of the so-called 'Swing riots', Hardy’s very popular novel uses the tragedy surrounding its main protagonist, Tess, to personify the loss of traditional ways of life.

An even sharper focus is provided by Ernie Pollard’s *The History of Benenden in the Weald of Kent*. Pollard writes that following the Napoleonic wars the government’s policy to maintain high corn prices resulted in further suffering for labourers as food prices rose. As a direct result he concludes that “through the 1820s rural poverty and disorder were major concerns” and unemployment increased. Yet conditions were to worsen. In 1830 Pollard speaks of “major uprisings [which] began in east Kent at the end of August, when some four hundred labourers destroyed threshing machines at Hardres, near Canterbury”.

As the year progressed there seemed the very real likelihood of major social

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unrest, possibly revolution, as reflected by Pollard’s point that throughout September and October, Kent experienced “fires, machine-breaking and angry gatherings of farm labourers demanding wage increases”.11

For Pollard the riots did not have the effect of improving the lot of the workers and this he argues occurred in 1834 when the government introduced the Poor Law Amendment Act which resulted in the establishment of Union Workhouses. The conditions in these he argues were so “deliberately severe as to deter all but the most destitute and handicapped from claiming relief”.12 A way of escaping this crushing poverty was emigration. For the period 1831 to 1841, Pollard writes that about 160 Benenden people, about 10% of the population, left for a new life overseas.13 While Henry Wenham’s participation in the Swing riots cannot be established, his family’s reasons for leaving Benenden in Kent are all too clear.

What awaited my great great grandparents on arrival in NSW is partly answered by records held at the State Records of NSW (SRNSW). These show that they had been able to emigrate because of a program which operated between 1835 and 1841 known as the Bounty Reward system:

“Bounty immigrants” were selected by colonists who then paid for their passage. When the immigrant arrived, a colonist would employ the

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11 Pollard, “Thomas Law Hodges and the Swing riots” 
12 Pollard, “Thomas Law Hodges and the Swing riots” 
13 Pollard, “Thomas Law Hodges and the Swing riots” 
immigrant and the employer would then be reimbursed by the government for all or part of the cost of passage.\textsuperscript{14}

SRNSW records show that for the family of Henry Wenham the colonist was “Mr John Hook” (\textit{sic}) of “Crooks Park”.\textsuperscript{15} For one year’s employment the family would receive £35. They were likely employed at Hooke’s property at Dungog, NSW. After arriving in the colony in 1828, Hooke had been granted 2,560 acres near Dungog in NSW.\textsuperscript{16}

![Geographical locations central to my family's early history in NSW](image)

Figure 2. Geographical locations central to my family’s early history in NSW

How long my great great grandparents were to stay at Dungog is unclear, but the Certificate of Baptism for my great grandfather Charles Wenham shows that he was born in 1842 and christened 12 years later at Warialda, in northern NSW.

\textsuperscript{14} “Australia, New South Wales, Index to the Bounty Immigrants”, \textit{Family Search}\nhttps://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Australia,_New_South_Wales,_Index_to_Bounty_Immigrants\%28FamilySearch_Historical_Records\%29 (28 July 2014)

\textsuperscript{15} State Records NSW: NRS 5316, Colonial Secretary, Persons on bounty ships [4/4782-812] Reel 2654, [4/4780]

\textsuperscript{16} “Early Hunter Valley Settlers”, \textit{Free Settler or Felon}?\nhttp://www.jenwilletts.com/john_hooke.htm (28 July 2014)
From the 1840s locations between Warialda and Moree would be central to the stories of the family of Henry and Mary Wenham (see Figure 2 above).

European settlement had been established in the Moree district by 1835 and many of these first settlers had come from the Hunter Valley. At this point the story of my family’s first years in the colony might seem to incorporate a trait present in those histories of Australia discussed in Chapter One. It might read as though they were among the first people to explore, settle and discover new lands. Of course nothing could be further from the truth.

A balance can be found in the work of Aboriginal elder and historian Noeline Briggs–Smith. Her text, *Moree Mob, Volume Two Burrul Wallaby*, speaks of the area’s first inhabitants: the Gamilaroi (Gamilaraay) people. They were a people who had inhabited “an area of over 30,000 square miles [7,769,964 hectares] of which there was fertile soil; running rivers and streams, with plenty of fish” for millennia.

The total number of the Gamilaroi at the time my family and other European settlers arrived is difficult to establish. For Briggs–Smith this can be attributed to the fact that “the only available information derives from a time of depopulation, caused by early white invasion”. Her estimates are for a figure of between 6,500

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19 Briggs-Smith, *Moree Mob, 2*.
20 Briggs-Smith, *Moree Mob, 2*.
to 7,000 in the period 1839-1845, the time of my European family’s arrival in the area.

The linking of these two cultures, the European and the Gamilaroi, in my family came through my great grandfather, Charles Wenham. In 1865 he and his partner, Sally Barlow, had a daughter Harriet who was born at Terry Hie Hie (Terrihihi), a small settlement situated 60 kilometres south east of Moree. Briggs–Smith establishes the importance of this place to the First Australians and speaks of it being a major meeting place for the Gamilaroi.

Harriet Wenham was to marry twice and she has many descendants. One of her sons was Walter Duncan. Born at the Aboriginal mission at Terry Hie Hie, on 20 July 1889, he enlisted for the AIF at Tamworth NSW on 8 May 1917. His attestation papers give as his next of kin his mother, Harriet, and her address as being Terry Hie Hie. On enlistment he was 34 years and 10 months of age, 5’ 5” (165 cm) in height, 160 pounds (72.6 kg) in weight with an expanded chest measurement of 39” (99 cm). His physical description has him being described as having complexion “dark”, eyes “grey” and hair “dark”. Under the section “Distinctive marks” the recruiting officer has recorded “¼ cast”.

With the service number 3477, Walter Duncan was taken on strength by the 1st Light Horse Regiment. Serving in the Middle East he was to spend a considerable

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21 Briggs-Smith, Moree Mob, 2.
22 Briggs-Smith, Moree Mob, 9.
period in hospital suffering from malaria. He returned to Australia on 19 April 1919. Walter Herbert Duncan died at Moree in 1937 aged 48.\textsuperscript{25} His mother, Harriet, died in Moree aged 60 on 13 May 1925 and has no known grave.\textsuperscript{26}

For an unknown reason the relationship between Sally Barlow and my great grandfather ended, for on 4 November 1868, Charles Wenham married Annie Baker. Their wedding certificate provides more of the story. Firstly it records Charles as having been born in 1842 at Raymond Terrace, NSW, geographically not far from Dungog. This suggests that my great, great parents moved north to Warialda sometime after 1842.

At the time of his wedding Charles Wenham was 27, a stockman and resident at Pallamallawa. My great grandmother Annie was 16, a servant, and had been born at Pallamallawa where she was living at the time of her marriage. Her father is listed as Thomas Baker and his occupation as shepherd. Her mother, only recorded as Kitty, was a servant. Following her name there is the annotation “(An Aboriginal)”. The marriage took place at Warialda and one of the witnesses was J M Corrigan, who also gave his consent to the marriage. A classified advertisement in The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser for 28 January 1868 adds to the story. A J M Corrigan of the Palamalawa (sic) Hotel and Store sought the services of a “sober respectable man as tutor to a family and to assist in a store”.\textsuperscript{27} It seems very probable that Annie Baker had either been working for Corrigan or was possibly under his care. There is no reference

\textsuperscript{25} Personal correspondence with Noeline Briggs-Smith.
\textsuperscript{26} Personal correspondence with Noeline Briggs-Smith.
to any of Charles Wenham’s family being at the wedding, did they approve of his marrying an Aboriginal?

In describing the complexity of Gamilaroi culture Briggs-Smith notes that smaller clans of the Gamilaroi “mostly stayed within their own taurai (hunting area)”. For my great grandmother the clan was the Wolroi.28 The Wolroi were also the people who had originally inhabited the Myall Creek area.29

Henry Wenham and his family had arrived in the colony in 1838 and ironically it was a date which marked one of the bleaker times in early colonial history. It involved what was to occur at Myall Creek.30 It was here on 10 June 1838 that a group of between 25 to 30 defenceless Aboriginal people were butchered by between 10 to 12 white stockmen.31 These massacres were arguably the direct result of earlier violence in the Gwydir region. These Stubbins writes were centred on the activities of Major James Winniet Nunn and about thirty troopers who “conducted a murderous campaign” which resulted in the murder of 100s of Aboriginal people.32 For Stubbins the continuing relationship between the First Nations and European colonists was to be one characterised by “murderous

28 Briggs-Smith, Moree Mob, 8.
attacks on Aborigines, including the use of arsenic and other poisoning, by European settlers [which] continued on the frontiers until into the 20th century”.33

These events help establish the historical context for the family of Henry and Mary Wenham on their arrival in northern NSW, a time of violence and alienation which has been captured by Noeline Briggs-Smith when she argues that:

> Aboriginal people were pushed off their land and forcibly removed from families and regions, transported to missions, reserves and later institutions set up by the government to receive them.34

Its effects are to be seen in the descendants of my great grandfather Charles Wenham. Those of his daughter Harriet have embraced their Indigenous culture, while until recently those of his son, George, have not. In American research it is behaviour described as “passing”. In his introduction To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Racial Passing, Steven J Belluscio cites Elaine K. Ginsberg's definition of racial passing. For Ginsberg it is behaviour which is marked by:

> Crossing the boundary that separates dominant and marginal cultural, racial and/or ethnic groups – usually with the purpose of “shed[ding]” the identity of an oppressed group to gain access to social and economic opportunities.35

While Belluscio makes the point that “[p]assing has traditionally been treated as an exclusively African American phenomenon”,36 it has been highlighted in an

34 Briggs-Smith, Moree Mob, 9.
36 Belluscio, To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Racial Passing, 1.
Australian context by Sally Morgan. Her 1987 novel, *My Place*, is an exploration of how she was to overcome a history of passing by her family and ultimately embrace her Indigenous ancestry.\(^{37}\)

While the subject of passing in its Australian context seems not to have been a subject for research, I would contend that it does provide a compelling explanation for the successful enlistment into the First AIF by many Indigenous men. A traditional interrogation of historical sources helps provide likely reasons for part of my family’s passing, but I expect a methodology centring on oral history in the coda, to provide even greater insights and answers.

Traditional sources also have their limitations, some of which soon become apparent in Figure 3, the birth certificate for my grandfather, George Wenham. Likely to be the only official document for him before his time in the AIF it reveals that he was born at Boolooroo, a property six kilometres from the township of Moree, on the 27 March 1887. The details for the document seem to have been given by my great grandmother, Annie Wenham. Likely illiterate she had supplied answers which are often incorrect and in fact seem to have been guess work. As her husband was recorded as being absent at the time, possibly as a result of his stated occupation, “boundary rider”, my great grandmother has given his name as “George” not “Charles” and his age is shown as “30” whereas it should have been “45”. Our family name is spelt phonetically as “Wynham”. The details she has supplied for their wedding were “month and date unknown” and the year as “1873”, whereas the correct information would have been “4 November 1868”. The document does however allude to my grandfather’s brothers: Charles, John

and William. Unlike George, none of them elected to enlist for the AIF. George also had two sisters: Angelina and Mary. Although each lived to a relatively old age, Mary was the only other sibling to have had a family. If there had been no other sources, this document would have provided very inaccurate information. It does however highlight some of the possible consequences of illiteracy.

Figure 3. Birth certificate of George Wenham
George Wenham and the AIF

My grandfather, George Wenham enlisted at Moree, NSW on 28 August 1915. His age was 27 years and 5 months and his occupation labourer. He gave as his next of kin my great grandmother, Annie, and her address was recorded as Weetah Siding. At this time a rail line ran from Moree to Inverell and properties adjacent to the line had individual sidings; one of these was Weetah, a property geographically close to Pallamallawa.

Figure 4. NAA: B2455, WENHAM GEORGE

My grandfather’s attestation papers show that not only was he older than the average on enlistment, he was also taller at 5’ 9” (175 cm), weighed 140 pounds (63.5 kg), but had an expanded chest measurement of only 34½” (87.6 cm). Physically, like many other Indigenous men, he is described as having complexion “dark”, eyes “brown” and hair “black”. His denomination is given as “Church of England”. Originally intended as a reinforcement for C Company in the 30th Battalion, his service number was 3663.

The 30th Battalion was a unit in the 5th Australian Division. In the Great War, the 5th Division was made up of three infantry brigades: the 8th, 14th and 15th. The 30th Battalion was one of four (the other three being the 29th, 31st and 32nd Battalions) in the 8th Brigade. Following the evacuation from Gallipoli in December 1915 by the 1st and 2nd Divisions, two new Australian Divisions, the 4th and 5th, were formed in Egypt. In order to give these new brigades the experience gained from the fighting at Gallipoli, half of the strength of the 14th (53rd, 54th, 55th and 56th Battalions) and 15th (57th, 58th, 59th and 60th Battalions) Brigades came from men transferred men from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Brigades of the 1st Australian Division. However the origins of the 8th Brigade differed. In June 1915, it was decided to form a new brigade in Australia: this was to become the 8th Brigade and it did not have a core of men who had fought at the Dardanelles. A.D. Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division: Being an Authoritative Account of the Division’s Doings in Egypt, France and Belgium, Reprint (Eastbourne, GB: The Naval and Military Press, 2002), 18-24. Its battalions were organised geographically, the 30th being a NSW unit.
Figure 5 AWM - RELAWM13307.128. Collection Colour patch; 30 Infantry Battalion, AIF

Figure 6. George Wenham, 3663, B Company 30th Battalion, 8th Brigade, 5th Australian Division
Figure 7. The reverse of Figure 6. It has two postscripts; one from my aunt identifying my grandfather, the other from my grandmother. Her words encapsulate what I have learned about my grandfather: George Wenham and are the reason for my thesis’s title.

