NOT JUST A NOSTALGIC FAREWELL: *THE "DERNIÈRE HEURE"* AS A LANDMARK DOCUMENT IN FRANCO-AUSTRALIAN FRIENDSHIP

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Introduction

This article argues that the tale of *The "Dernière Heure"*[1] contains, in metonymic form, many aspects of the complex story of the disengagement of Australian forces from the First World War. The 'last hour' of the title comes to embrace much of that prolonged period between the Armistice on 11 November 1918 and the soldiers' final homecoming. As we know, the plan of 'first to come, first to go' to deal with the problems of repatriating so many tens of thousands of surviving troops with a limited number of ships and a delicate economy at home meant that some had to wait for many months before their turn came (see e.g. Fitzhardinge 1979, 351–353). The magazine bears witness that for many of these men, that time of waiting brought sobering assessment of the war's costs; more positively, it marks the awareness that a deepening friendship had been born between Australia and France.

The cover of *The "Dernière Heure"* (Taylor and Leyshon White, 1919) is arresting, most immediately through its portrayal of the neckless head of a madly grinning digger, but also because of its bilingual title. What sort of publication is it? It is a stand-alone magazine or booklet of some 60 pages produced in early 1919 by the Australian Section of the Third Echelon of

[1] J. R. W. Taylor and Cyril Leyshon White (eds), 1919, *The "Dernière Heure"*, Rouen, L. Wolf.

the British General Headquarters in Rouen.[2] David Kent has identified more than 250 such publications, listing *The "Dernière Heure"* in his 'souvenir' category (Kent 1999, 210–216), without discussing its content. *The "Dernière Heure"* does not follow the criteria Kent sets out for most Australian troop publications: '[…] first and foremost intended to amuse the men in a closed community; […] in every case the publications were introspective and reflective' (Kent 1999, 8).

While it does have elements of a unit-based journal, the outlook and scope of *The "Dernière Heure"* are more akin to *The Anzac Book* (Bean 1916) and *From the Australian Front* (1917), which were both, to quote General Birdwood's introduction to the latter, intended 'to convey to those whom we left behind in Australia, and who we know are thinking of us, some idea of our surroundings on the battle fronts of the Australians'.[3] In *The "Dernière Heure"* composed in the months following the 11 November 1918 Armistice, the messages are no longer about battlefronts. However, the quest for a broad audience is undeniable—not just an Australian one, moreover, but one that included the French people among whom the Australian soldiers had been living for the previous three years.

It has not so far been possible to unearth any archival material relating directly to the conception, production or dissemination of the booklet.[4] Fortunately, there have been a number of alternative research pathways, in addition to internal evidence from *The "Dernière Heure"* itself, that offer a

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[2] Some of the contributions are dated. The latest message is from Joseph Cook, Minister for the Australian Navy, on 20 March 1919—which means that the booklet appeared after that.

[3] *The Anzac Book* runs to 170 pages, and contains a great variety of prose, poetry, photographs, drawings and cartoons; *From the Australian Front* is a little over 100 pages, and is almost entirely made up of illustrative material.

[4] This does not mean that such material may not be found in the future. The trouble lies in the largely undocumented, but severely culled, archives of the Australian Records Section of the 3rd Echelon of the General Headquarters. Stored, mostly unsorted, under the Series AWM23, these archives have an index (AWM24), but as a note on AWM 24 indicates, further research needs to be done at the curatorial level before the validity of the index or the content of the archives can be accurately determined.
See http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/SeriesDetail.aspx?series_no=AWM24&singleRecord=T, accessed 11 May 2015.

good understanding of how the booklet came into being, and of the context in which that took place. What emerges is that *The"Dernière Heure",* while certainly the moving farewell to France that its creators intended, also opens onto other dimensions.

The analysis of the booklet itself is in three parts: the first deals with the question of genre, the second with the textual material, the third with the illustrations. The analysis is preceded by two short sections which set the creation of the booklet into its historical context, and is followed by a concluding argument as to why *The"Dernière Heure"* merits continuing attention in the history of Australian-French relations. A final coda will provide a brief summary of the postwar lives of the main protagonists.

The 1st Australian General Hospital and *The Jackass*

Understanding the genesis of *The"Dernière Heure"* requires elucidation of certain facets of the historical context. The first of these concerns the 1st Australian General Hospital in Rouen and its journal *The Jackass*.

At noon on Monday 11 November 1918, Colonel J. A. Dick, commanding officer of the hospital in Rouen, took up his pencil to scribble an excited note in the regimental diary. The Armistice was announced, and there was 'great rejoicing at the various camps, hospitals, and in the city of Rouen'.[5] The following Sunday, Colonel Dick took his place among the honoured invitees at the *Te Deum* mass celebrated in Rouen's Cathedral by the Archibishop, Mgr Louis-Ernest Dubois. During the week, he had been able to learn something of the terms of the Armistice, and was thus able to join fully in the thanks being offered for the victorious end of the most terrible of wars.

With the end of hostilities came the order, on 28 November 1918, for the removal of the 1st AGH (Australian General Hospital) to Sutton Veney in England.[6] No further patients were to be received, and existing ones were to be transferred to other medical facilities. Described as urgent, the shifting of the hospital and its staff nevertheless took more than five weeks, being completed on 9 January 1919. This was partly because of the size of the

[5] AWM4 (Australian War Memorial) 26/65/32 November 1918.

