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## *World War I Special Issue*

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# THE FRENCH AUSTRALIAN REVIEW
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*The French Australian Review*, formerly *Explorations*, is the twice yearly journal of the Institute for the Study of French-Australian Relations (ISFAR), founded in 1985. Its peer-reviewed articles (a double blind peer refereeing process), and other texts, address French-Australian relations—historical and contemporary—across social, political, scientific and cultural subjects. Copies of most back issues are available for purchase. The journal index and on-line issues (all issues other than the last ten) can be consulted on the ISFAR website *www.isfar.org.au* by clicking on *Index* and *Archive*.

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# THE FRENCH AUSTRALIAN REVIEW

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French children tending graves at the
Adelaide Cemetery (Villers-Bretonneux)
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Courtesy Australian War Memorial
www.awm.gov.au/collection/E05925

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Elsa-Maude Kent in the Villers-Bretonneux cemetery
August 2011.

Courtesy Anne Brassart-Evans

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# FOREWORD

STUART MACINTYRE

'They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old.' The centenary of the Great War has already generated an upsurge of commemoration and interest far surpassing the remembrance of the survivors. An upsurge of interest among a generation too young to have direct memory of the events is now served by new memorials and rituals, new histories and sources of information.

The dawn service at Anzac Bay has now passed and attention turns in 2016 to the Western Front. Here Australian soldiers were caught up in a different kind of warfare, one conducted on a vastly greater scale with aircraft, gas, flame-throwers, great defensive entrenchments and a volume of artillery bombardments absent from the Gallipoli campaign. Unlike the baptism of fire in the failed attempt to invade Turkey, the Australians were now assisting in the defence of their allies, France and Belgium. It is therefore appropriate that a group of French specialists should join here with others sharing an interest in the Western Front to reflect on that encounter.

The collection includes accounts of some of the principal Australian engagements, at Fromelles and Villers-Bretonneux. Others take up family connections or relate their efforts to increase our knowledge and comprehension of this protracted ordeal. There is possibly a danger of overplaying the lack of appreciation of the Western Front. It was indisputably central to the vastly greater number of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) who fought there, and the families of those who died; its demands gave rise to the divisions over conscription and inscribed the sombre memory of the war. The Western Front dominates the list of Australian war novels presented at the end of this collection.

The attention given to the interaction between Australian troops and their French hosts is of special note. Several of the essays explore the ways that these young men, the great majority travelling beyond Australia for the first time, responded to the French countryside, towns and villages, their sympathy for the desolation the war caused and the hospitality they were accorded. Here again there is a risk of overplaying the amity, which is uppermost in diaries, letters and other sources. It is salutary to be reminded of the disturbances and bad behaviour of men on leave, the misunderstandings

and resentments. So too Anne Brassart-Evans, who has done so much to increase appreciation of the connection with Villers-Bretonneux, recalls how fragmentary the memory of the Australian war memorial was there in the 1950s, and the scepticism of the inhabitants when one Australian official after another arrived to announce yet another unfulfilled monumental plan.

Yet the evidence presented here attests to the level of mutual interest. Of particular interest is Colin Nettelbeck's use of a magazine, *The "Dernière Heure"*, produced by members of the AIF awaiting repatriation after the Armistice. Here we see an informed engagement with the people and culture of France, with a nostalgia that would be maintained by many following return. Similarly, Jacqueline Dwyer's account of the French Economic Mission to Australia at the end of the war speaks to this desire to consolidate links, just as the fund-raising to assist the reconstruction of Picardy attested to popular sympathy. It is striking, nevertheless, how that Mission failed to grasp that the war had hardened Australian attitudes and reduced its capacity to grasp new opportunities—though the truculence of Billy Hughes at the Paris Peace Conference made that clear.

The French connection revealed in this collection occurred in circumstances that were, by their martial nature, finite. It left lasting memories among those who experienced it, but little continuing engagement, and few Australians fought on French soil in the Second World War. It is only now, as France has joined Turkey as a place of pilgrimage, that significant numbers make a similar discovery.

*The University of Melbourne*

# INTRODUCTION

COLIN NETTELBECK

The centenary of the Great War has generated a large number of public commemorative activities in Australia, including a spate of new books, numerous conferences and exhibitions, a major renewal of presentations at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and the national project to create a new multi-million dollar information centre at Villers-Bretonneux in France. This surge of reflection reveals how present World War I remains in the Australian consciousness.