However my grandfather was not to leave for the Western Front until 5 August 1916. The reason can be found in his medical history. In September 1915 he had contracted “Double Pneumonia” at “Broadmeadows (sic) Camp Newcastle NSW”. It was to prove the underlying cause for his premature death in 1928. It also meant that despite his early enlistment, my grandfather was not present at the Battle of Fromelles.

Ellis’s *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division: Being an Authoritative Account of the Division’s Doings in Egypt, France and Belgium*, reflects the importance of the Battle of Fromelles by making it the focus of a complete chapter. It was the first major engagement by the 5th Division and although a subject treated earlier in this thesis, its sobering statistics are worthy of recall. “From noon 19th July to

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41 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 117
noon 20th July [casualties] were 178 officers and 3,335 other ranks”. Remembering that at full strength an infantry battalion was approximately 1,000 men, the 60th, 32nd and 59th Battalions had casualties of 757, 718 and 695 respectively. Joan Beaumont in Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War cites a letter in which Corporal Hugh Knyvett, 59th Battalion, describes the horrific aftermath of the battle. With the 100th centenary of the Great War its inclusion is a cause for reflection on the human cost to those involved. It also helps explain why on its fourteenth anniversary, the commander of the 15th Brigade at Fromelles, Major-General H E (Pompey) Elliott was to commit suicide.

The sight of our trenches that next morning is burned into my brain. Here and there a man could stand upright, but in most places if you did not wish to be exposed to a sniper’s bullet you had to progress on your hands and knees. If you had gathered the stock of a thousand butcher-shops, cut it up into small pieces and strewn it about, it would give you a faint conception of the shambles those trenches were … It was folly to look over the parapet, for nearly every shell-hole contained a wounded man, and, poor fellow, he would wave to show his whereabouts; and though we could not help him, it would attract the attention of the Huns, who still had shells to spare.

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42 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 117.
43 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 117.
44 Joan Beaumont, Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War (Crows Nest NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2013)
Following recuperation caused by contracting double pneumonia, George Wenham left Australia on the troopship SS *Ballarat* and arrived at Plymouth on 30 September 1916. The inherent dangers faced by those who made this voyage are highlighted by the fact that the *Ballarat* on a latter voyage, 25 April 1917, was torpedoed and sunk in the English Channel.


My grandfather then crossed the Channel and arrived in Etaples, France on 6 December 1916 but once again sickness, the mumps, delayed his being taken on strength by the 30th Battalion until 15 January 1917. Following Fromelles the 5th Division had remained in the line near Armentières for nearly three months.

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48 AWM Collection: ART13329. The sinking of troopship SS *Ballarat* which took place on 25 April 1917 in the English Channel. A submarine torpedoed the *Ballarat*, which was carrying Australian troops from Melbourne to England. Efforts made to tow the ship to shallow water failed and she sank off The Lizard the following morning. No lives were lost of the 1752 souls on board. [http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ART13329/](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ART13329/) (1 August 2014).

49 Etaples located south of Boulogne on the French coast was the main centre in France for the final training of British troops before they went up to the front.

50 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 117.
Such was the nature of the mauling it had taken; it was in no fit state to be engaged in the bitter fighting experienced by the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian divisions at Pozières and Mouquet Farm. In fact it was not until 19 October 1916 that the Division was to move to the Somme battle area. During the Somme winter of 1916-17, the 5th Division was twice at the Front, what they found there is captured by Ellis who wrote “No brush will ever paint, and no pen will ever tell, a tenth part of its repulsiveness, or of the sufferings of those who endured its horrors”.51

When my grandfather joined the 30th Battalion, Ellis writes “while infantry action was the most part limited to the ordinary routine duties of the front line”, there were instances of greater import. One of these was the successful “co-operation of the 8th Brigade and the 5th Divisional Artillery in support of the British 29th Division.52 It is likely that this was George Wenham’s first experience of fighting on the Western Front.

However his time at the front was again short, for on 3 February 1917 he was admitted by the 15 Australian Field Ambulance to the Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) suffering from Pyrexia (fever) of unknown origin (PUO).53 At this time the 30th Battalion was at Fricourt Brigade camp and its war diary records “4 other ranks evacuated sick”.54

It is likely, given Ellis’s description of the change in weather experienced by the men in this harsh winter of 1916-17, that conditions at the front had aggravated

51 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 141.
52 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 163.
the earlier damage done by my grandfather’s contracting double pneumonia. From December 1916 conditions at the front had become colder. “The cold … had thrown a curtain of snow over the whole area, and then had frozen it hard”. These conditions were to continue until mid-February 1917 when the thaw began. Significantly, Ellis writes that between “November and February one of the main concerns for the medical services was the treatment of colds, and the respiratory complications that arose from them”. George Wenham’s treatment on this occasion was to last until 17 March 1917.

His return to the 30th Battalion coincided with the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line. He was again taken on strength on 19 March 1917, two days after soldiers of the 30th Battalion has been the first troops to enter Bapaume, the capture of which is described by Beaumont as “the grail of the Somme battle of 1916”. Sloan’s The Purple and the Gold; a unit history of the 30th Battalion, cites Bean to celebrate this achievement:

The occupation of Bapaume aroused throughout the British Army in France a glow of elation whose warmth it is difficult to recapture in a written account. During half of 1916, while the British Army had been waging the most terrible struggle in its history, this town had been the goal.

Writing in 1920 Ellis is a little less sanguine with his thoughts on the taking of the town. In light of the fact that it had been evacuated by the retreating Germans,

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55 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 163.
56 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 171.
58 Beaumont, Broken Nation, 227.
they arguably represent a more balanced account. What the Australians found on 17 March 1917 is captured in Figure 9.

The Division’s elation at being first into Bapaume was considerably less than one might have imagined from the chorus of triumph which was sounded by the Press of the allied countries. … The men on the spot knew better, and beyond a little local excitement and natural gratification, General Tivey’s [officer commanding the 8th Brigade] men attached no especial importance to the success, which was, in truth one of the lesser things accomplished by the brigade in the war.61

Figure 9. AWM E00374: France: Picardie, Somme, Albert Bapaume Area, Bapaume, 17 March 1917. Public domain.

61 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 181.
George Wenham continued service with the 30th Battalion as the 5th Division led the Allied pursuit as the Germans retreated to the Hindenburg Line until relieved by the 1st Australian Division on 6 April 1917. The role of the 8th Brigade during this time is provided by Ellis who notes that:

Though the 8th Brigade as such took no tour of duty as divisional vanguard, its units rendered valuable assistance to both the 14th and 15th Brigades and, especially at Beaumetz, bore the brunt of some of the heaviest fighting.\(^63\)

At Beaumetz the 30th Battalion, with its sister battalion the 29th, were successful in repelling a German attack, which withered before an Australian advance which caused utter confusion amongst the attackers who included a detachment of “storm troopers’, specially brought up from Valenciennes”.\(^64\) Storm troopers were designed to help break the stalemate which so often characterised trench warfare. Developed by Captain Willy Rohr these were small groups of men “contain[ing] the ‘princes of the trenches’, the brightest and best that the German

\(^{63}\) Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 181.
\(^{64}\) Sloan, The Purple and the Gold, 133.
infantry could produce” who, using mortars, machine guns, and flame-throwers, were trained to force a gap in enemy trench lines and then roll up defences by flank attack. They also made wide use of grenades. Storm troopers were to become an integral factor in the initial success of the German Spring Offensive of 1918.

On 16 June 1917 the 5th Division moved to Senlis, near the town of Albert, in northern France, where until the month’s end rest was combined with organised activities and drill. June was also the time of the successful British attack at Messines and Wytschaete in Belgium, where the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions had been prominent. On 18 September 1917 the 5th Division arrived at Reninghelst, about five miles from Ypres. Soon it too would be involved in the Battle of Third Ypres.

For what was to be the 5th Division’s major operation on the Ypres front, Ellis again devotes a complete chapter: the Battle of Polygon Wood. Ellis argues that the task confronting the division was “a heavy one,” the area of attack being the most difficult confronted by any of the British forces fighting at Third Ypres to that point. In writing of the Division’s success Ellis seems still haunted by the ghosts of Fromelles.

The casualties in the battle were severe, 27 officers and 518 other ranks being killed, 69 officers and 2,234 other ranks wounded, and two officers

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66 Sloan, The Purple and the Gold, 142.
67 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 222.
68 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 227-259.
69 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 230.
and 170 other ranks missing, a total of slightly over 3,000. But how different a result from the Battle of Fromelles! Over 2,000 fewer casualties than on that fateful field and a great victory achieved in addition!\(^{70}\)

For Ellis it seems as though Polygon Wood had redeemed the heartache and tragedy associated with Fromelles, despite these appalling casualty figures. It is described by the AWM as being taken on the day the 4th and 5th Australian Divisions “completely won Polygon Wood”. It reflects a view which is of some annoyance to Ellis who writes that “The official communiqué dealing with the battle makes interesting reading.”\(^{71}\) He goes on to note that while it gave eleven lines to the work of the British 33rd Division, it “curtly announced in two lines that Australian troops (that is, the 4th and 5th Australian Divisions) cleared the remainder of Polygon Wood and reached their objectives for the day”.\(^{72}\) Obviously peeved by what he regarded as the downplaying of the 5th's role, he goes on to write, “The 4th Australian Division had not entered Polygon Wood at all”.\(^{73}\) The scars of Fromelles are deep.

It is a theme noted by Beaumont in her reflection on Polygon Wood:

It was here, not at Fromelles, that the 5th Division chose to place their divisional monument after the war ... they chose to be remembered for victory, not catastrophe. They crowned the Butte with an obelisk while boasting that their success on 25-26 September was 'largely due to the vigour with which the troops of the Division snatched complete victory from an almost desperate situation'.\(^{74}\)

\(^{70}\) Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 251.
\(^{71}\) Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 252.
\(^{72}\) Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 252.
\(^{73}\) Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 252.
Ellis’s records show that he began his history on 12 June 1919 while still a serving member of the AIF. One can therefore better understand the pride and level of subjectivity he had regarding his Division and especially his annoyance when he felt that its contributions had been undervalued. Beaumont on the other hand, publishing in 2013, and so removed in time from the event, sees in the 5th Division’s monument evidence of “boasting”; time has interesting effects on the way one sees history.
Both Ellis and Beaumont have identified Fromelles and Polygon Wood as pivotal events in the history of the 5th Division. For the first my grandfather’s sickness may well have prevented him from becoming one of its ghastly casualties, for the second Ellis again provides an answer:

The 30th Battalion (Lieut.-Col. Clark) and the 32nd Battalion (Lieut.-Col. Davies), which had not been employed in the battle, relieved the 29th and 31st Battalions, and the forward troops of the 15th Brigade in the right sector.\textsuperscript{76}


\textsuperscript{75} Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 255.
Although not an active player in the battle, the battalion’s war diary shows that for the period 26 to 27 September it did suffer casualties: four other ranks killed, and seven wounded.\footnote{AWM: War diary 30th Battalion, \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RCDIG1005330/?image=10&fullscreen=true#display-image} (5 August 2014)} With the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion successfully beating off an attack on 29 September, 1917 the 5\textsuperscript{th} Division had effectively finished an active role in the battles for Passchendaele. On 10 October 1917 the 5\textsuperscript{th} Division relieved the 1\textsuperscript{st} Australian Division at Broodseinde, its role “defensive only”.\footnote{Ellis, \textit{The Story of the Fifth Australian Division}, 256.} The Division was to remain in the line until 27 October, 1917 and although its role had been one of defence its entire time at the front had seen it under a “constant artillery battle [which had resulted in] heavy casualties to the forward and support troops”.\footnote{Ellis, \textit{The Story of the Fifth Australian Division}, 256.} In its first six days the Division suffered casualties of 130 a day.\footnote{Ellis, \textit{The Story of the Fifth Australian Division}, 257.}

Although present on this occasion, my grandfather and his battalion are likely to have played only a minor role at the Battle for Polygon Wood. Did my grandfather feel cheated that his battalion had not played a greater role in the battle that has come to define the 5\textsuperscript{th} Division on the Western Front, or did he feel relieved not to have been numbered among those terrible statistics? While providing much of the context, there are some questions which cannot be answered by a silhouette biography. Nevertheless an insight is suggested by the “Australian Comforts Funds” card for 1917-18, Figures 13 and 14, which my grandmother kept. Most likely given to her by my grandfather it reflects the pride he and the men of the 5\textsuperscript{th} Australian Division had in their achievements at Polygon Wood.
On 5 November 1917 the 5th Division moved to the south of Ypres and took over a sector which included the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge. Its new location although only five or six miles (eight to nine km) from Polygon Wood, was in the words of Ellis, “a front so near that ghastly sector” yet one that was “so tranquil”.  