[6] Unless indicated otherwise, the information for this section has been derived from the 1st AGH Unit Diaries (see note 5).

operation. The 1st AGH had arrived from Cairo in Rouen in 1916, and had grown in proportion to the needs for catering for the casualties of the Western Front. Occupying one end of the Rouen horse-racing track, and composed of huts, tents and marquees, by November 1918 it had a capacity of over 1,000 beds, with 23 medical officers, 75 nurses, and 250 other ranks. Over its three years in Rouen, more than 90,000 patients were treated (Barker 1994, 104).

In his notes for October 1918, Colonel Dick reserves a place for the Regimental Magazine, *The Jackass*:[7]

> The Committee of the Regimental Magazine is about to bring out a Christmas Number of "The Jackass", and it is likely that this Christmas issue may be the last. On account of many old members having left the unit, there are difficulties in producing a Monthly Magazine regularly. The Magazine has been productive of a great amount of unit spirit.

The magazine ran from June 1918 until December 1918, with six numbers in all, November being cancelled for the production of a bumper Christmas issue. It offers extensive information not only about hospital life, but about many aspects of soldiers' experiences, including their perceptions of France during leave, and their clear adoption of a strongly developed sense of a specific Australian identity.[8] While *The Jackass* is not our major focus here, it is no accident that this unit journal, in its scope, ambition and quality of presentation, has much in common with *The "Dernière Heure"*: the former, while concentrating much more on its specific unit than the latter, also escapes the 'introspective' characteristics noted by Kent, a fact that is less surprising when we consider that both operations had the same literary and artistic editors, and both were produced by the same French printer. Because of this, any in-depth analysis of *The "Dernière Heure"* cannot avoid *The Jackass* as a point of reference.

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[7] *The Jackass* can be viewed on-line at the State Library of New South Wales: http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/album/albumView.aspx?itemID=1184382&acmsid=0, accessed 11 May 2015.

[8] See for example Leslie Picken's article on 'Australianism' in the July 1918 issue (n° 2, p. 6).

James R. W. Taylor (from Brisbane) and Cyril Leyshon White (from Melbourne) comprised the core team behind both *The Jackass* and *The "Dernière Heure"*, and it will be helpful at this point to provide something of their background. Taylor had joined the Medical Corps in July 1915, arriving in France from Alexandria in April 1916 as part of the transfer of the 1st Australian General Hospital to Rouen.[9] He served as an orderly in that unit until its removal to England in December 1918. Leyshon White, for his part, had been at Gallipoli as a field ambulance man, and had been decorated with the Military Medal for bravery. He joined the staff of the 1st AGH in early January 1918, and like Taylor, remained there until December 1918. On enlistment, Taylor had given his profession as 'reporter'; White described himself as an 'art teacher'. One can imagine that their meeting, presumably at the hospital, would have been a mutually stimulating one. It is not unlikely that White, three years older, and with considerable experience both of war and of art—he had contributed to Bean's *Anzac Book* (1916) and produced a series of greetings cards[10]—was the driving force in the partnership they formed, although there is no doubt that Taylor, the son of Richard Sanderson Taylor, a senior journalist at the Brisbane *Courier* (Editor from 1919), was a talented and fluent writer.[11] He was in the second year of his cadetship at the *Courier* when he enlisted.[12] The editorial of the first number of *The Jackass* strongly suggests that it was the initiative, energy and determination of this pair that brought the magazine into being:

> There was never any reason why N° 1 A. G. H. as a unit should not have boasted a journal to its credit. An excuse did not even exist which could justify the silence of the literary element on the staff. […] Therefore a little company of enthusiasts met and decided to do their utmost in overcoming the difficulties

[9] Details about Taylor and White are derived from their official service records, unless otherwise indicated, (NAA B2455 1672; and NAA B884 V4797).

[10] Samples of these are held by the State Library of Victoria: see especially images H99.166/136 and H99. 166/137.

[11] See *The Argus*, 7 June 1932, p. 6.

[12] See *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1951, p. 4.

> associated in publishing even the most modest type of organ […]. We are grateful to the Commanding Officer for his support. (p. 2)

It seems reasonable to interpret the silent 'literary element' as referring to Taylor, and to credit White with the seminal enthusiasm; the allusion to the C. O.'s support confirms that the initiative came from below, rather than being a top-down decision. In any case, by the time the special Christmas number of *The Jackass* appeared in December 1918, Taylor and White were well versed in all aspects of journal production. Taylor, in addition to overseeing the collation and presentation of the written material, wrote many pieces himself; White created layout and design as well as producing dozens of illustrations ranging from the comic and caricatural to the more sober or reflective. Furthermore, they had mastered the complexities of the material side of production, a matter to which Taylor drew explicit attention in the October issue (n° 5, p. 3), when in noting that each number required an 8-week process, he stressed the particular difficulties arising from dealing with printers who knew no English.