Widely acknowledged as foundational to Australia's nationhood, it is also to a considerable extent an unhealed wound in the collective psyche, for despite the stories of heroism and valour told and retold in the succession of a hundred Anzac Days, the horrors of the death and/or mutilation of so many tens of thousands of volunteers, mostly young men, and the sense of grief at their loss, have not faded with passing time. If anything, they have become more intense, and one of the reasons for this is that recent years have seen a shift, in the attention paid to the First World War, from an almost exclusive focus on Australia's eight-month engagement at Gallipoli in 1915, to a greater concentration on the three years spent in the bloody campaigns of Belgium and France.

*The French Australian Review*, in this special commemorative number, seeks to emphasise less the war experience itself than various ways in which the massive presence of Australians on French soil from 1916 to 1918 (and indeed often well into 1919) contributed to the development of the longer-term relationship between the two countries and peoples. Their status as allies was of course primary, but beyond the commitment to a common cause, more enduring links were created that in many cases remain pertinent today.

The articles and notes gathered here fall into three broad categories illustrating those links. The first concerns the building of a closer Australian-French relationship, and offers several different perspectives on the phenomenon. Leah Riches revisits Fromelles—the disastrous inaugural Australian engagement in France—in order to probe what she calls the 'shifting patterns' of Australia's war memory. Jacqueline Dwyer gives a detailed description and analysis of the large-scale, but little known, French Mission that visited Australia in 1918, planning for peace and the future while

the war in Europe was still going on. My piece examines the astonishing degree of francophilia displayed in a magazine produced by Australian soldiers in Rouen during the period of the long wait to return home after war's end. John Drury recounts the postwar adoption of the village of Dernancourt by Adelaide, and Anne Brassart-Evans offers an insider's reflection on the now well-established, but still very special relationship between the people of Villers-Bretonneux and Australia.

A second category shows how family history can not only lead to larger-scale historical exploration, but can also inflect previously existing narratives and understanding because of the unique perspective adopted. Three of our authors follow the stories of their grandfathers, uncovering along the way little known or forgotten facets of the war experience. Jane Gilmour uses the prism of a Queensland chaplain's diary to reconstruct elements of the Western Front experience. Pauline Georgelin's French-born forebear, who elected to serve in the AIF, leads her to an exploration of the times and places where Australian and French troops fought side by side and fraternised. Both she and Jillian Durance, whose bandsman grandfather developed friendships with French and Belgian civilians, remind us of the importance of the AIF Education Service in the period between the Armistice and the soldiers' return home.

The final category evokes the need and effort to express the experience and memory of the war through art. Leyshon White's drawing *The Homecoming* (p.72) is one example. Another is Andrew Plant's story of how his discovery of Villers-Bretonneux led him to create an illustrated children's book. Elaine Lewis, in her selected bibliography of novels and poems, reminds us of the existence and value of a substantial volume of work too often poorly known.

Many of the pieces presented here open up pathways to further research into Australian French relations. That kind of stimulation has always been a key aim of ISFAR, and while this special number of *The French Australian Review* has been consciously timed to coincide with the wider community's commemoration of the wrenching but formative Australian experience of the First World War, it is also part of the longer task of documenting and analysing the importance of the links between the two countries and their peoples.

*The University of Melbourne*

# ‘DE L’OMBRE À LA LUMIÈRE’[1] REMEMBERING FROMELLES THROUGH A CENTURY OF PRIVATE GRIEF AND PUBLIC POLITICS

LEAH RICHES

## Introduction

On 19 July 2010, in the small village of Fromelles, northern France, thousands of Australian, British, and French nationals witnessed the reburial of an unknown soldier of the First World War. He was the last of 250 Australian and British soldiers to be interred with full military honours following the excavation of mass graves in nearby Pheasant Wood in 2008.[2] Inside the newly created Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, descendants of the Fromelles soldiers read from the letters and diaries of their relatives, breathing life into their long dead sentiments and concerns about the war. In an adjoining field an overflow of thousands more viewed the event via television screens under a scorching sun. Millions more watched on as it was televised around the world.

Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) CWGC Military Cemetery (author’s collection)

Almost a century before, on the evening of 19 July 1916, soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) 5th Division, alongside members of

[1] From the shadows to the light. This is the inscription at the entrance of the Musée de la Bataille de Fromelles.