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81 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 261.
Now although so geographically close to Ypres, the 5th Division’s time in the line at Messines- Wytschaete was one of “comparative quietness”. Then on 14, 15 and 16 December the Division moved well behind the lines to Samer, a village, 10 miles (16 km) from Boulogne. It proved to be a time of relative relaxation for the men, three days’ complete holiday, leave to Boulogne and the celebration of Christmas. It was at this time that George Wenham received leave to England, from 6 January 1918 until 20 January 1918. In a small note book, my grandfather has an entry for Horseferry Road, in London. The entry is difficult to read both because of its age and his limited literacy. It can be seen below in Figure 15.

Figure 15. One of the few surviving examples of my grandfather’s writing from small notebook.

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82 Horse Ferry Road was the location for the AIF’s Administrative Headquarters in London. “Soldiers newly arrived on leave in London would visit the offices to collect pay, tourist information and usually a new uniform”. “AIF Administrative Headquarters”, *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, [http://www.answers.com/topic/aif-administrative-headquarters](http://www.answers.com/topic/aif-administrative-headquarters), (12 August 2014)
In all probability it was in this two week time frame that he was to meet my future
grandmother, Madeline Alice Sydney. Given the handwriting, it is likely she who
made an entry, Figure 16, in my grandfather’s note book which shows that at the
time she was with the Royal Flying Corps.

![Figure 16. My grandmother’s entry in my grandfather’s note book.](image1)

![Figure 17. My Grandmother, Madeleine Alice Sydney, 1916](image2)
Soon after his return to his unit, the 5th Division went back into the line at its old sector on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, with the 8th Brigade taking its place in the line on 31 January 1918. Ellis writes that the Allies were only too aware that following the collapse of Russia the Germans would execute a “supreme effort … to smash the French and British Armies and dictate peace before the growing force of America would have time to influence the decision”. As a consequence the pressing need for the division was the preparation for defence. To determine enemy intentions Ellis writes of the numerous trench raids carried out by the division to secure prisoners in an effort to keep apprised of the enemy’s movement of troops.

Things however where to change from about mid-March, Ellis writes of German artillery targeting the division’s back areas with “accurate and steady bombardment”. These were he states the “conditions reported almost along the entire length of the Western Front”. Interestingly Ellis writes that on 19 March 1918 Haig’s Intelligence Staff had come to the conclusion that German preparations were near completion and that an attack would be launched on the Arras-St Quentin front, well to the south of the 5th Division’s current position.

21 March 1918 saw the Germans launch Operation Michael, an attempt to split the French and British forces on the Western Front. It was the start of what has become known as the German Spring Offensive and began with German forces firing some 1.16 million shells in five hours on positions held by the British 5th Army occupying the region of the 1916 Somme battlefields. By 23 March the

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83 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 271.
84 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 271.
85 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 275.
86 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 276.
offensive had opened a breach 64 kilometres long in the British front. The outcome of the war was in the balance.

At this time of crisis, fate seems to have played its part in George Wenham’s time in the military once more. On 3 March 1918, he was again admitted to hospital, on this occasion the cause was gingivitis, an inflammation of the gums. Despite the chaos which had resulted from rapid German advances, my grandfather’s treatment showed the ability of support units such as the dental services to still operate effectively. Records show that in March 1918 there were 218 cases of “Ulcerative Gingivitis” in the AIF. His treatment was to last until 24 March 1918, part of which was at the recently established Australian Convalescent Depot. Following this treatment he rejoined the 30th Battalion on 28 May 1918.

During his absence the 5th Division’s 15th Brigade had played a pivotal role in the halting of the German advance which centred on the fighting at Villers-Bretonneux 24-25 April 1918. Marshall Foch, who had become Generalissimo of Allied Forces on 26 March 1918, in praising the Australian involvement, spoke of their “altogether astonishing valiance” and further praise from an unnamed British officer is also cited by Beaumont, “Even if the Australians achieved nothing else in this war, they would have won the right to be considered among the greatest

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87 Beaumont, Broken Nation, 405-406.
fighting races of the world”. 90 In her appraisal of the importance Villers Bretonneux has now assumed in the Australian psyche, Beaumont argues:

More than nine decades later, it remains a – possibly the – dominant site of commemoration of the Western Front, overshadowing even Pozières and Fromelles. 91

It is an importance she finds reflected by the fact that it was the site chosen after the war for the national memorial to the dead and missing in France. 92

On George Wenham’s return to the 30th Battalion the 5th Division was occupying the front line astride the Somme. Ellis notes that “the 8th and 14th Brigades held the Divisional front for the whole month [May]”. 93 So on his return; my grandfather would have gone straight into the line. While Ellis writes “there was little fighting to record” George Wenham likely experienced the sniping, machine gun fire and the patrolling of No Man’s Land which characterised front line life at this time. 94

An insight into my grandfather’s time in the front line can be found in his note book. As a child my grandmother had told me that during the war, my grandfather had been a sniper. From what appears to be an entry for May 1918, he writes of being “in action again” where he fulfilled the roles of “sniper”, “observer” and “scout from hide” (see Figure 18). What he might have worn in his role of sniper and the type of weapon he very likely used can be seen in Figures 19 and 20.

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90 Beaumont, Broken Nation, 427.
91 Beaumont, Broken Nation, 427.
92 Beaumont, Broken Nation, 429.
93 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 306.
94 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 306.
Figure 18. My grandfather’s note on sniping contained in his small notebook.

Figure 19. IWM London, Oct 2014. Sniper’s camouflage suit.
Although the AWM site has many references to Australian snipers at Gallipoli there is very little of their activities on the Western Front. In the preface to H Hesketh-Prichard’s *Sniping in France, with notes on the scientific training of scouts, observers, and snipers*, General Lord Horne uses the terms “sniper”, “observer” and “scout” in assessing the value to the British Army which accrued
from the training of snipers on the Western Front. Hesketh-Prichard who had much to do with training of snipers observed:

The Canadians, the Anzacs, and the Scottish Regiments were all splendid, many units showing an aggressiveness which had the greatest effect on the moral of the enemy. Of the Australians, I had to my regret, no experience, but they always had the name of being very good indeed.

The role of Australian snipers, such as George Wenham, on the Western Front seems to represent an area of research yet to be undertaken. Doubtlessly he would have also had to deal with that other constant of life at the front, enemy artillery. Ellis writes that both German gas shelling and artillery resulted in casualties for May of 37 officers and 643 other ranks.

On 31 May 1918 the 5th Division was relieved by the 4th Australian Division and relocated to the Coisy area for a period of two weeks’ rest. Ellis writes that the weather at this time was “glorious” and that in addition to the necessary “cleaning and refitting” the division initiated programs for both formal training and recreation. One can only wonder if George Wenham contrasted the beauty of such a French summer with those he had experienced in northern NSW. What he likely experienced is captured in Figure 21.

The one sobering moment is described by Ellis as “the famous Spanish influenza epidemic” which he says made its appearance at this time. While stating that it

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95 H Hesketh-Prichard’s Sniping in France, with notes on the scientific training of scouts, observers, and snipers, https://openlibrary.org/books/OL7043683M/Sniping_in_France (12 August 2014)
96 Hesketh-Prichard’s Sniping in France, https://openlibrary.org/books/OL7043683M/Sniping_in_France (12 August 2014)
97 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 306.
98 Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, 311.
was not regarded seriously in light of its mortality rate, he does go on to argue that it represented a serious threat to the fighting levels of the division.\footnote{Ellis, \textit{The Story of the Fifth Australian Division}, 311.}

\footnote{AWM Collection: ART02471. Depicts groups of men from the 5th Division in a street in Coisy during their recreation time. The street also contains several Coisy inhabitants, livestock and wagons. In the background, the tower of the Coisy Church is visible. Albert Henry Fullwood was born in Birmingham, England in March 1863. In 1883 he sailed to Australia and began work as a lithographic draughtsman, working on the staff of illustrated journals such as \textit{Australian Town and Country Journal} and the \textit{Bulletin}. In 1900 he went to the United States, then to London, as an expatriate artist where he worked as a freelance illustrator, receiving commissions from newspapers and journals, including the London 'Graphic' and designing postcards. From April 1915 until November 1917 Fullwood served with the Royal Army Medical Corps as an orderly at the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth in the company of fellow artists Coates, Roberts and Streeton. He was subsequently appointed an official war artist, attached to the 5th Division AIF, working in France between May and August 1918 and from December 1918 to January 1919. His major contribution as a war artist was to record aspects of the war which others may not have noticed or taken for granted. His works have a narrative element and captured Australian soldiers in 'straightforwardly picturesque views of their environment'. Fullwood returned to Australia in 1920 after his commission had been terminated and became a foundation member of the Australian Painter Etcher's Society in 1920 and the Australian Watercolour Institute in 1924. He died from pneumonia in October 1930. \url{http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ART02471/} (7 August 2014).}
On 14, 15 and 16 June 1918 the 5th Division returned to the front line to an area close to that it had occupied in May. It was a time of minor operations, largely characterised by trench raids. This is reflected in the divisional casualty figures for June supplied by Ellis: five officers and 74 other ranks killed; 19 officers and 409 other ranks wounded, and three other ranks missing.\textsuperscript{101}

In July the division’s major involvement was to support the 4th Australian Division’s attack at the Battle of Hamel on 4 July 1918. The 4th Division were to the 5th’s right and the 15th and 14th Brigades were charged with both diverting enemy attention from the attack at Hamel and to improve the 5th Division’s line. Ellis writes:

> The morning of the 4th of July was an unhappy one for the enemy, and the fine results of all the operations on the 4th and 5th Australian Divisional fronts materially improved the Corps line.\textsuperscript{102}

Interestingly in describing the events of Polygon Wood, Ellis had seemed to want to distance the 4th Division from the victory there, on this occasion he seems not to have had a problem in associating the 5th with the great triumph achieved at Hamel by the 4th. Their role however has been acknowledged by Beaumont who cites the 15th Brigade’s commander, Brigadier Elliott’s remarks, “My Brigade only had a small part in part [in Hamel], but what they did do, they did magnificently”.\textsuperscript{103}

During the month of July the 5th Division had lost 12 officers and 141 other ranks killed, 38 officers and 862 other ranks wounded, and 10 other ranks missing.\textsuperscript{104}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{101}] Ellis, \textit{The Story of the Fifth Australian Division}, 314.
\item[\textsuperscript{102}] Ellis, \textit{The Story of the Fifth Australian Division}, 317.
\item[\textsuperscript{103}] Beaumont, \textit{Broken Nation}, 463.
\item[\textsuperscript{104}] Ellis, \textit{The Story of the Fifth Australian Division}, 320.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Ellis writes that while there was in the division a feeling of transition from defence to offence, there was little thought that within a week, the 5th Division would play a role in what he argues was “the most momentous offensive battle of the war”: the Battle of Amiens, 8 August, 1918.

Yet it was a moment in history in which George Wenham was not to play a role. On 2 August 1918 he was admitted to the 8th Australian Field Ambulance suffering from “Haemoptysis”; the coughing of blood. From the 8th Australian Field Ambulance he was then transferred to the 47th Casualty Clearing Station and then on 5 August he was admitted to the 16th General Hospital. Such was the seriousness of his condition that he was then evacuated to Bath War Hospital in south-western England. News of his condition was sent to my great grandmother on 24 August 1918, Figure 22.

Figure 22. NAA: B2455, WENHAM GEORGE

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105 Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, 320.
My grandfather’s records have a medical report, Figure 23, from his admission to Bath War Hospital which describes how the illness had affected him. It clearly links his present condition to the pneumonia he had contracted in September 1915, after which he told medical staff; he was ‘never the same since’. While in Bath War Hospital he experienced “night sweats” and “haemoptysis” (the coughing of blood). His appearance is now described as being “very wasted, especially the face”. While his normal weight was 11 stone (70 kg) this had dropped to 10 stone 1¼ pounds (64 kg). Responding positively to the treatment he received, George Wenham seems to have overcome his fever, yet despite now having a “good appetite”, he had only gained 1¼ pounds (0.6 kg).

On 5 October 1918 following a review at the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital Dartford in Kent, George Wenham was recommended for discharge “As permanently unfit for General service or Home Service”. It reveals that he was now suffering from tuberculosis to which he was predisposed by his medical
history of pneumonia and general debility, called 'war strain' in his medical report. On his return to Australia it further recommended that George Wenham have, “A year (more or less) at a Consumptive Sanatorium”. The report unequivocally states at point 21 (iii) that his disability was a condition caused by his wartime service.

![Medical Report on an Invalid](image)

Figure 24. NAA: B2455, WENHAM GEORGE
Opinion of the Medical Board

Note.—(a) Clear and decisive answers to the following questions are to be carefully filled in by the Board, so, in the event of the man being invalided, it is essential that the Medical Board should be in possession of the most reliable information to enable him to decide upon the man’s claim to pension.