The move to the 3rd Echelon GHQ

Another element of the historical context element concerns the Australian section of the 3rd Echelon of the British General Headquarters in Rouen. The essential role of this section was to keep accurate records of the movements and situations of individual soldiers. Now, throughout 1917 and 1918, there had been mounting pressure for certain units to amalgamate, in the interests of what was purported to be better management and the avoidance of duplication. One proposal was for the Australian Section of the 3rd Echelon to be subsumed into the British war records office in London.[13] The Australian Government, while not rejecting the proposal outright, insisted on detailed discussions, a position which can be seen as part of the more general trend of Australia's assertion of increasing autonomy as the war progressed. The heavy engagement of Australian troops in the spring and summer battles of

[13] The account that follows is based on documentation held at the Australian War Memorial: notably in AWM 224 MSS605, which documents the history of this very bureaucratic process.

1918 further delayed implementation of the plans. However, in October 1918, it was agreed that the major part of the section (some 250 personnel) would be moved to London on 12 November, leaving a rump of around 50 staff in Rouen to carry out a limited number of specific tasks.

Luckily, *The "Dernière Heure"*, in one of its unit-specific contributions, provides a list of the soldiers who were part of the so-called 'New Section' when it was formed on 13 November, together with lists of those who were subsequently sent home to Australia or elsewhere, those who died, and those who were brought in to replace the ones who left (pp. 48–49). It is in this last list that we find the names of Taylor and White, who transferred to their new unit in December 1918. They were not the only ones to cross over from the 1st AGH before it went to Sutton Veney: the service records of at least eight others reveal the same shift.[14] In the absence of archival proof, we can only speculate about whether the process was voluntary or mandated, but we can be confident that, in the case of Taylor and White, the opportunity to remain in France would have been welcome. We shall see that Taylor's love of France was intense, and we know that White had applied, under the Army Education policy, to study at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, a goal he later achieved.[15]

The "Dernière Heure" I: the question of genre

As has already been mentioned, *The "Dernière Heure"* is difficult to classify. It shows certain characteristics of the unit journal as described by Kent. For example, in addition to the lists of Australian Section 3rd Echelon personnel (pp. 48–49), there is a photograph of the group (p. 25); most of the contributions come from present or former members of the unit; many of the short anecdotes and jokes are typical of unit publications; an entertainment piece on billiards (pp. 32–33) is a thinly-disguised comical portrait gallery of many of the staff; and several pieces deal with the city of Rouen, where the unit was situated. There are also satirical comments about the bureaucratic nature of

[14] They were: A. Duncan, A. A. Porter, R. Lambert, W. J. Moloney, T. E. Marchant, V. J. Shepherd, L. Sinclair and V. E. Taylor.

[15] See *History of the Department of Repatriation and Demobilisation*, AWM 243/804, p. 23 and throughout. I am grateful to Pauline Georgelin for drawing my attention to this document.

the demobilisation process (e.g. pp. 45–46) and greetings photographs from Australian female troop-entertainers (pp. 39, 41). This in-turned tendency is however more than counterbalanced by a very clear editorial intention to open the scope as widely as possible. One reason for this was that there were so many thousands of troops awaiting repatriation, for whom the magazine would furnish material for entertainment and reflection. It includes messages from an impressive range of major figures that feature in its early pages: Marshall Foch, General Birdwood, Prime Minister Hughes, General Monash, Sir Joseph Cook, Lieutenant General C. B. B. White. While it was common enough practice for such leaders to support local newspapers, to get so many of them together is unusual. Just how Taylor and White managed to obtain these messages remains unknown, but the one from Foch (p. 4),[16] forwarded by his chief-of-staff, makes it clear that the request came from Staff-Sergeant Lindsay Millard (given on p. 56 as the 'President' of the magazine's organising committee).[17] Of course, the editors were fortunate that Hughes and Cook were in Paris at the time for the Versailles Peace Conference (Fitzhardinge 1979, 350 ff). Birdwood's foreword marks a transparent link to the two previous AIF-wide publications, for which he also wrote the introductions (*The Anzac Book* and *From the Australian Front*): although he used the occasion to praise the work of 'hidden' parts of the army's undertakings—such as the 3rd Echelon—he supported the publication's ambition to be of value 'not only to the men of the Australian Section 3rd Echelon, but to the whole AIF' (p. 5).

That ambition is manifest in quite specific ways. Taylor has, for example, a piece on the Australian YMCA and the many programmes (concerts, cinema shows, lectures, whist drives) mounted throughout the war 'to occupy the minds of those who were only too apt to be melancholy or morose' (p. 51); and there is coverage of a number of military units whose importance may not have been obvious to the troops at large, such as the bakeries, for instance (also in Rouen), the Australian Electrical Mechanical Mining and

[16] Foch's text is the only one not specifically written for the occasion. See below.

[17] Millard's service record shows that, like Taylor, he declared himself to be a 'reporter' at the time of his enlistment. Earlier in his service, he had been arrested for being absent without leave and for bigamy. He certainly did not lack chutzpah (AWM B2455 6308).