[2] 219 Australians from the 5th Division, AIF; 75 remain unidentified; 2 unidentified British soldiers and 29 entirely unidentified soldiers; Commonwealth War Graves Commission, ‘Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery’, http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/5001073/FROMELLES%20(PHEASANT%20WOOD)%20MILITARY%20CEMETERY, accessed 29 July 2015.

the British 61st South Midland Division, were ordered to attack the German stronghold known as the Sugar Loaf. The diversionary tactic was ordered by the British High Command to prevent German troops from moving southwards to engage in the main offensive taking place on the Somme. The attack was a complete failure. When the battle concluded the following morning, the Australians had suffered horrendously and gained little ground. The events of 19 and 20 July 1916 and the resulting 5,533 AIF casualties marked a disastrous introduction to fighting on the Western Front.[3]

Fromelles was the AIF's first major battle in France. Culturally it has been caught between the legend of Gallipoli and the slower-dawning horrors of the Western Front. As early as 1919 Fromelles had become marginal or even absent in the midst of more elaborate acts of remembering that took place in the aftermath of the First World War, with Gallipoli remaining the central focus of national remembrance. Until the discovery and excavation of the mass graves, this continued to be the case for Fromelles, missing from the national narrative of the war, despite its staggering costs. Yet for a century, those intimately affected by the battle of Fromelles and its memory, the returned servicemen and their families, continued to remember and commemorate spiritedly. These carriers of memory, from the time of the attack in 1916 onwards, represent a significant source of historical agency which to date has yet to be explored.

Much of the recent literature on Fromelles has preferenced battlefield analysis, alongside the discovery and recovery of the soldiers.[4] This article reorients the focus to those who sustained a memory of Fromelles in their private and public activities, from 1916 to the present. Who was remembering Fromelles, what was the nature of their remembrance and what were the significant trends in their commemoration? There are three distinct phases in the commemorative arc from 1916 to the present. First, remembrance was predominantly private and localised, driven by returned servicemen and families amidst anxious concerns that Fromelles was being forgotten. Second, a resurgence of interest in war memory, in conjunction with persistent familial remembrance, saw Fromelles enter a public commemoration phase from the

[3] Australian War Memorial, 'Australian Military Units: Battle of Fromelles', http://www.awm.gov.au/units/event_159.asp, accessed 3 July 2015.

[4] For an excellent overview of the battle see Corfield 2009. For details of the recovery process see Lindsay 2007, Lee 2010 and Summers (ed.) 2010.

1980s. Finally, extending this analysis beyond recovery of the Fromelles soldiers reveals a major reconnection between Fromelles and Anzac, as the battle has secured a place in the Anzac rhetoric and public discourse, no longer forgotten, but reconfigured as entirely consistent with the Anzac story.

**Familial Remembrance: 1916 onwards**

The story of Fromelles is one that has been shaped by those determined to remember at levels below the state—especially those with familial connections and returned servicemen. In the years immediately after the Battle of Fromelles bereaved families sought both private and public means to acknowledge their grief. On successive anniversaries of the battle Australian newspapers were filled with 'In Memoriam' columns. For many Australian families, as Pat Jalland (2006) and Bart Ziino (2007) have suggested, the ritual of placing such notices enabled mourners to begin to acknowledge the deaths, which at the same time publicly exposed the magnitude of private remembering. From 1917 onwards 'In Memoriam' columns in the metropolitan newspapers swelled on 19 and 20 July. On the first anniversary of Fromelles, Melbourne's *Argus* (19 July 1917) printed four columns on the front page; two years later the notices extended to five columns in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (19 July 1919), while in 1920 Adelaide's *Advertiser* (19 July) ran four columns of notices. Although these notices expressed individual remembrance, they also exposed what Jay Winter (1995, 29) refers to as 'communities in mourning'.

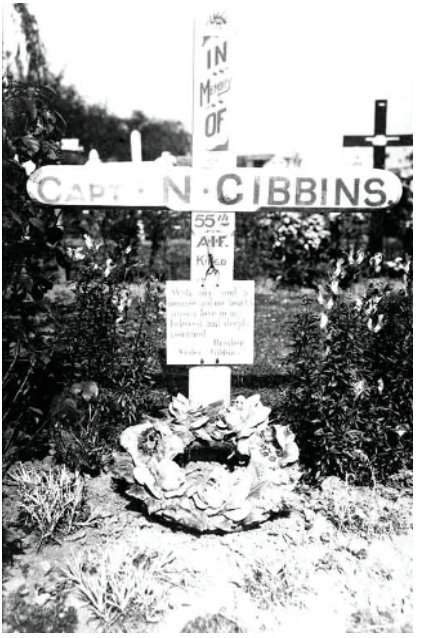
The persistent nature of remembering remained largely with the families of Fromelles soldiers for decades. One such example is poignantly articulated by the family of Private Joseph Hart, a twenty-year-old jeweller from Sydney. Hart joined the AIF as a signaller and arrived in France in June 1916, having spent the previous months training in Egypt. The following month, almost a year after his enlistment, Joseph suffered a fatal head wound at Fromelles; his body lay caught between the Allied and German front lines.[5] Joseph was one of the 1,917 men killed in action at Fromelles. His parents, Victor and Rae, bore their loss for decades. Each anniversary, 'In Memoriam' notices expressed the simplicity of familial remembrance: 'in loving memory of our dear son, grandson and brother'.[6] Over the years the sentiment