(ii) Expressions such as “may,” “might,” “probably,” &c., should be avoided.

(iii) The rules of pension must directly according to whether the disability is, (a) caused or aggravated by service in the present war, (b) due to service not connected with present war, etc. (1) earlier active service, (2) climatic disease in peace-time, (5) ordinary military service before the war. It is, therefore, essential when assigning the cause of a disability to differentiate between these.

(iv) In answering question 21 the Board should be careful to discriminate between disease resulting from military conditions and diseases in which the soldier would have been equally liable in civil life.

(v) A disability is to be regarded as due to climate when it is caused by military service abroad in climates where there is a special liability to contract the disease.

21. (a) State whether the disability is clearly attributable to—
   (i) Service during the present war;
   (ii) Climate;
   (iii) Ordinary military service; and
   (iv) Whether it is constitutional or hereditary.

   (b) If due to one of the first three of these causes, to what specific conditions do the Board attribute it?

22. Has the disability been aggravated by any of the conditions mentioned in Question 21, and if so, which?

23. Is the disability permanent?

24. If not permanent, how soon do the Board recommend re-examination?

25. What is the degree of disability at which, in the Board’s opinion, he should be assessed for pension purposes at present?

   Degree of disability should be expressed in the following percentages:
   100, 90, 70, 60, 50, 40, 30, 20, less than 20, or nil.

26. If an operation was advised and declined, was the refusal unreasonable?

27. Do the Board recommend—
   (a) Discharge as permanently unfit;
   (b) Change of Station?

28. If discharge is recommended it should be stated whether further medical treatment (including orthopedic training) is desirable in—
   (a) Hospital;
   (b) Sanatorium;
   (c) Convalescent home;
   (d) Private effort;
   (e) Other institution either as in-patient or an out-patient, and if so, the period for which recommended.

29. With reference to Any Council Instruction No. 1570 of 1917, is any surgical appliance recommended?

30. Does the man require the constant attendance of another person?

Signatures:

President.

Members.

Admin. Officer.

Figure 25. NAA: B2455, WENHAM GEORGE
A postcard, Figure 26, sent from my grandmother shows that she had visited my grandfather while he was a patient at Dartford. It is a visit which likely saw them discuss both their wedding and return to Australia.

![Postcard](image)

Figure 26. Postcard sent by Madeleine Sydney to George Wenham during his time in Dartford hospital, 1918.

George Wenham’s medical board had been held on 5 October 1918 and soon after, on 15 October 1918, my grandparents married in the Catholic church of St Peter and St Paul, Ilford in Essex. At the time of their wedding my grandfather was 30 and my grandmother, Madeleine Alice Sydney called ‘Madge’, 28. Given the overall time frame it seems to have been something of a whirlwind romance and if family stories are to be given any credence, Madeleine Sydney had been engaged when she met George Wenham.
On 5 December, 1918 George Wenham was transferred from the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital to the 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital prior to his return to
Australia 11 January 1919. On the voyage home he was accompanied by my grandmother. They arrived in Australia 26 February 1919.

Figure 28. NAA: B2455, WENHAM GEORGE

George and Madeleine Wenham post war

An entry in the Moree Gwydir Examiner and General Advertiser for 14 March 1919 states “Private George Wenham, accompanied by his English bride, returned to Moree on Monday last [10 March 1919]”. It goes on to state that after a brief time in Moree they then went to their home by the Inverell train.107 It is

likely to have been at the property, discussed earlier in this chapter, of his brother, John Wenham. An entry for the Moree Gwydir Examiner and General Advertiser 2 April 1936 states that John Wenham had taken up land he named Adnaw at Marambir (Weetah) Siding in 1916. It goes on to state that he had “resided there until the time of his death”.\(^{108}\) As Adnaw was given as the place of residence of George’s other brothers, William and Charles, it is highly likely to have been the destination of my grandparents in 1919.

For my grandmother travelling to a home so far away from her family begs the question, what did she really know about my grandfather? Again if family stories are to be believed, when she married she thought that she was doing so with “a man of means”. For many years I had been told that the cause of my grandfather’s premature death was that he had been gassed. A 4 July 1941 entry in the Singleton Argus\(^ {109}\) tells of my grandmother being informed that my uncle, Sydney George Wenham, had been wounded in action in World War 2. It goes on to state that my grandfather had been gassed in the Great War. It is a story which even when his records showed the true cause as being tuberculosis, was denied by some members of my family. I can also recall that as a young boy my grandmother telling me that George had said he’d been recommended for a bravery award, but had declined it as “They came up to the front like rations”. As a decoration for bravery cannot be declined and as there is no record of my grandfather ever being recommended for one, it was clearly untrue. What then seems to emerge is a man from the small rural community of Moree who, when


on leave for the first time in the cosmopolitan city of London, at a time when the outcome of the war was in the balance, may have told stories to put himself in the best possible light. Perhaps while in the War Hospital at Bath he had told my grandmother that his illness had been caused by gas, perhaps it was a story which he thought more fitting of a soldier than tuberculosis.

My grandmother’s arrival in Moree in 1919 must have been something of a shock. Not only was George Wenham not a man of means, he was also Aboriginal. While I have nothing definite about her reaction, the fact that my grandparents soon moved south to Belford near Singleton suggests that she wanted to distance herself from my great-grandmother Annie and other members of George’s family.

The location of Belford can be found in Figure 2 and its distance from my grandfather’s family in Moree is quite pronounced. The likely reason for its selection seems much to do with my grandfather’s sister Mary. She had married Samuel Eslick on 20 January 1913 and their home was at Belford.

In the early years of the 1920s my grandparents seem to have shared the home of the Eslicks, Figure 29. On 6 October 1921 my grandfather applied for a £100 loan under the Returned Soldiers’ Settlement scheme so that he could farm a 51 acre (20.6 hectares) Crown lease at Belford.\textsuperscript{110}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{110} State Records NSW: NRS 8058, Returned Soldiers’ Settlement loan files. George Wenham, File 8186,[ 12/7291].
\end{footnotesize}
In his application George Wenham had stated that his intention was to use the land for the purpose of dairy farming and the growing of corn. His application shows that the local Repatriation Committee at Singleton had given him a “favourable report”. A problem arose however concerning his health. His file contains the note that:

A doctor’s certificate, however, has been received regarding Settler’s health, in which it states that he is suffering from Phythisis (sic), and that he should have light work.¹¹¹

The report goes on recommend that as dairy farming could not be considered light work, that his application be refused. My grandfather’s complete file for assistance under the Returned Soldiers’ Settlement scheme can be found in Appendix 2, B1. Figure 30 is a photograph of my grandfather taken with his eldest son Sydney, at Belford sometime in the 1920s. It shows a man, when compared


404
with that of him in uniform, clearly emaciated by the illness from which he was suffering.

Figure 30. A photograph of George Wenham taken in 1920s showing the debilitating effects of his illness.

The subject of Indigenous members of the AIF and Soldier Settlement has been one which has generated heated views in recent times. On 10 July 2014, during NAIDOC Week, the History Council of NSW hosted “More than Service: Black Diggers and the Great War”. Eminent Indigenous academic Professor John Maynard during his presentation, “Missing Voices – Aboriginal dissent and patriotism in World War 1” spoke of how only one or two returned Indigenous servicemen\textsuperscript{112} were granted Soldier Settlement blocks. He also highlighted the

irony in the fact that much of the land used in the Soldier Settlement scheme had come from Aboriginal reserves. If it had not been for his parlous health there seems little doubt that George Wenham would have had his application approved. Whether his sister, Harriett’s, son Walter Duncan would have been likely to succeed is highly unlikely. Arguably it underlines the significance that “racial passing” played in Indigenous enlistment.

When he received official notification on 7 December 1921 that his application for a loan had been refused, it must have been a time of bitter disappointment for my grandparents. However this setback does not seem to have ended their attempts to become successful farmers. George Wenham’s application for a loan of £100 had stated that it was to be used for a building and fences, the title for the 51 acres at Belford had been confirmed earlier on 1 October 1921.113 Support for the proposition that they still attempted to develop the block comes from a letter written to my grandmother by her father (John Sydney), dated 10 May 1924. He wrote:

I heard all about the extensions of premises you are having. I am very pleased to hear that you are doing all right. I suppose in the not to (sic) far future you will blossom out in full as Rancheros, or what do you call it in Australia.

He also writes of his feelings for my grandmother, who was his oldest child:

I am all right personally, but sometimes get rather down or depressed of course I know it will take time but I never have got over my serious loss of

my darling and as time goes on I seem to feel it more but what is to be will be or in other words “Kismet”.

It is a letter which fits well into the methodology of the silhouette biography. Three years after failing to obtain a Repatriation loan my grandparents seemed still to be pursuing their dream. In addition it provides an insight into my grandmother’s family. It reflects the emotional costs which result when contact is limited by migration. Not only does it help to better understand my grandfather; it also gives a better understanding of my grandmother. She had come from an educated, middle class family and now likely found herself in what could almost be described as a frontier home, a block described in George Wenham’s loan application as being “Forest Res[erve]. Just cut up”.114

Unfortunately the story of my grandparents is then a blank until 1928. His physical condition at this time can be found in an entry dated 27 March 1928 from his repatriation file held by the NAA.115 It makes harrowing reading. It records that my grandfather exhibited:

Persistent weakness and inability to continuously do any heavy work.
Rash about the hands and lately about the face and eyes (which swell) for last 12 months. Has recently had all his teeth removed for pyorrhoea alveolaris [a purulent inflammation of the tissues surrounding the teeth, associated with the discharge of pus].

It describes him as being “a tall spare man. Swarthy”. Although his examining doctor had recorded “malnutrition”, he goes on to write that my grandfather had said that his appetite was good and that he had good plain food to eat. While his

115 NAA: C138, R42862, WENHAM, George [Box 3469]
heart showed no murmurs or enlargement he had “subsiding giant urticaria [swelling] about both eyes” and a “scaly and weeping eczema on both hands”. The file also contains the comments of Dr Barton, the LMO (Local medical officer), who said of my grandfather “this man is a trier but cannot keep up to his work and always appears to be ailing. He is debilitated”. The report concludes with a recommendation that my grandfather attend the Prince of Wales Repatriation Hospital, Randwick, for further investigation.

Correspondence from the Repatriation Commission, 2 April 1928, Figure 31, reflects this significant deterioration in my grandfather’s health. Perhaps the strain of trying to establish a viable farm and the fact that he had never received the year’s treatment in a consumptive sanatorium recommended by his medical board were possible explanations. However it does confirm that as late as 1928, my grandfather’s address was still Belford.

While, Figure 32 shows that George Wenham was well enough to be given six periods of leave for four hours during May 1928, the last on 23 May, his health then quickly deteriorated and he was to die on 30 May 1928.
Mr. George Wenham,
Belford,
Via Singleton.

Dear Sir,

With reference to your examination by a Medical Officer of this Department recently it has been found necessary for you to come to Sydney for admission to the Prince of Wales Repatriation General Hospital, Randwick, for full investigation and treatment of your condition.

2. For the purpose of your journey I enclose herewith a Warrant No. 37784, Belford to Sydney. I also enclose an envelope addressed to the Medical Superintendent of the abovementioned Hospital, which contains your admission card, and will be pleased if on arrival in Sydney you will report direct to that Institution handing in this letter as your authority for admission.

3. If unable to report within 10 days please advise me.

Yours faithfully,

J.H. Barrett
Deputy Commissioner

Encl.
Figure 32. George Wenham’s leave form for May, 1928

My grandfather’s death certificate, Figure 33, gives the cause of death as “Lobar Pneumonia” and that the duration of his last illness was “6 days”. His “rank or profession” is stated as being “Soldier” and “Telephone Linesman”. As there is no reference to “farmer”, it may well be that the effort to develop the block had been too much. The human cost to my family of my grandfather’s premature death is also recorded on his death certificate. These are the details of my grandparents’ five children: Marjorie aged 8 years, Sydney aged 6 years, Charles (my father) aged 4, Phyllis aged 2 years and Margaret aged 1 month. My grandfather was buried in Whittingham Cemetery, near Singleton on 31 May 1928, Figure 34.
Figure 33. My grandfather’s death certificate.
412

Figure 34. George Wenham’s grave Whittingham, NSW, May 2014.
During my search for George Wenham, I began with little more than his photograph in uniform and record from the National Archives of Australia, now I find that his is a story far more complex than I had ever imagined. When placed into the context of the other Indigenous men who served in the First AIF his story might seem rather unremarkable. Physically taller and older than the average his physical description does fit that of the majority of Indigenous soldiers. Unlike, for example, the men highlighted in Chapter 7, George Wenham did not have one entry on his records for any form of misconduct. Through illness or the workings of fate he was not to play a significant role in any of the iconic battles fought by the 5th Australian Division in which he served. However, while his records show that he was not to be wounded in action, the illness which was to ultimately claim his life was a direct result of his service for Australia. It was to be just as telling as any shell or bullet.