Boring Company, the Third Casualty Clearing Station in Germany, or the Australian Veterinary Hospital in Calais (pp. 51–53).[18]

The "Dernière Heure" is thus a hybrid magazine. It is made even more so by its most defining characteristic: the considerable use of the French language and the expression of marked francophilia in so many of its pieces. This will be examined further below, but the degree of bilingualism is a unique[19] generic quality that requires noting here. It suggests that the editors were, at least in a symbolic way, offering their work to a French readership; and they were certainly, as far as their AIF readership was concerned, asserting the presence of the French culture and language as a factor in the Australians' repatriation process. The determination to make it a part of the series that began with *The Anzac Book* also invites an historical perspective that gives particular emphasis to the Western Front, as distinct from the war's beginning at Gallipoli.

The "Dernière Heure" II: the texts

Putting to one side the many jokes and anecdotes that punctuate the booklet,[20] this analysis concentrates on three categories of text: the messages from important military and political figures, examples of Australian francophilia, and the French language contributions.

Marshall Foch's text salutes the 'magnificent dash' of the 'incomparable' Australian soldiers who, 'by their initiative, their fighting spirit, their magnificent ardour […] proved themselves to be shock troops of the first order' who will leave the French with an 'undying memory'.[21] In stressing the quality of the Australian soldiers' contribution to the allied cause, Foch also treats them as a separate entity, distinguishing them from their British,

[18] The first three of these units would appear to have remained somewhat neglected by historians.

[19] A precedent had been set in the special Christmas number of *The Jackass* (p. 3), which published a five stanza poem in French (with English translation) entitled 'Australia', by Madame Georgy Pilar. See below.

[20] Such features are common to most troop journals, and are therefore of less interest to our investigation of the unusual characteristics of *The "Dernière Heure"*.

[21] P. 4, translation, probably by Taylor.

American and French comrades. This recognition of Australianness is one of the themes of *The"Dernière Heure"*, which is convergent with the many post-1917 journals that, as Kent points out, became vehicles of Australian specificity and even chauvinism (1999, 118 ff). That the recognition should come from the French commander-in-chief of the Allied Armies, however, can be considered significant, at least from an Australian perspective.[22]

Unsurprisingly, the same nationalist theme underpins Birdwood's message (p. 5) and that of his Chief of Staff C. B. B. White (p. 24). Nationalism surges up particularly strongly in the text sent by Monash (p. 10), who writes: 'Australia has achieved, by her record, an exalted nationhood, and an enhanced confidence in herself and her people.' The confidence evoked by Monash is resoundingly echoed in the Prime Minister's words:

> Australian troops go home with the consciousness of a great task nobly done. They have done nobly for the world and nobly for Australia. In competition with the fighting men of nearly all nations, they have excelled. Inspired by the great ideal of freedom, they have won for the Australian arms renown of a lustre not surpassed by the fighting men of any nation in any age. (p. 7)

There is no doubt that Hughes believed passionately that, through its war effort, Australia had earned the right to stand up henceforth as a nation among nations: this had been his position at the Paris Economic Conference in 1916 (Fitzhardinge 1979, 121 ff) and he would maintain it during the Peace Conference in 1919 (Fitzhardinge 1979, 342 ff). In his message, Hughes

[22] It is unlikely that Australian soldiers would have been aware of Foch's tendency to describe all foreign military units whom he visited in similarly laudatory terms. See for example Romain Fathi, *'Do Not Forget Australia'. Australian War Memorialisation at Villers-Bretonneux*, PhD thesis, Sciences-Po/ The University of Queensland, 2015, p. 65 (on Foch's comments on American, Canadian and Irish troops), and Commonwealth War Graves Archives (Maidenhead) WG 861/2/3/11 Box 1063 on Foch's speech at the opening of India's Neuve Chapelle Memorial in France. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing this point to my attention, and for providing the references.

extends his claim of nationalism to include the cultural work of such papers as *The "Dernière Heure"*:

> […] they have reflected as perhaps no other literary and artistic work during the War has done, the brimming spirits and distinctive humour of our men. They will be a valuable contribution, not only to the historical records of the war, but to Australian literature as a whole. (p. 7)

It is to be hoped that the contributors to *The"Dernière Heure"* would not have taken this prophecy seriously: nothing in the booklet is worthy of lasting literary appreciation.

What the diggers would have remarked upon in Hughes' message was his promise that they would be well looked after upon their return to Australia—that every man would get a 'prompt, business-like and generous deal'. While this did not always happen, a great many soldiers believed that Hughes wanted it and tried to make it happen: there is moreover a good deal of evidence to support this view, even late in Hughes' political career, when he fought successfully for extended pension rights for returned soldiers (Fitzhardinge 1979, 628 ff).

Compared to Hughes' stirring comments, those of Joseph Cook's quotation of 'the language of Shakespeare' —'Thanks, and thanks and again thanks' (p. 12)—seem rather trite, although he does note that the 'intrepidity and chivalry of the Australian soldiers' allows the nation to hold its 'head high' at the Peace Conference.