[5] Private Joseph Hart, Red Cross Wounded and Missing files, 1DRL/0428.

[6] In Memoriam: Hart, Joseph, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 July 1919, p. 9.

remained unchanged, yet those remembering would fade with the passing of time, until only his elderly sisters remained. With minimal absences his family honoured his memory in this way until 1983.

Violet Gibbins placed 'In Memoriam' notices in honour of her brother, Captain Norman Gibbins, but she also sought to honour his memory by more public means. As principal at the Osborne Ladies' College, Blackheath, New South Wales, Gibbins initiated a tree-planting memorial, a distinctly Australian initiative, on 20 July 1925 to commemorate her brother. Students planted twenty-five trees to honour her brother and pay tribute to the men of the 55th Battalion and others who had died at Fromelles.[7] Memorials such as this, whether stone or organic, Jay Winter (1995) argues, served as sites for collective mourning and in some instances substitute graves for the missing, where mourners could reflect on their private grief.




The inscription beneath the cross reads: 'With my soul's homage and my heart's utmost love to my beloved and deeply mourned brother'. Violet Gibbins. [AWM P03788.003]

[7] 'Near and Far', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 27 July 1925, p. 4.

**Veterans' Remembrance: 1916–1980**

Returned servicemen placed 'In Memoriam' notices too, as did the various battalion associations. The Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA), later to become the Returned and Services League (RSL), alongside the battalion associations, emerged as prominent agencies in organising wreath-laying ceremonies and reunions which formalised commemoration of Fromelles within their repertoire of annual services. The reunions fluctuated between sober moments of reflection and, as the 30th Battalion preferred, occasions 'devoted […] mainly to festivities' rather than sombre speechmaking.[8] The events were well attended, some even registering record attendances decades later.[9] As late as 1947 the 53rd Battalion Association 'Whale Oil Guards' continued to hold their annual 'smoke and Fromelles' commemoration night.[10]

Though the dedication to remembering remained strong among returned servicemen, Fromelles received minimal coverage in the newspapers: typically only bland acknowledgement of the anniversary or commemorative services, which on occasion were entirely forgotten. The perceived anonymity of the battle in the post-war landscape led many Fromelles veterans to petition for greater acknowledgement in the public sphere. One way they achieved this was to write letters to the editor. As early as 1917 the letters provide a revealing insight into how the returned servicemen articulated their experience of war and placed Fromelles in the wider context of Australia's First World War experience.

Those who authored letters were motivated by a sense of duty to the memory of the men who did not return, and to offering an historical account of the battle to those mourning the dead of Fromelles. A letter penned by 'Fleurbaix' in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (17 July 1919, 7) argued that the battle 'must be emphasised and impressed on future generations of Australia […] their proper place given to them in Australian history'. Writing as early as 1917 'LMC' even chose to question the brevity with which C. E. W. Bean recorded the battle in the official histories, which was why 'Fleurbaix [was]

[8] 'Fromelles: Wreaths and Reunions', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 July 1929, p. 7.

[9] 'Fromelles: Anniversary tomorrow', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 July 1936, p. 14; 'Military Reunions: 54th Battalion', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July 1933, p. 6.

[10] '53rd Battalion', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 1947, p. 9.

little understood by Australian folk', he argued.[11] Overwhelmingly many of the letters resonated with an anxiety that Fromelles had achieved little purchase on the national consciousness.

From 1919 onwards appeals for greater recognition of Fromelles began to appear in metropolitan newspapers. While enabled in part by a relaxation in censorship restrictions post-armistice, those appeals were much more a response to the confusion and ignorance that had surrounded the battle since 1916. It was not journalists who were moving on the issue, but returned servicemen, like Senior Chaplain James Green, who attempted to address supposed public ignorance. Green (1919, 7) called for the 'veil of mystery' to be removed and set about deconstructing the battle for *Sydney Morning Herald* readers. He declared that what had been reported as 'a lively skirmish' was rather a 'glorious action [that] should take its place in the list of outstanding Australian battles'.