He was one of only 23 Indigenous men to have an English bride and in many ways theirs seem at first sight to have been an unlikely marriage. George, from the rural background of Moree, almost functionally illiterate, finds himself for the first time in the cosmopolitan city of London in 1918. He has leave for only two weeks, meets a 28 year old woman from an educated background and nine months later they marry. No doubt in his efforts to impress my grandmother, he had told her stories which on analysis have proven to be largely untrue. Throughout the course of this thesis it has been my intention to highlight the humanity of the men who fought in the AIF. The story of George Wenham is the story of a human being. In January 1918 he had no way of foreseeing what the future held, what might happen when he returned to the front so there is little
wonder as to why he maximised his war experience during his two weeks in London.

It is also the story of my grandmother, Madeleine. Although she really knew little about my grandfather she had agreed to marry and settle on the other side of the world, possibly never to see her family again. During his two weeks in London George must have experienced a city far grander than one he could have ever imagined. Yet for Madeleine, a native of the city, the cost of the war must have been only too apparent. Post-war Australia is likely to have seemed a very attractive option. It is also likely that what she found on arrival was not quite what she had expected.

Their settling at Belford, so far from Moree is likely to have been the result both of my grandmother’s negative reaction to my grandfather’s Aboriginality and its being the location of Mary, his sister’s home. It is also clear that it was the location of what seems likely a failed attempt to establish a farm of their own. It was there that they raised a family of five. Following their father’s death in 1928, this young family was to experience the worst of the Great Depression. When this was followed by the outbreak of World War Two, George Wenham’s two sons 116 served in the 2nd AIF. Both brothers served in the 2/33rd Battalion of the 7th Australian Division. My uncle, Sydney George Wenham, served in Syria, Kokoda and Borneo and my father Charles Phillip Wenham enlisted twice. Having been found to be under age he was discharged and then shortly afterwards enlisted

NAA: B883, NX50817, Charles Phillip Wenham (my father) 
NAA: B883, NX95728, Charles Phillip Wenham (my father)
successfully again, although still under age. He served in New Guinea. Figure 35 is a portrait of my grandmother with her eldest daughter Marjorie and eldest son Sydney, taken at Belford in the early 1920s. Figure 36 shows them in Sydney in 1940 when my uncle Sydney had enlisted for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} AIF, with them is my father Charles then aged 16.

Figure 35. My grandmother with her first two children Marjorie and Sydney.
Following the death of my grandfather in 1928 my family had little contact with Moree. My grandmother does not seem to have wanted the children to know anything of their Aboriginality and this was not to change until quite recently. Perhaps at a time of racial prejudice she thought that she was protecting them. Earlier chapters in this thesis have shown how the First Australians became so marginalised that being Aboriginal was for some, a source of shame. In the coda the focus will be one in which our family’s heritage is not shunned but embraced and celebrated. At its core will be oral history, a methodology employed to better
understand the experiences of Indigenous men and their families' and the issues of being Aboriginal in Moree.
CODA

“What’s the best thing you guys have done?” The response, “Survive.”

The aim of this afterword is to supplement the silhouette biography of George Wenham in Chapter 8 which relied heavily on a methodology based on written sources, the staple for a traditional historical recovery. What follows draws on the knowledge and experience of four leaders of Australia’s First People as related to me through a series of oral history interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015. In doing so the wisdom and understanding they have shared have not only played a pivotal role in giving me a better understanding of my grandfather, but they have also given me a rich understanding of my Aboriginal heritage. I would also like to thank each for allowing me to name them in this thesis.

In providing me an insight into my family’s story and life for the Gamilaroi in Moree Noeline Briggs-Smith has been pivotal.¹ Noeline is an experienced Aboriginal researcher, cultural educator, author and highly respected Gamilaroi elder. While I am not one of her descendants we are related through my great aunt Harriet Wenham–Barlow. Harriet was the daughter of Charles Wenham and Sally Barlow.

When asked about my great grandfather, Charles and his first partner Sally Barlow, Aunty Noeli’s response illustrated the shadowy nature of a silhouette biography, even with oral history. While she was able to tell me that, until the establishment of the mission at Terry Hie Hie in 1895, most Aboriginal people had lived and worked on properties in small camps, and this is how Harriet’s

¹ Noeline Briggs-Smith, interview with Michael Wenham, 17 September 2014, Moree NSW.
parents most probably met, she wasn’t able to say a great deal about Harriet. The reason Noeli gave was that when adults spoke the children had to go outside. As she said, “We missed out on a lot of the things they were talking about.”

However a clearer picture emerged when she talked of the elders’ decision to move from the mission at Terry Hie Hie to what became known as “Top Camp” on the Mehi River at Moree. The reason she gave was the hope of escaping the oppressive control exercised by the New South Wales Protection and Welfare Boards on the mission. Aunty Noeli told of how in 1940 she was born at Top Camp in a “tin hut” belonging to her Granny Lizzy. She spoke with pride of how she was raised by Granny Lizzy and recalled the many stories her grandmother shared from her early years. One she related shows that, even though the devastating effects of dispossession were taking their toll, in many ways Australia’s First people were still following many of their traditional ways:

She [Granny Lizzy] said there was an area up near Inverell where they had these huge big rocks and ponds of water. She said they would all gather there. She can only just remember that as a child they would come together, the Aboriginal people would come together and they would settle disputes and arrange marriages.

Yet what I found most revealing is one of the reasons for the move to Top Camp. In Aunty Noeli’s words, “they left the reserve because white men would ride in on horseback and take the children.” When she recalled with considerable emotion, “how riding into the camps was their way of getting any of these children with light skin. They would pick up the light skinned children first”, I remembered even as primary school student in the 1950s being taught the policy of assimilation. One

2 Noeline said that when her grandmother died in a segregated ward at the back of Moree District Hospital her age was estimated to be between 98 and 101 years.
story she told to highlight the issue concerned Violet, the child of Roseanne and Percy Duncan. She was an albino and “every time the camps were raided, Grandfather, her father, would turn the big wash tub over and put her under the wash tub. He would sit on it and roll a smoke. He saved her many times from being taken.”

Aunty Noeli detailed how once removed the children were then taken by rail to Central Station in Sydney before being separated; with boys going to Kinchela Boys’ Home near Kempsey on the north coast of New South Wales and the girls to the Cootamundra Girls’ Home [Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls]. They were memories which she recalled with a bitter emotion.

One of the women [one of the Stolen Generation] says she hates the words “Going on a holiday”. She cringes whenever she hears those words because that’s what they told them when they took them away as children.

Aunty Noeli’s memories then have provided one of the likely reasons as to why the Wenhams in Moree had decided to “pass” as white: to save their children being taken by the State. It is a theme found in another two of my interviews. While his family never suffered the cruelty of their children being removed, John Lester,3 a Wanaruah elder, recalled:

[I]t had omni presence because I remember my dad made sure I polished my shoes, that I was neat, I was tidy and I remember him saying, “The Welfare will get you. The Welfare will get you”. [the NSW Welfare Board]

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3 John Lester, interview with Michael Wenham, 5 March 2015, the Wollotuka Institute, the University of Newcastle, NSW
However unlike Uncle John, for Dennis Foley, it was to have a devastating impact. As with Aunty Noeli he had been raised by his grandmother, but when she became ill he returned to his mother. Now ten years of age he recalled what he was to experience one day at school:

The cops took me in a big Maria, a big old Ford, a Ford 100. They were a huge big old truck and they were massive. I was only a kid at primary school and I got taken there. They had a few other kids there. We got taken to Minda, [a children’s home run by the Welfare Board as a holding centre] back of Lidcombe there and it was cruel. I was in Minda for about a week before the court case and they fostered me out; made me a ward of the state. Mum and Dad never knew where I was; they never knew.

Uncle Dennis said that the authorities told him that his parents neither loved nor wanted him. His understandable anger with the “justice” he received was echoed in his words: “I’ll never forget that mongrel judge, bang! ‘It’s all in your best interests’. I’ll never forget him saying that, ‘It’s in your best interests’”. This had occurred to Uncle Dennis in the 1960s, so for the Wenhams at Moree being seen as Aboriginal carried the very likely possibility of the State taking their children.

Another reason the Wenhams may have endeavoured to “pass” as European also became clear in the interviews. In Chapter 1 the argument was advanced that following Federation in 1901, Australia’s First People were subject to an increase in racism and governmental control. How this was evident in communities such as Moree is reflected in an account given by Aunty Noeli of

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4 Dennis Foley, interview with Michael Wenham, 2 February 2015, the University of Newcastle, NSW

421
how the town treated returned Indigenous servicemen. As she recounted what had happened she became increasingly agitated:

When they came back to Australia they couldn’t even go into RSL clubs, they couldn’t, were never allowed in the land ballots. They had to go back on the reserves or the missions. They were prisoners without bars or fences. You had to get permission to even go into town, permission to go up the river to a good fishing hole, permission to go to somebody’s funeral if it was in another town: permission, permission. [here she became extremely animated] So they came back with the freedom with their soldier friends, but then when they came back to Australia can you imagine having to adapt to that again. It’s a trauma.

She later spoke of the work of Charlie Perkins, who in 1965 had used his Freedom Rides to highlight the racism in towns such as Moree. Her recollection of this period in Australia’s history can be better understood by her own words:

To me, I mean it’s hard to, a lot of people say, “I know what you’re going through”. I’ve lived through this, I’ve lived it! People say, “Why is it that you know so much?” – because I’ve lived it! I’ve stood back in shops waiting for my father to be served; in the shops that would serve you. The way they were treated was like aliens and I could never get my head around it as a kid. We were just told “Be quiet”, when we brought the subject up. But why, but why? They just had to go along with it.

When I asked Aunty Noeli if treatment such as this would have influenced the Wenhams in denying their Aboriginality her response was, “Well you didn’t go about shouting that you were Aboriginal: that’s for sure”. While research and oral histories help describe the devastating effect of racism, a genuine empathy may well be impossible, for as Aunty Noeli put it, “People say ‘I know how you feel’. They don’t know how you feel, until you’ve lived [stressed] racism, you will never
know how we feel. A lot of us are still alive today who lived through it [emphasis by hitting table], lived through it”.

In earlier chapters the phenomenon of racial passing has been advocated as a possible explanation in accounting for the relatively large number of Indigenous recruits for the AIF, particularly in the years 1914 and 1915. It is a theme evident in the interview with Uncle Dennis, a Gai-mariagal elder. Although from a later time frame it still demonstrates how many denied their true identity to escape the prejudice and control that any such admission would evoke. He had spoken with great affection for his grandmother who had raised him, but he did say:

Grandma would hide her Aboriginality by talking in Maltese because she used to work in a market garden when she was younger and she’d worked with the Maltese women and she learnt a bit of Maltese. So when she was questioned on her Aboriginality she’d say, “Oh no, I’m Maltese”.

This denial was not just limited to his grandmother. Uncle Dennis also related how it applied to his uncles, one of whom went on to serve in the Korean War. He had used an explanation for his appearance previously used by Aunty Noeli’s great uncle, Norman Briggs in 1915. Both claimed to be Maori.

There was further evidence of racial passing in my interview with Pat Daley.\(^5\) Aunty Pat, a Gamilaroi woman, had lost a great uncle, William Daley, at Fromelles. He like my grandfather had enlisted at Narrabri in 1915 but unlike George Wenham had fought in this disastrous battle where Australian losses were estimated at 5,335 in twenty four hours. Despite the recent recovery of many

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\(^5\) Pat Daley, interview with Michael Wenham, 21 January 2015, Belmont North, NSW.
of the previously unknown he is still missing. When describing him Aunty Pat’s words are enlightening:

Those family, that Daley side of the family are all very fair, we’re the only dark ones – maybe at that time, umm, - that’s where the Irish did come in, he did marry an Aboriginal lady, but everyone’s fair, everyone’s fair.

Later she was to reinforce this point when she said of William Daley, “Because at that time because he was fair they didn’t think he was Aboriginal”. Arguably it again suggests how many Indigenous men may have been able to enlist early in the war despite the restrictions outlined in Chapters 1 and 2.

Although my interviews had helped me understand the circumstances which helped explain my family’s dogged denial of their Aboriginality and strengthened my belief in the likelihood of many Indigenous recruits “passing” as white, they did little to add to my picture of George Wenham as an individual. The passage of time was too great an obstacle. It was also the case with Aunty Pat who, when I asked if she knew the reasons for William enlisting, could only say, “Never heard a thing, never have” and later expressed her regret that, “I never even thought to ask my uncle”. It was also a theme found with Uncle John. He had three relatives who enlisted for the AIF, of whom two - Alister Lester and Augustus Lester - were to die on the Western Front. When I asked Uncle John if their names or that of Alice Lester, whose name appeared on each of their records, meant anything to him he answered, “Alice doesn’t, but the other two, Frederick and Augustus; my father’s named after Frederick and his brother was Augustus Lester, Gussy Lester who lived at La Perouse”. While this was about all he knew of his relatives he was able however to add a possible reason for Indigenous men volunteering. This came about when he recalled an answer his father had given him for his
enlisting for World War Two. “I asked why did you join up and he said, ‘It was the only job I could get’”. While the reasons underlying Indigenous enlistment is a question central to the research of Aboriginal service, the passage of 100 years means that the answers suggested really can only be possibilities.