If these formal statements of support emphasise the specificity of the Australian soldiers and their achievements in forging a stronger sense of nationhood, a great many of the other contributions stress the links that have been created between those soldiers and France. There are, for example, five poems by 'H. T.' (unidentifiable, though perhaps Sgt. J. H. Taylor), all of which are driven by nostalgic attachment to Rouen or France (pp. 11, 12, 33, 36, 47). The conclusion of his 'Goodbye, dear land' is typical: 'The span of wistful remembrance/Forever joins my soul to France.' Sergeant Leslie Picken's 'Our Legacy of Sweet Memories' (p. 8) looks to a future in which the deeper meaning of the French sojourn will be revealed through reflection; this recalls the view he had expressed even more strongly in his article for

The Jackass (n° 2, p. 6), where he explicitly links the 'sudden awakening to a new national ideal' to the soldiers' experiences in France:

> It is not necessary for a man to be permeated with French literature or even to know the language to be imbued with the French spirit. What I mean by the French spirit is this wonderful intangible spirit that has, ever through crises in her history, enabled her to strive and to fight a way through to the realisation of her true destiny. France is the cradle of our modern civilisation; the creator of our destiny.

The longest piece in the booklet is 'Lourdes: the City of Miracles' (pp. 18–22), by the C. O. of the unit, Major J. W. Donnelly. Half touristic, half the account of a slightly sceptical believer (Donnelly's service record lists him as 'R. C.'), while it does not contain any overt praise of France, the essay is infused with the sense that France's deep spiritual roots are still capable of generating restorative powers. By far the most francophilic texts, however, are those penned by James Taylor himself. Two in particular command attention. The first is a short essay entitled 'France has Attracted Australia by her Glorious Spirit' (p. 16). Here is a sample of the tone:

> What can explain that love for France which fills the heart of the average Australian? Is it the fact that he is merely fascinated by the natural loveliness of the most beautiful country in the world? Is it because he has helped defend her village and homes? Or is it because so many mates must lie forever under the shadow and protection of the tri-colour? No, it is scarcely an affection springing from such sources. It is more spontaneous, more natural, perhaps. One would say, rather, that it was the direct result of an intense admiration for a people who have endured the cruellest suffering imaginable with a fortitude of iron.

Taylor's second text is the one that concludes the booklet (p. 56). Written in French under the title 'Nos adieux à Rouen' (Our Farewell to Rouen), it is

Taylor's attempt to express the fullness of the Australians' sentiment to the French people who for over three years had been their hosts:

> Oh, Rouen, the children of Australia who have stayed within your walls will never forget you. Between you and them have been created links that time will only strengthen, because you have taught them to love sweet France.
>
> Oh, France, may the blood that we have shed for you serve to make you greater and make you more beautiful. That is the wish that we all make and which we ask the Most High to grant, not tomorrow, but today![23]

How widely was such fervour shared? Such francophilic discourse is not so far removed from that of the Premier of New South Wales, William Holman (see Brown and Dwyer 2014, 28), or indeed that of Prime Minister Hughes himself, who, when he visited Amiens in 1921, declared that without France, a nation defined by its artistic, scientific and literary grandeur as much as by its military exploits, civilisation would have been 'groping in the dark'.[24]

There is really only one piece, in the whole of *The "Dernière Heure"*, that might be considered as moderating this tide of francophilia, and that is a purported translation of a leading article from the Rouen *White Star*. It is in fact a gentle satire (written by 'Mill', most probably Sgt Millard) about the relief of the French population now that the Australians are leaving:

> In November, a large number of Australians left by boat from Rouen, receiving an enthusiastic farewell, we were so pleased to get rid of them. Many of the bakers have left, and more are leaving in the near future, while the 1st A. G. H. has ceased to exist in this city. The remnant of the 3rd Echelon, a hardened band

[23] Author's translation.
O, Rouen, les enfants d'Australie qui ont séjourné dans tes murs ne t'oublieront jamais. Il s'est créé entre toi et eux des liens que le temps ne pourra que resserrer, car tu leur as fait aimer la douce France.
O, France, puisse le sang que nous avons versé pour toi servir à te faire plus grande et te faire plus belle. C'est le vœu que nous formons tous et que nous demandons au Très Haut de réaliser non pas demain, mais aujourd'hui!

[24] *The Brisbane Courier*, 27 August 1921, p. 5.

> of sinners, is located beyond the Gare du Nord and all citizens should avoid that quarter of the City if possible. Remember that the more innocent they look, the more they are to be dreaded. (p. 26)

But such self-ironising hardly amounts to criticism of the French. Indeed, it could be read as praise of the French for their patience in bearing with the uncouth Australians for so long. Overwhelmingly, the thrust of the magazine is admiration and love of France and the French, and nostalgia about leaving. Projections about going home to Australia are rarely unmixed with regrets about leaving France. That is the case with 'RIC TOC's' poem 'Expectation':

> I've seen Nice. I've been at Monte,
> And in hectic Gay Paree;
> But my thoughts are always roaming
> Back to where I'll soon be homing.
> Yes, my thoughts turn back to Sydney
> Where she sparkles by the sea. (p. 34)

Much more often, thoughts of home are combined with the feeling that something of importance has been revealed to Australian soldiers during their time in France, and that the memory will henceforth be part of their lives. Kendall's poem, 'Sighs from London', is typical:

> We blamed your faults,
> There was sometimes tension;
> You got our money by easy arts.
> But we paid no price for your comprehension,
> And, old Rouen, you have kept our hearts. (p. 50)

Of the six pieces written in French, half were translated into English. 'M. H.' (perhaps M. H. Gibbs) provided a poem in both languages ('Le Chagrin d'amour', p. 53), a clever exercise in style that suggests a quite sophisticated knowledge of French. Translations are also given for the Foch message and for an acrostic, entitled 'Remember' written on the name AUSSIE by 'Une

Française' (French p. 25, English p. 27).[25] Left untranslated were Taylor's final adieu, and two other pieces by French authors. The first of these is a quatrain by the poet Henri de Régnier. Editor Taylor's statement that 'translation is, at best, almost invariably ineffectual and unjust' may be a kind effort to mask the fact that the poem reads today as embarrassingly banal and contrived; but one could hardly omit the contribution of a famous member of the Académie française, and the quatrain does register a distinctive friendship between France and Australia.

> Salut, soldats de France, et soldats d'Australie!
> Par le lien de gloire à jamais qui vous lie,
> D'un pas victorieux vous irez vers demain,
> Cœur à cœur, côte à côte, et la main dans la main.[26] (p. 17)

The other untranslated text, 'Au Pays du Soleil', is a charming, if sentimental, farewell scene set on the Côte d'Azur, in which a group of Australian soldiers, about to return home, interact with the admiring French locals, and receive as a parting gift a bouquet of golden wattle, a token of France's gratitude (p. 30). The author is Madame Georgy Pilar (whom we will recall from her participation in *The Jackass*).[27] The inclusion of her work is the strongest sign

[25] Aux terribles jours de bataille
Un grand soldat fut notre ami.
Sous le feu bravant la mitraille
Sans trembler, face à l'ennemi,
Il resta… sanglant et muraille
Et la France lui dit : Merci!

[26] Hail, soldiers of France, and soldiers of Australia!
By the link of glory which forever binds you,
With victorious step, you will march towards the future,
Heart to heart, side by side and hand in hand.

[27] Who was this mystery woman? According to the introductory note in *The Jackass*, it was through the C. O. (Colonel Dick) that she came into contact with the editors. She was a journalist, reporting on life at the front for a Paris newspaper. Presumably, she struck up a friendship with Taylor and White; she is almost certainly the 'French lady' who wrote the acrostic, and one wonders whether she might have cast a helpful eye on Taylor's French: it stretches credibility to think that its perfection could be the product of an Australian high school education, even

of the editorial determination to make *The "Dernière Heure"* an expression of an ongoing spirit of collaboration between the two nations and the two cultures.

One thing completely absent from *The "Dernière Heure"* is any trace of the oath that every Australian soldier had to swear when he volunteered: to 'well and truly serve our Sovereign Lord the King', and to 'resist His Majesty's enemies and cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and maintained'.[28] Instead of love of King or Empire, there is admiration for France—for the achievements of its civilisation, the courage of its troops, the forebearance of its civilian population—and, through the strong regret at leaving, the sense of a new friendship born of common sacrifice and suffering.

The "Dernière Heure" III: the illustrations

The visual material deployed through the booklet consists of photographs and drawings, all in black and white with the exception of the cover. Photographs (unattributed) are used in a mostly conventional and realist fashion: there are studio portraits of Birdwood, Hughes, Monash and Cook, and of the show girls Dorothy Brunton, Ivy Shilling and the Éclair Twins; there is a photo of the men of the unit (unfortunately without identification by name); and there are several shots of Lourdes (perhaps reproduced from postcards). More sombre are the photos accompanying Taylor's 'The mates we left behind' (p. 13) ('Corner of an Australian cemetery'), and the collage 'On the path of war'(p. 54) presented over the name of 'Bill Bailey', which details the ruins of several French villages.

There is greater generic variety in the drawings, which range from comical sketches and amusing illustrations of textual material to pictures that carry autonomous meaning. Leyshon White's own work ranges across all of these areas, but he also engaged the talents of a number of other artists: G. K. Townshend and L. G. Hitchcock, both of whom had moved to London in November 1918, and both of whom had identified themselves as artists at the time of their enlistment; L. G. Green was a 'master decorator' before signing up, and contributed ornamental lettering and designs for a number of pieces; Sgt A. J. B. Watts, a clerk, had no recorded training in drawing, but was given

taking into account his time in France.

[28] This oath was part of the standard enlistment form.