The interviews also had the initial effect of creating a sense of loss, verging on despair for me. This has to do with what seems to emerge from the devastating effects of dispossession on Aboriginal traditional culture. As Aunty Noeli related, “I think it was 1905 they had their last big corroboree at Wee Waa. So the customs and their culture were slowly dying out even in the early 1900s.” She was to raise another issue that was to trouble me; that of language. It seemed to me that when a culture is denied its own language and forced to use that of its oppressors, the results can be catastrophic. As Aunty Noeli said, “The language was suppressed; they weren’t allowed to speak the language out at Terry Hie Hie.”

Language was also central to Aunty Pat. During our talk there was a moment when she became so upset that I had to ask if she wanted to stop. After she assured me that she would like to continue she began to give an insight into Aboriginal spirituality. Earlier when I had asked her if my great grandmother would have known the old stories and the old ways she had said, “They would have, [but] they weren’t allowed to tell anyone. That’s why it all died out.” She then said more on the subject of language:

[E]ven the lingo. Where I come from in Tingha, there was only a couple of old gentlemen, I remember, they would speak in the lingo, and that was it. That’s what we grew up with, we weren’t allowed to talk.
The reason for why she had become upset was explained when she spoke of her visit to the site of the Myall Creek massacre near Bingara.

Yes, Myall Creek Massacre. Yes, I went there and oh yes, they [the Spirits] decided to get in the car with me and follow me around in the car. Talking in their lingo.

Kicking the car.

Kicking the boot thing and I don’t know what made me … I went to Tingha of course and I could hear them. I thought, “That’s it!” I opened up the car doors, told them to get out.

I kick myself for not taking them back. But they wanted to come for a ride.

Aunty Pat then told me of many other times when she experienced similar occurrences. Of these she said, “Yes, so whenever I go to graves I open the door and tell them that they’re not coming with me; they’ve got to stay. And so far that’s been good”. For me the sharing of such intimate moments proved a powerful affirmation of my Aboriginal culture.

It was strengthened by a memory which Uncle John said he would never forget. It is one which needs telling in full, one not to be paraphrased:

Well, I’ll tell you a story. When we were starting up Aboriginal Education, we used to hold conferences all over the place. We had one on the North Coast. One of the few, last remaining holders of language was at the conference and it was at, not Sawtell, it was, umm, just north of Nambucca, there’s a big caravan place. Late at night we left there and walked along the beach, with this fellow and I was trying to talk to him and find out what was going on. He could speak language. There was a really full moon over the ocean and he stopped along the beach and there was only he and I. He went out until he was knee deep in the water and talking language. Crying his eyes out. He came back in and I said, “What can I do Johnny?”
He said, “I’m the last of my speakers traditionally and more so ceremony.” And he said, “I can only pass it on to an initiated man and there’s none left. I’m torn between my culture which says I can only pass it on to initiated men and there’s no others around.”

I had conducted four interviews and reached a point where I believed an ancient culture had been irreparably damaged by the dispossession that had occurred in a little over a hundred years. Uncle John’s moving account of this last holder of knowledge and language seemed only to affirm this.

However he then provided a more telling perspective. Once again it is a wisdom deserving to be given in full:

We’ve really got to be careful when we talk about the destruction of culture. It’s certainly an impact of the invasion and I talk about invasion; but what you’ve got is our culture responds to the sets of circumstances the environment presents. So we haven’t lost culture, we’ve had to change and adapt.

It was an insight which made me rethink the way Aboriginal culture should be seen. On reflection it was advice which had been followed by each of the elders I had interviewed. Aunty Noeli’s preservation and celebration of Australia’s First People in Moree, Aunty Pat’s spirituality, Uncle Dennis’s overcoming the obstacles placed in his path to become a university professor, and the wisdom of Uncle John, also a professor. Each has been generous in sharing their knowledge with me and helping me find my grandfather George Wenham.

The oral history at the core of this epilogue has significantly added to the silhouette biography of my grandfather. However, just as with traditional historical examination, one based on the written word, it has had its strengths and weaknesses. It has certainly provided strong reasons as to why my family when
threatened by the probable removal of its children and being the target for the vicious racism practised in places such as Moree, denied their race, their Aboriginality. It has also strengthened my belief that the practice of racial passing was a likely factor explaining the successful enlistment of many Indigenous men in the AIF, particularly in the early years of the war. Where it has been less successful has been in not providing more detail of the man who was George Wenham. The tyranny of time has left him in many ways still a shadowy silhouette. Yet overall it has been a positive experience, the culture of George Wenham and his family reflects the words of Uncle John. It is a culture which has changed, but it is a culture which is still here and one which continues to build and gather strength.

The search for the man who was my grandfather, George Wenham, centred on his experience as an Indigenous serviceman in the Great War. Through a historical recovery it has seen him placed in the wider examination of Indigenous men in the First AIF which forms the core of this thesis. A direct result of this recovery must be a reinterpretation of the ANZAC myth. Rather than being a white myth, it can now expand to become more inclusive of the reality of our national story whereby it recognises in a postcolonial manner the dispossession at the basis of the national story and the contribution of Indigenous men and their families to the nation. Lest we forget.
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3. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS 442

4. BOOKS 442

5. JOURNALS 445

6. ELECTRONIC SOURCES 446
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NAA: B2455, CAMPBELL W C
NAA: B2455, FERGUSON J
NAA: B2455, FLICK MICHAEL
NAA: B2455, FIREBRACE J A
NAA: B2455, FIREBRACE W R
NAA: B2455, FIRTH E J
NAA: B2455, FOLEY C W
NAA: B2455, FORD C
NAA: B2455, FRANKS W
NAA: B2455, GALLAHER C P
NAA: B2455, GARLAND D J
NAA: B2455, GOLDSPINK C E
NAA: B2455, GOLDSPINK J A
NAA: B2455, GOOLAGONG J
NAA: B2455, GOWER J D
NAA: B2455, GOWER W H
NAA: B2455, GRANT D
NAA: B2455, GRANT H
NAA: B2455, GRANT R
NAA: B2455, GRAY J W
NAA: B2455, HAMPSON D L
NAA: B2455, HARPER H
NAA: B2455, HARRIS J G
NAA: B2455, HEARPS C 207
NAA: B2455, HELAND J S DEPOT
NAA: B2455, HILL C
NAA: B2455, HOMER A C 115
NAA: B2455, HOMER W J DEPOT/7011
NAA: B2455, HUBBARD R
NAA: B2455, HUGHES W 6987
NAA: B2455, IDRIESS ION LLEWELLYN
NAA: B2455, IRWIN WILLIAM ALLAN
NAA: B2455, JENKINS ALLAN JAMES
NAA: B2455, JOHNSON W
NAA: B2455, JOHNSTON J
NAA: B2455, JONAS WILLIAM JAMES ALBERT
NAA: B2455, KENNEDY GEORGE
NAA: B2455, KENNY ROBERT JOHN
NAA: B2455, KING R
NAA: B2455, KING WILLIAM
NAA: B2455, KNIGHT ALBERT
NAA: B2455, KNIGHT WILLIAM ALBERT
NAA: B2455, KNYVETT REGINALD HUGH
NAA: B2455, LACEY ERNEST
NAA: B2455, LACEY LOUIS
NAA: B2455, LANSLEY CLARENCE VICTOR
NAA: B2455, LAVENDER ANDREW
NAA: B2455, LAVENDER CLEMENTS JOSEPH
NAA: B2455, LAVENDER CLIVE CLARENDON
NAA: B2455, LAVENDER GEORGE
NAA: B2455, LAVENDER VICTOR MICHAEL
NAA: B2455, LEANE WILLIAM ARTHUR
NAA: B2455, LEONARD ARCHIBALD HENRY
NAA: B2455, LOCKE JEROME 117A 85938
NAA: B2455, LOCKE HENRY JAMES 532
NAA: B2455, LOVETT EDWARD MC DONALD
NAA: B2455, LOVETT FREDERICK AMOS
NAA: B2455, LOVETT HERBERT STAHLLE
NAA: B2455, LOVETT LEONARD CHARLES
NAA: B2455, MCCALLUM A E
NAA: B2455, MCDONALD A
NAA: B2455, MCDONALD G W
NAA: B2455, MCKENZIE L
NAA: B2455, MACNEE H M
NAA: B2455, MADGE MAITLAND
NAA: B2455, MARKS SIDNEY ROBERT
NAA: B2455, MARSHALL ROBERT CHRISTOPHER
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NAA: B2455, MARTYN CHARLES
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NAA: B2455, MITCHELL BISMARK
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NAA: B2455, PRENTICE FREDERICK

433
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NAA: B2455, PURCELL TOMMY
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NAA: B2455, RAWS JOHN ALEXANDER
NAA: B2455, REES EDWARD
NAA: B2455, RIGNEY CYRIL SPURGEON
NAA: B2455, RIGNEY RUFUS GORDON
NAA: B2455, RILEY ARTHUR
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NAA: B2455, ROBERTS ERNEST HUGH
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NAA: B2455, ROSE EWAN
NAA: B2455, ROSS PETER
NAA: B2455, ROWAN JOHN
NAA: B2455, Runga Raymond Charles
NAA: B2455, RUTTLEY ARTHUR HERBERT
NAA: B2455, SELFE ARCHIE AUGUSTUS
NAA: B2455, SIMPSON JOHN
NAA: B2455, SIMPSON STAMFORD WALLACE
NAA: B2455, SINCLAIR ERIC
NAA: B2455, SKELLY SYDNEY JOSEPH
NAA: B2455, SKELLY THOMAS
NAA: B2455, SLOANE JOHN
NAA: B2455, SMITH L G
NAA: B2455, SMITH R
NAA: B2455, SMITH W E
NAA: B2455, SPROLES ALBERT AUGUSTUS HIPITHITE
NAA: B2455, STANTON JAMES
NAA: B2455, STEWART FRANK 4911
NAA: B2455, TALBOTT WILLIAM THOMAS
NAA: B2455, TAYLOR R W
NAA: B2455, THORPE HARRY
NAA: B2455, TIVEY EDWIN
NAA: B2455, TRIPCONY ALBERT
NAA: B2455, VICKERS WILLIAM
NAA: B2455, WALKER A T
NAA: B2455, WALLER CHARLES STEPHEN
NAA: B2455, WANDIN JOSEPH
NAA: B2455, WATTS ERNEST
NAA: B2455, WENHAM GEORGE
NAA: B2455, WILSON G E
NAA: B2455, WILSON E
NAA: B2455, WILSON E R
NAA: B2455, WINTLE CECIL TAAFFEE
NAA: B2455, YOUNG L G
NAA: B2455, UNKNOWN [Harold “Pompey Elliott”]

Second Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1939-1947

NAA: B883, VX1
NAA: B884, W30636
NAA: B883, WX8343
NAA: B884, Q187467
NAA: B884, Q116658
NAA: B884, V85751
NAA: B884, V12095
NAA: B884, V5180
NAA: B884, V14915
NAA: B884, V4787
NAA: B884, V10841
NAA: B844 N100089
NAA: B884, QX1836
NAA: B884, N281674
NAA: B884, N391521
NAA: B884, N388376
NAA: B883, NX50817
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4th Battalion, AIF
6th Battalion, AIF
7th Battalion, AIF
12th Battalion, AIF
13th Battalion, AIF
15th Battalion, AIF
16th Battalion, AIF
17th Battalion, AIF
19th Battalion, AIF
25th Battalion, AIF
26th Battalion, AIF
30th Battalion, AIF
32nd Battalion, AIF
33rd Battalion, AIF
37th Battalion, AIF
40th Battalion, AIF
41st Battalion, AIF
43rd Battalion, AIF
47th Battalion, AIF
48th Battalion, AIF
53rd Battalion, AIF
54th Battalion, AIF
55th Battalion, AIF
60th Battalion, AIF

Light Horse
1st Light Horse Regiment
5th Light Horse Regiment
11th Light Horse Regiment
3rd Light Horse Field Ambulance

Artillery
2nd Australian Light Mortar Battery

Engineers
1st Australian Pioneer Battalion
5th Australian Pioneer Battalion
4th Field Company

Medical
Staff Officer, Australian Dental Services, France

Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War
1DRL/0428


Roll of Honour


Honours and Awards


Images:


https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Australia,_New_South_Wales,_Index_to_Bounty_Immigrants_%28FamilySearch_Historical_Records%29  

Personal

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All tapes are held at present by the researcher in an archive.

Noeline Briggs-Smith, interview with Michael Wenham, 17 September 2014, Moree NSW
Pat Daley, interview with Michael Wenham, 21 January 2015, Belmont North, NSW.
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**A1: Appendix 1**

In October 2014 the writer visited Europe to photograph either the graves or memorial sites for the Indigenous men who died in Belgium, France and the United Kingdom.

**Belgium – Those commemorated on the Menin Gate**

Completed in 1927, the Menin Gate in Ypres “bears the names of more than 54 000 officers and men [who died in Flanders] whose graves are not known”. ¹

Among the 54 000 names are those of 15 Indigenous men who fell in the Ypres Salient.