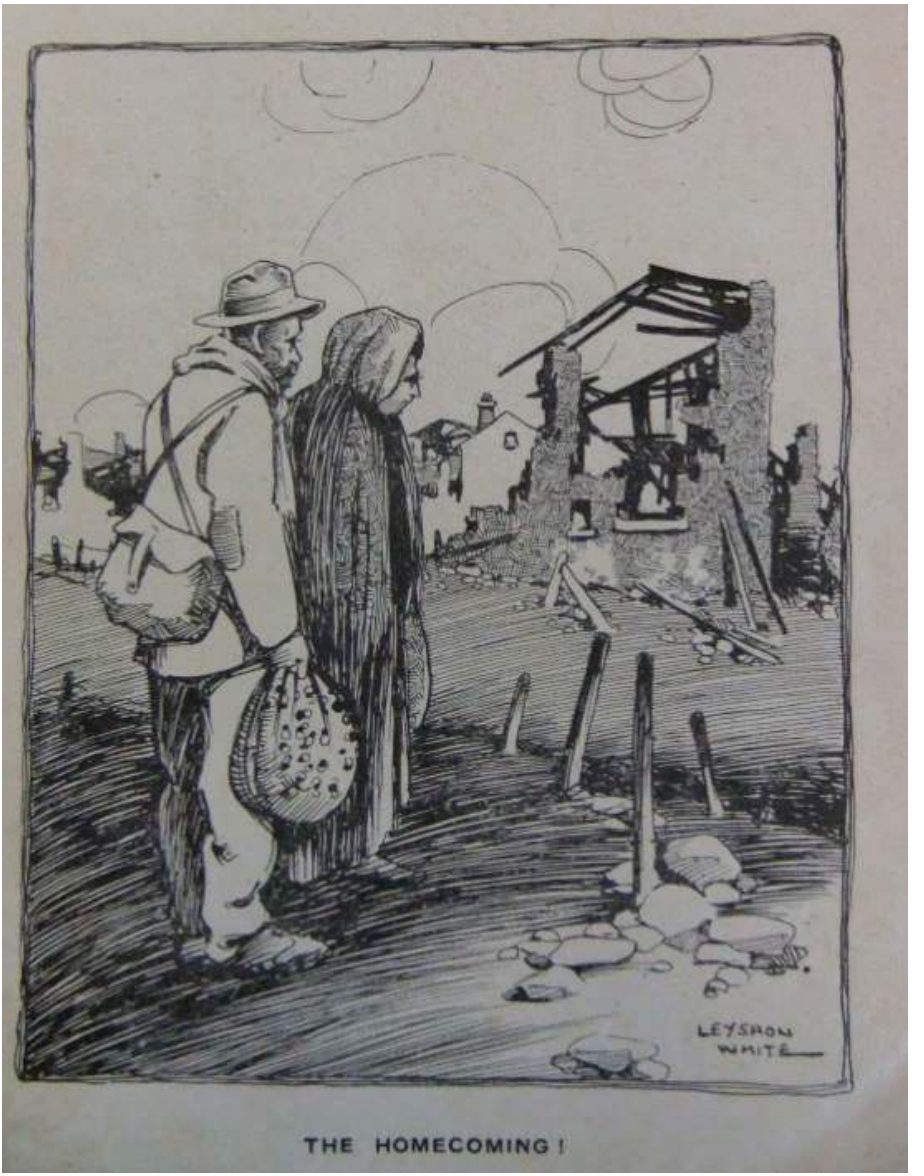
the opportunity to place six little caricatures as fillers (pp. 27, 35, 43, 44, 46, 49).

This spirit of inclusiveness notwithstanding, Leyshon White seems to have decided to demonstrate quite systematically the range of his own skills and vision of things, and in doing so, makes by far the strongest contribution to the overall impact of *The"Dernière Heure"*. White had published five drawings in *The Anzac Book*, and while they have not attracted the same attention as those of Will Dyson, Daryl Lindsay, Frank Crozier or others from the 'official war artists' list,[29] they are evidence of originality and experience well beyond most of the artwork in that book or in *From the Australian Front*. In *The "Dernière Heure"*, there are fourteen White works, and while not all could claim to represent an artistic statement, the subject matter and positioning of a number of them are integral to our appreciation of the import of the journal as a whole.

The most obvious of these is the cover. At first glance, the image seems to express glee at the idea of homecoming, together with a tinge of larrikinism. However, White had used the open-mouthed grin motif before, and notably in his 1916 Christmas 'Greetings from France' cards, one of which portrays a heavily bandaged digger and carries the caption 'Blighty!'—indicating that the subject has been wounded badly enough to be sent away from the front to England.[30] The digger's grin has a subversive quality in the earlier versions, implying underlying bitterness or disillusionment or cynicism, and there may be something similar at work in *The"Dernière Heure"*, where the opening page, immediately after the cover, is a drawing of much darker mood. Entitled 'The Homecoming', this drawing (featured on the following page) depicts a French couple returning, their belongings in a single pitiful bundle in their hands, to a house reduced to rubble. The message is clear: the cost of the war is not to be forgotten; nor is the fact that for many French people, homecoming will not be what the front cover digger might have in mind. There is a similar juxtaposition at the end of the magazine: Taylor's adieu to France is lightened visually by the presence of a contented-looking Gumnut Baby figure, but the positive impression created by this Australian motif is undercut on the following page, where Old Father

[29] See Moore (1938) and McCulloch (1984).

[30] See State Library of Victoria, Image H99. 166/137. There is a further example in *The Jackass* nº 4, September 1918, p. 3.



Time, complete with scythe and a firmly stern look, is the closing image of the publication.

In between, White has included a classically realist drawing of Rouen (the Rue du Hallage, p. 6), which underscores the magazine's themes of respect for France's ancient culture and regret at leaving it. In the illustrations for Georgy Pilar's 'Au pays du soleil', there is both whimsy and delight in White's images of fashionably dressed young French women farewelling impeccably neat Australian soldiers against a background of seaside palm trees. But it is in the centre of the magazine, in a cartoon picture entitled 'Survival of the fittest', and in humorous mode, that White delivers his message about where the blame lies for all the suffering. Satan hands the power of hell to Kaiser Wilhelm with the comment: 'There's not room for two of us'. Twenty years later, a disconsolate Wilhelm sees that there is 'not an Aussie in sight'. Whether he was aware of it or not, the sentiments expressed here by White were very much those on which Prime Minister Hughes would base his demands for reparations in the Peace Talks that were beginning.