1. **George AITKEN**, 52nd Battalion (KIA 19 October 1917)

2. **Thomas BOWEN** 18th Battalion (KIA 20 September 1917)
3. Frederick BRIGGS 33rd Battalion (KIA 5 October 1917)

4. Norman BRIGGS 34th Battalion (enlisted as Oliver White and it is under this name he is commemorated) (KIA 12 October 1917).
5. Vere DYSON 40th Battalion (KIA 5 October 1917)
6. Thomas FORD 31st Battalion (KIA 27 September 1917)

7. Edward HEATH 33rd Battalion (KIA 15 June 1917)
8. William KING 36th Battalion (“Mick” King KIA 12 October 1917)

9. Lawrence LESLIE 35th Battalion (KIA 12 October 1917)
10. Alexander McKINNON 43rd Battalion (KIA 4 October 1917)

11. William MURRAY 5th Battalion (KIA 20 September 1917)
12. James NABIBUX 45th Battalion (KIA 7 June 1917)

13. Alfred O’NEILL 1st Tunnelling Company
14. Cyril RIGNEY 43rd Battalion (KIA 3 July 1917)

Indigenous members of the First AIF buried in Belgium
1. John HOLLAND 51st Battalion (DOW 23 September 1917) is buried at Birr Cross Roads Military Cemetery 3 kilometres east of Ypres.

Figure 3. Belgium: Birr Cross Roads No 3 Military Cemetery. Oct 2014.
2. Charles MARYTN 26th Battalion (KIA 20 September 1917) is buried at Hooge Crater Military Cemetery.

![Hooge Crater Cemetery](image)

Figure 4 Hooge Crater Military Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.
3. Daniel COOPER 24th Battalion (KIA 20 September 1917) is buried at Perth Cemetery (China Wall) three kilometres east of Ypres.

Figure 5. Perth Cemetery (China Wall) Military Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.
4. John HUCKLE 1st Battalion (KIA 3 October 1917) is buried at Aeroplane Cemetery 3.5 kilometres north east of Ypres.

![Aeroplane Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.](image)

Figure 6. Aeroplane Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.
5. **John FISHER 40th Battalion** (DOW 13 October 1917) is buried at Potijze Chateau Grounds Cemetery north east of Ypres.

Figure 7 Potijze Chateau Grounds Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.
Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery is located 12 kilometres west of Ypres and is the resting place of two Indigenous men. It is the second largest Commonwealth cemetery in Belgium and has 9,901 burials.

Figure 8 Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.

Figure 9. Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.
6. Frederick BROOK 3rd Battalion (DOW 5 October 1917)

7. Martin COOHEY 4th Pioneer Battalion (DOW 20 October 1917)
8. Lawrence BOOTH 21st Battalion (DOW 14 October 1917) is buried at Nine Elms British Cemetery west of the town of Poperinge.

Figure 10. Nine Elms British Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.
Figure 11. Nine Elms British Cemetery, Belgium. Oct 2014.
5303 Private
L.H. BOOTH
21st Bn. Australian Inf.
13th October 1917
9. John BAKER 3rd Pioneer Battalion (KIA 27 June 1917) is buried at Kandahar Farm Cemetery 14 kilometres south of Ypres.
10. Henry MASON 28th Battalion (KIA 24 June 1916) is buried at La Plus Douve Farm Cemetery, 10.5 kilometres south of Ypres.

Figure 13. La Plus Douve Farm Cemetery, Belgium, Oct 2014.
France: Fromelles

William DALEY, 54th Battalion (KIA 21 July 1916) is commemorated at VC Corner Australian Cemetery.

Figure 14. VC Corner Australian Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.

Figure 15. VC Corner Australian Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
IN HONOUR OF 410 UNKNOWN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS HERE BURIED, WHO WERE AMONG THE FOLLOWING 1299 OFFICERS NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCES KILLED IN THE ATTACK AT FROMELLES JULY 19TH / 20TH 1916

BATTALION
PRIVATE
APPLETON A.E.
DARWIN T.M.
THOMPSON J.H.
WILLS A.H.
WINFIELD J.E.
WILLIAMSON W.B.
WILLIAMSON J.D.
BURLINGTON M.E.

CORPORAL
CRAIG M.A.
TOOLE J.

LANCE CORPORAL
FLETCHER T.K.
HARTLEY F.
HURDIN J.
LITTLE V.H.
PAGAN G.
WADESH B.M.
WILKINSON H.M.

PRIVATE
BACKHOUSE V.J.
BALKIN M.

54TH INFANTRY BATTALION
PRIVATE
CLAPPERTON C.
CLARK R.A.
CONNOLLY W.T.
CREWS C.W.
CROW J.

DRIVER
COODY R.

2nd BATTALION
SERJEANT
CAMPBELL J.M.
RICHARDSON H.
WASS W.

FLUDE H.
FORREST J.R.
GATES C.
GIBBONS T.G.
GRAY G.H.
GRAY S.
HARRIS S.E.
HAY B.
HEARLE R.C.
HEATHER W.
HIGGINS A.J.
HILL A.
HOLLIAD C.D.
HOLMES J.L.
HOPE E.J.
IRVING D.G.
JOHNSTON C.D.
KBATE S.
KENTISH A.
KING H.L.
KINGSMAN A.
LEWIS D.
LIVES B.
McALISTER H.
McALISTER B.
McLAREN S.B.
McLAREN W.E.
McPHERSON D.
MCDONALD C.
MOORE V.H.
MYERS P.L.
NAISH C.E.

24
Figure 16. Somme River, which gave its name to the fighting in this area, France. Oct 2014.
Australian National Memorial - Villers-Bretonneux

At the official Australian National Memorial for the Western Front at Villers-Bretonneux are recorded the names of 10,982 Australian soldiers who died in France and for whom there is no known grave. Among these are the names of 25 Indigenous members of the First AIF. (20% of those who died in the Great War)

Figure 17. Australian National Memorial - Villers-Bretonneux, France. Oct 2014.

Indigenous men recorded on the Australian National Memorial

1. Geoffrey ARCHER 12th Battalion (KIA 6/10 April 1917)
2. David BINDOFF 19th Battalion (KIA 27 July 1916)

3. William CASTLES 54th Battalion (DOD 23 October 1917)
4. John Henry COE 53rd Battalion (KIA 29 March 1917)

5. Samuel DICKERSON 28th Battalion (KIA 29 July 1916)
6. **William Egan** 60th Battalion (KIA 26 April 1918)

7. **Augustus Farmer** 16th Battalion (KIA 8 August 1918)
8. Larry FARMER 28th Battalion (KIA 10 August 1916)

9. Charles FOX 52nd Battalion (KIA 27 April 1918)
10. **Charles GAGE** 56th Battalion (KIA 3 December 1916)

11. **William GOLDSPINK** 6th Battalion (KIA 8 December 1916)
12. John GRANT 53rd Battalion (KIA 29 March 1917)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lieutenant</th>
<th>Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson J.M.</td>
<td>Dark G.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayre C.</td>
<td>Davies J.I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark J.</td>
<td>Day W.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collman R.H.</td>
<td>Fair H.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickering S.</td>
<td>Fletcher W.A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smith H.J.</td>
<td>Foulser P.J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lce. Corporal</td>
<td>Glaister D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forbes A.J.</td>
<td>Grant J.H.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grove W.J.</td>
<td>Holman E.G.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Herbert W.E.</td>
<td>Hudson R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smeeth A.G.</td>
<td>Humphris R.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Jackson G.T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams A.</td>
<td>Jackson J.F.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adams J.</td>
<td>Jennings C.W.</td>
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<td>Bentley J.W.W.</td>
<td>Johnston E.</td>
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<td>Bowder T.</td>
<td>Joyce P.J.</td>
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<td>Brown N.E.</td>
<td>Kidd T.H.</td>
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<td>Mackenzie D.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marshall C.L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mignonie R.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morris J.A.</td>
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13. James HARRIS 59th Battalion (KIA 4 July 1918)

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<tr>
<th>Captain</th>
<th>Private</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hornby L.L.</td>
<td>Fahey H.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serjeant</td>
<td>Fogo J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrett F.P.</td>
<td>Fox A.L.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legge H.A.</td>
<td>Giroud W.L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nash C.H.</td>
<td>Gouge R.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner F.O.</td>
<td>Hade E.T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>Harris J.G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverdale R.</td>
<td>Haynes P.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Loughlin P.J.</td>
<td>Hubbard E.W.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lce. Corporal</td>
<td>Johnston A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall P.E.</td>
<td>Jones R.G.</td>
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<tr>
<td>McDonald H.</td>
<td>McCormack P.L.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Miles A.E.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Morey S.A.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Morrison E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morrissey P.W.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Wallie JOHNSON 47th Battalion (KIA 11 April 1917)
16. Alister LESTER 4th Battalion (KIA 26 April 1918)

17. Augustus LESTER 34th Battalion (KIA 23 August 1918)
18. Thomas LEWIS 2nd Battalion (KIA 24 July 1916)

19. Richard MARTIN 47th Battalion (KIA 28 March 1918)
20. William MAYNARD 12th Battalion (KIA 6/10 April 1917)

22. Albert TRIPCONY 25th Battalion (KIA 12 May 1917)

23. Francis VARCOE 27th Battalion (KIA 5 May 1917)

25. Vincent WATLEY 54th Battalion (KIA 20 May 1917)
Indigenous men from the AIF buried in France

1. William FIREBRACE 24th Battalion (KIA 15 August 1918) is buried at Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery.

Figure 19. Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
2. Robert CALDWELL 15th Battalion is buried at Corbie Communal Cemetery Extension 15 kilometres east of Amiens.

Figure 20. Corbie Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Oct 2014.
3. **Tommy PURCELL** 15th Battalion (DOW 19 September 1918) is buried at Doingt Communal Cemetery Extension on the eastern outskirts of Peronne.

![Figure 21. Doingt Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Oct 2014.](image)
4. Albert SMITH 4th FAB is buried at Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension 11 kilometres east of Peronne.

Figure 22. Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Oct 2014.
5. Hubert MARKS 5th Pioneer Battalion (KIA 3 October 1918) is buried at Templeux-le-Guerard Communal Extension Cemetery 26 kilometres east of Peronne.

Figure 23. Templeux-le-Guerard Communal Extension Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.

Figure 24. Templeux-le-Guerard Communal Extension Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
6. Thomas PEHOW 12th Battalion is buried at Jeancourt Communal Cemetery Extension approximately halfway between Peronne and St Quentin.

Figure 25. Jeancourt Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Oct 2014.
7. Frank MAYNARD 26th Battalion (KIA 6/10 April 1917) is buried at Sunken Road Cemetery, Contalmaison 6 kilometres east north east of Albert.

Figure 26. Sunken Road Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.

Figure 27. Sunken Road Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
8. Roderick BUDSWORTH 1st Battalion (KIA 5 November 1916) is buried at Caterpillar Valley Cemetery approximately 13 kilometres east of Albert and 10 kilometres south of Bapaume.

Figure 28. Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
Figure 29. Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.

Figure 30. Note family inscription at foot of headstone.
Heath Cemetery 13 kilometres from Villers-Bretonneux is the resting place of five Indigenous men.

10. George LAURIE 42nd Battalion (KIA 12 August 1918)
11. William RAWLINGS 29th Battalion (KIA 9 August 1918)
12. Harry THORPE 7th Battalion (DOW 9 August 1918)
13. Thomas WALKER 25th Battalion (KIA 11 August 1918)
14. Alfred WRIGHT 25th Battalion is buried at Serre Road Cemetery No 2, 11
kilometres north east of Albert.

Figure 31. Serre Road Cemetery No 2, France. Oct 2014.
Archie MARSHALL 41st Battalion (KIA 24 April 1918) is buried at Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension about 8 kilometres south west of Albert.

Figure 32. Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Oct 2014.
15. John TALBOTT 56th Battalion (DOW 9 December 1916) is buried at Heilly Station Cemetery, Mericourt-l’Abbe 19 kilometres north east of Amiens.

Figure 33. Heilly Station Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
Two Indigenous men are buried at Daours Communal Cemetery Extension about 10 kilometres east of Amiens.

Figure 34. Daours Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Oct 2014.

Figure 35. Daours Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Oct 2014.
16. William IRWIN 33rd Battalion (DOW 1 September 1918)
17. Alfred KELLY 17th Battalion (DOW 20 August 1918)
18. William HOLLAND 16th Battalion (DOW 10 August 1918) is buried in Vignacourt British Cemetery. Vignacourt is a village in the Department of the Somme on the west of the road from Amiens to Doullens.

Figure 36. Vignacourt British Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
19. Thomas HAYNES 9th Battalion (KIA 15 April 1917) is buried in Morchies Australian Cemetery. It is about one kilometre from the village of Beugny.

Figure 37. Morchies Australian Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
20. James GOLDSPINK 3rd Battalion (KIA 9 April 1917) is buried at Beaumetz Cross Roads Cemetery, south of the village of Hermies.