Conclusion

In recognising the hybrid generic nature of *The "Dernière Heure"*—part unit journal, part souvenir, part deliberate attempt to complement *The Anzac Book* and *From the Front*, part effort to document the growing relationship between Australian servicemen and their French hosts—this study has revealed some of the less well-known complexities of the period between the 11 November 1918 end of hostilities and the return home of Australia's fighting forces. We have seen that this little booklet is something of a privileged site, and that the story of its conception, production and content opens onto more significant matters: insight into the logistics of ending a terrible war, the expansion of an Australian national spirit and the development of Australian-French connections independently of Australia's place in the British Empire. With its multiple perspectives—political and military, high-ranking officers and ordinary enlisted men, Australian and French, verbal and visual—*The "Dernière Heure"* is a rare and potent document that takes us at one and the same time into the feelings and experiences of individuals and into the currents of history in the making. It deserves to be considered as a significant reference point in the longer term development of the relations between Australia and France.

The francophilia expressed in *The"Dernière Heure"* was not an isolated case.[31] The idea that France might provide inspiration and perhaps even a pathway to the development of greater autonomy, beyond the limits of the Empire, for Australia's participation in world affairs, was definitely in the air. It can be seen in the Australian request for the French Economic Mission in 1918, and in the appointment of Clive Voss as economic counsellor in Paris in 1919 (Schedvin 2008, pp. 12–24). Increased French interest in Australia is also evident at this time, and the discourse of the reports of the Economic Mission is proof that the interest was not just economic, but involved developing long-term friendship (e.g. *Mission Française* 1919, 155).[32]

The scope of the French connection at this point in Australia's history has been insufficiently acknowledged by historians. To determine why this is the case would require a separate and substantial study, but we hope that our exegesis of *The "Dernière Heure"* has made clear that commemoration of our Western Front soldiers, if it is to be faithful, must take into account that France was much more for them than just the place where so many thousands of them gave their lives.

Coda

As for many, the 'last hour' was a long one for James Taylor and Cyril Leyshon White, who finally sailed home to Australia in June and November 1919, respectively. Taylor, after serving some time under his father at the *Brisbane Courier*, joined the *Sydney Morning Herald*, where he became editor of the *Saturday Magazine*, and was later chief of the paper's London desk.[33] He never married, and 'died suddenly' in 1951 at the age of fifty-seven. Leyshon White married soon after his return to Australia, and founded a commercial art school in Melbourne. This seems to have been a very successful venture,

[31] Kent (1999) quotes a number of other cases of francophile sentiment (e.g. p. 39, p. 197), but a broader-based analysis of the materials in the trench, ship and unit journals would be a good way of testing the extent of the phenomenon.

[32] Interestingly, Taylor had noted and praised the goals of the French Mission when it was first announced in the Paris press, in *The Jackass*, 4, September 1918, p. 2. For more information on the Mission, see Jacqueline Dwyer's article in this issue.

[33] See *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1951, p. 4, and Souter 1981, p. 158.

at least initially. White re-enlisted during the Second World War (lowering his age in order to do so); perhaps he had fallen on hard times.[34] The biographies of both men, to date, are sketchy, and it would be good to know more about them. Clearly, both have a place in the history of the development of relations between Australian and French cultures.

It would be pertinent, too, to know more about the figure of Georgy Pilar. That she was an Australophile is evident from her contributions to *The "Dernière Heure"* and *The Jackass*. She in fact visited Australia after the war, travelling extensively through much of 1921, supposedly in the process of writing a novel and reporting on Australian life for French newspapers. Her visit was extensively covered by the Australian press, and she proved to be quite outspoken in her criticisms of work habits, the lack of male gallantry towards women, and what she saw as flaws in the local sense of fashion.[35]

Her evocation of the Australian contribution in France, however, is without reservation:

> Who could in France forget their generous impulse, forget the gallantry of the Anzacs? If you speak of them in any village of the Somme, in the remotest spot in Flanders, everybody will say: 'Les Australiens! Ah! Les braves soldats!' and they will add:—'Not only brave soldiers, but so kind to us all, and to think they were not obliged to come! Wonderful men!!' In fact, the Digger and the Poilu were great friends. I should say that something is alike in their ways of life—their independence, and above all, their love of freedom. (*Sydney Mail*, 19 October 1921, p. 22)[36]

[34] The State Library of Victoria holds a number of useful documents relating to White's school: e.g. on the Art School (Australian Gallery File) and the magazine he founded (*The Art Student*: AF 705 AR755).

[35] See for example, *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 9 August 1921, p. 39; *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 20 September 1921, p. 7; *Queensland Times*, 24 November 1921, p. 6.

[36] The *Sydney Mail* article includes a photograph of Georgy Pilar.

Whether she saw Jim Taylor or Cyril Leyshon White during her Australian stay remains unknown, but it is surely lives like theirs and hers, with their passions and hopes and direct experience, that make our historical understanding of our soldiers' last months of engagement in World War I more meaningful.

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