Figure 38. Beaumetz Cross Roads Cemetery, France. Oct 2014.
Indigenous men buried in the United Kingdom

1. Percy KENNEDY 23rd Battalion (DOD 15 September 1916) is buried at Harefield (St Mary) Churchyard.

There are 120 First World War graves, mostly those of Australians who died in No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield Park. Uniquely, their graves are marked by scroll shaped headstones, chosen by the staff and patients at the hospital. In the centre of the Australian plot stands a memorial obelisk [Figure 32] which was erected by Sir Francis Newdegate, late Governor of Tasmania and of Western Australia, and Mr. C.A.M. Billyard-Leake, of Harefield Park.³

³ CWGC, “HAREFIELD (ST. MARY’S) CHURCHYARD”, http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/42433/HAREFIELD%20%28ST.%20MARY%29%20CHURCHYARD (16 April 2015)
Figure 39 Harefield (St Mary) Churchyard, England. Oct 2014.
Figure 40. Harefield (St Mary) Churchyard, England. Oct 2014
2. William PUNCH 1st Battalion (DOD 29 August 1917) is buried at Bournemouth East Cemetery on England’s south coast.
Figure 43. Ypres, Belgium. Oct 2014.
**B1: Appendix 2**

State Records NSW: NRS 8058, Returned Soldiers' Settlement loan files. George Wenham, File 8186,[ 12/7291].

![Image of document page](image-url)
RETURNED SOLDIERS' SETTLEMENT BRANCH.

OFFICE MEMORANDUM.

S. 186/3

SUBJECT

GEORGE WENHAM (Crown Lease No. 21/4, 514 acres, Portion 52, Parish Bedford, County Northumberland.

An application for an advance of £100 has been made by George Wenham in respect of the abovementioned holding.

A favourable report has been received from the local Repatriation Committee at Singleton.

A doctor's certificate, however, has been received regarding Settler's health, in which it is stated that he is suffering from Pneumonia, and that he should have light work.

Applicant intends to engage in dairying, and this cannot be considered to be a "light" occupation. In any case his condition (and health, more) should preclude him engaging in dairying.

It is, therefore, submitted that George Wenham's application for assistance be refused.

Director of Soldiers' Settlements.

5 DEC 1921

The Minister.

APPROVED

5 DEC 1921

In accordance with instruction.

No note in Repatriation Loans.
The Secretary,
Repatriation Committee,
Singleton.

Dear Sir,

Re C. Wepham.

With reference to this Settler's application for an advance, I have to advise that in view of his complaint, it is considered that he is physically unfit for such work as dairying, and it has been decided to refuse his request for assistance.

Yours faithfully,
A. A. Watson,
Director of Soldiers' Settlements.
per.
7th December, 1921.
Loans 8100.

Mr. G. Wenham,
BELFORD.

Dear Sir,

I have to advise that after full consideration to your application for an advance of £100 in respect of Crown Lease 21/4, Singleton, it has been decided to refuse your request.

It is regretted that the assistance desired by you cannot be granted.

Yours faithfully,
A. A. Watson,
Director of Soldiers' Settlements.
per.
Application has been made by George Wenham for an Advance of £100 in respect of 51 acres, Crown Lease No. 21/4, Section 52, Parish Bedfield, County Northumberland, Land District Singleton, title to which was confirmed on the 1st October, 1921.

The Local Repatriation Committee considers the holding to be a home maintenance area, suitable for dairying and agriculture, by which the applicant intends to develop the area, and maintain himself.

The following allotment is desired:

- Fencing ... £40 0 0
- Building ... £60 0 0
- £100 0 0

As this Settler's health is apparently not robust, a Doctor's Certificate has been furnished in the case, stating that his condition has improved since March last, and that he is capable of performing light work in the country.

The applicant proposes to live on the land. His assets are stated by the Local Repatriation Committee to be £200:0:0. No assistance by way of loan or gift has been given by the War Service House Commission or Repatriation Department.

It is submitted that approval be given for an advance of £100 to George Wenham, to be allotted as above.

Director.

/11/21.

The Minister.

Applicant is suffering from rheumatism. Doctor states that he is fit for light work in the country.

This is a damaging proposition, as I think cannot be considered as a "light" occupation. The regime advance is small. Do you consider this the applicant should be formally considered.

[Signature]

25th Nov.
DEPARTMENT OF LANDS, N.S.W.

To Secretary.

Hardy's Settlement.

Dear Sir,

Enclosed please find application for loan by C.G. Neher, also his references.

Yours faithfully,

J.M. O'Halloran

[Signature]

[Stamp]

Dear Sir,

I have before me the application of C.G. Neher for £200 advance under Section 11 of the Soldiers' Settlement Act, and have ordered an investigation of the same.

The returns are in the hands of the Director of Soldiers' Settlement, and I shall be glad if you will peruse them with me.

Yours faithfully,

A.A. Watson

[Signature]

[Stamp]

Prima facie case disclosed. May be recommended for approval subject to requisitions, if otherwise in order.

[Stamp] 24th Nov 1921

[Stamp] 24th Nov 1921

[Stamp] 24th Nov 1921
DEPARTMENT OF LANDS, N.S.W.

Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch,
Warwick Building.
Hamilton Street, SYDNEY.

13th Oct: 1921.

LOANS $186

THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER,
War Service Homes Commission,
Hamilton Street,
SYDNEY.

Dear Sir,

re: No. 3663, R. Wrenham, 8th 50th Batn.

The abovenamed returned soldier has applied to this Department for an advance under the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Act, but before proceeding further with same, I should be glad to learn whether he has applied for assistance from your Department. If so, will you please furnish particulars of such application, and state whether same has been approved.

As this is an urgent matter, I shall be glad to receive a reply by return mail.

Yours faithfully,

A. A. WATSON,
Director of Soldiers' Settlements,

Director, Soldiers' Settlement Branch.

No application for assistance has been received from the above named applicant.

A/Deputy Commissioner,
War Service Homes Commission,
17th Oct 21.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land District of</th>
<th>Dungelos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acres.</td>
<td>51 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.P. No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section.</td>
<td>18. 4 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Application</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of confirmation</td>
<td>1-10-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>Multinomahand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish</td>
<td>Rainford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Portion</td>
<td>Block A (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant</td>
<td>George Wenham</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Names of Transferees and dates of transfer:**

**In whose name O.F. stands:**

**If certificate leased, to whom and when:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How does O.P. stand in register of Lands Department?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[C] 15th. [m] [d] 1917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**H O.C.P., give series:**

**H A.O.P., give O.C.P.:**

**Appraisalment of cap. value:**

---

8
### Schedule Showing Amounts of Balances of Purchase Money Outstanding

Required for the purposes of payment, sale, purchase, mortgage, etc., as the case may be. When required for the purposes of payment the date of intended payment should be as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Holder</th>
<th>Lead District</th>
<th>Date of Selection</th>
<th>Number of Lots</th>
<th>Ass.</th>
<th>Outstanding Balance of Purchase Money (Subject to Interest, see next column)</th>
<th>Add Interest to Date of Payment</th>
<th>Date when next Installment is due</th>
<th>Amount of Installment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Whallon</td>
<td>Punggaher</td>
<td>18+ 20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEAR SIR,

G. WHELAN 1--

The abovenamed has made application for an advance under the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Act in respect of the holding mentioned above, and I shall be glad if you will forward to this office a report on his application, having regard to the following points:

Yours faithfully,

A. A. WATSON
Director of Soldiers' Settlements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>REPLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Is the holding considered a Home Maintenance Area?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) How is it proposed to develop the holding? (State whether dairying, or grazing, or agriculture, etc.)</td>
<td>Dairying and agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Is the holding suitable for intended purpose?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (d) What is the carrying capacity of the holding—
(a) large stock
(b) sheep | 15 (a) |
| (e) Recommended itemised allotment of proposed advances, in regard to—
Fencing
Buildings
Water Supply
Clearing
Stock (separate amounts for cows, horses, etc.)
Plant, Seeds, etc.
(State items with approx. cost of each) | Fencing 40
Building 60
Clearing 10
Stock (separate amounts for cows, horses, etc.) 20
Plant, Seeds, etc. 10 |
| (f) Settler's assets. | Cash furniture & homestead 2 |
| (g) Prospects of success and of meeting his obligations to the Crown within stipulated periods. | Fair |
| (h) Physical fitness and suitability for the undertaking. | Good stand position |
| (i) How will settle maintain himself pending a profitable return from the produce of his holding? | Provision, etc. |
| (j) Is holding sufficiently fenced, grassed, and watered to carry stock? | No |
| (k) Estimated market value of property—present title. | Annual value £36. |

(Signature) [Signature]
(Capacity of person signing) [Capacity]

(Date) 17 06 21
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

DEPARTMENT OF REPARATION,

4/20 EAGLES ST, NEW YORK, N.Y.

SANDY ST.
SYDNEY, 19TH OCTOBER 21

MINORANDUM for:
The Director of Soldiers' Settlements,
Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch,
Hamilton Street, SYDNEY.

Ref No. 3663, Mr. Womban, 9th 30th Battalion.

In reply to your memo, 6266 of 15th October,
I have to advise that no record is held in this office of any
assistance having been granted to the abovenamed.

A. W. Town.
Deputy Commissioner.
# Application for Loan

I, George Weatherall, of Sydney, being the holder of the lands specified in the Schedule "A" hereto, and the owner of the stock, farming plant, machinery, and improvements specified in Schedules "C" and "D" respectively, do hereby apply for a Loan of £1000 for money to be expended for the purpose of:

- General improvements, viz. fencing, building, etc.

This application is made on the understanding that:

1. The Loan will be used for the purpose stated above.
2. The Loan shall be a charge upon the land, and any other securities the Minister for Lands shall decide.

I have made the Declaration on Page 3 hereof, and I hereby for this Loan.

(Signature) G. Weatherall

(Address) Bexford

(Date) 6-13-1917

---

### Schedule "A" of Lands Above Referred To

State clearly if the land is held under Lease from a private owner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holding</th>
<th>Land District</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Estimated market value</th>
<th>No. of portion</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>own lease</td>
<td>St. Singleton</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own lease</td>
<td>Patrick Plains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are any of the lands part therein in the Schedule to your application subject to any charge, mortgage, or encumbrance? If so, specify which land.

To what extent are such lands charged, mortgaged, or encumbered?

What is the name and address of the holder of such charge?
Declarant.

I, George Brown, do hereby solemnly declare and affirm that I am the holder of the lands mentioned in Schedule "A" to my application, and the owner of the stock, farming plant, machinery, and the improvements on such lands as specified in Schedules "B," "C," and "D," and that the loan applied for is required only for the purpose stated herein, and that to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, the encumbrances, debts, and dealings hereinafter specified are the only encumbrances, debts, and dealings affecting any of the said lands, stock, plant, and machinery, and I also solemnly declare and affirm that the several answers to the questions and statements made herein are true and correct in every particular.

I undertake to expend the amount loaned solely for the purpose stated.

And I make this solemn Declaration as to the matters aforesaid according to law in this behalf made, and subject to the punishment by law provided for any wilfully false statement in any such Declaration.

(Signature of Declarant) J. H. W×××××

Made before me at St. John's this 12th day of October 1915.
11th October,

LOANS.

Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 7th instant enclosing application by G. WENHAM for an advance under the R.S.S. Act.

It would be appreciated if your Committee could furnish a report on this application in terms of the attached circular.

Stamped addressed envelope is enclosed for your reply.

Applicant's Military Discharge Certificate, which has been noted, is returned herewith.

Yours faithfully,

A.A. WATSON
Director of Soldiers' Settlemenets

For,

Hon. Secretary,
Patrick Flann Repatriation Committee,
SHEPPERTON.
State Records, on behalf of the State of New South Wales grants Michael Wenham a non-exclusive licence to use the following materials sourced from the State archives on the following terms:

**MATERIALS:**
State Records NSW: NRS 8058, Returned Soldiers' Settlement loan files. George Wenham, File 8186,[12/7291].

**PERMITTED USE:**
To be used in your thesis, *In Search of George Wenham: an Aboriginal Anzac and the History of Denial*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAMC</td>
<td>Australian Army Medical Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIATSS</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIF</td>
<td>Australian Imperial Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFA</td>
<td>Australian Field Ambulance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALH</td>
<td>Australian Light Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALROC</td>
<td>Australian Light Rail Operating Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTM</td>
<td>Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN &amp; MEF</td>
<td>Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZAC</td>
<td>Australian and New Zealand Army Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Australian Provost Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWL</td>
<td>Absent without leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWOL</td>
<td>Absent without leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWM</td>
<td>Australian War Memorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEF</td>
<td>British Expeditionary Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bn</td>
<td>Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capt</td>
<td>Captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>Commander of the Order of the Bath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS</td>
<td>Casualty Clearing Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C de G</td>
<td>Croix de Guerre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cm</td>
<td>centimetres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMG</td>
<td>Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c/o</td>
<td>care of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coy</td>
<td>Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coys</td>
<td>Companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cpl</td>
<td>Corporal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>Colonial Sugar Refineries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Communication trench</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Divisional Ammunition Column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>Division Artillery Train</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCM</td>
<td>Distinguished Conduct Medal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC-M</td>
<td>District Court-Martial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMTMC</td>
<td>Division Medium Trench Mortar Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Died of disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOW</td>
<td>Died of wounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO</td>
<td>Distinguished Service Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvr</td>
<td>Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEF</td>
<td>Egypt Expeditionary Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAB</td>
<td>Field Artillery Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSR</td>
<td>General Service Regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HM</td>
<td>His Majesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMAS</td>
<td>His Majesty’s Australian Ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREOC</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vic - Victoria

WA – Western Australia

WOAS – While on active service