Dr Charles MacLaurin (1919, 7) responded to Green's assessment and hoped he could complement his piece with 'essential facts'. Fromelles, he argued, was an 'orgy of blunders and calamity', and the result of 'half-trained and half-disciplined soldiers'. At heart MacLaurin nursed the same concerns as Green, but hit a nerve with his version of events. Passionate debate played out on the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in response to MacLaurin's comments. J. Williams (1919, 12) charged that MacLaurin's assessment was 'incorrect and unjust', while another correspondent argued that accounts of Fromelles were best not written by non-combatants dealing with hearsay.[12] A 'Herald Digger' (1919, 7) submitted a lengthy letter in which his opening statement was symptomatic of the Fromelles problem: 'to many Australians the Fleurbaix battle is something rarely spoken of. We hear of Lone Pine, Pozières, Passchendaele, Villers-Bretonneux, and others, yet the Fromelles fight is never mentioned.'

In 1929, the thirteenth anniversary of the battle, a commemorative editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted Sir James McCay's thoughts of

[11] 'Battle of Fleurbaix', *Advertiser*, 3 November 1917, p. 9. At the time the battle was referred to as Fleurbaix, the town closest to the Australian base; on other occasions it was referred to as Fromelles, the town behind the German line, and as it is now popularly known.

[12] K. N. Wark, *Sydney Morning Herald,* 29 July 1919, p. 8.

Fromelles.[13] McCay outlined that the failure was not, as General Douglas Haig asserted, due to insufficiently trained infantry. Like many veterans, McCay's memory of Fromelles was scarred by the heavy losses and the 'unflinching courage' displayed by the AIF, memories which sat uncomfortably alongside Fromelles as a failure and its lack of recognition. With the publication of Bean's third volume of the Official History, McCay expressed the continuing hope that recognition and acknowledgement would be forthcoming for the Fromelles veterans.[14] Comparable recognition to other Western Front battles like Pozières or Ypres never eventuated, but the survivors and mourners of Fromelles extended a commemorative thread throughout the years, quietly and purposefully.

The memory of Fromelles was also sustained within the pages of the RSL journals, in which several articles traded in memories and encouraged the persistence of remembering within the veteran community. The articles also marked an evolution in the way Fromelles was understood. In 1949 John W. Martin of the 30th Battalion wrote the first of his three articles on Fromelles that appeared in the RSL journals *Reveille* and *Mufti* over a thirty-year period.[15] 'Memories of Fleurbaix' restated much of Bean's account and framed it comparatively with the brevity of General Haig's initial dispatch. Martin's (1949) article encouraged the belief that Fromelles had contributed to the overall success of the Somme. Nine years later he was more inclined to dwell on the costs of the action. Able to provide greater detail of the battle, he poignantly stated it was only when the vast columns of the dead and wounded appeared in the papers, that Australians were aware of the AIF involvement (Martin 1958).

The final article, 'Massacre at Fromelles', published in 1980, illustrated a significant shift in the way veterans were recalling Fromelles. Opening with 'the inexperienced Australian Division', the article endorsed a contemporary understanding and contradicted the earlier emotional debates that refused to see the infantry slandered (Martin 1980, 6). This transition was

[13] Sir James McCay was the 5th Division's General Officer Commanding (GOC) at Fromelles.

[14] 'Fromelles: Thirteenth Anniversary', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 19 July 1929, p. 12.

[15] *Reveille* (New South Wales) and *Mufti* (Victoria) are the journals of the Returned and Services League state branches.

also reflected in an earlier article of 1966. The damning headline of 'Almost 6000 were mown down for nothing in futile battle of Fromelles' ushered in a new understanding of Fromelles, now free from a heroic context and firmly ensconced in a tragic one.[16]

The post-war anxiousness exhibited by many of the returned servicemen was fuelled by concerns that Fromelles had been forgotten. Unlike the battles of the Somme in 1916 and 1918, which gained prominence in the national memory, Fromelles remained in the shadows. The Australian experience of the First World War had been shaped into a nation building triumph. Bean's report of Fromelles, in the Official History, had also been criticised for its soft approach in dealing with battle mismanagement, preferring instead to focus on digger characteristics that typified the Anzac legend (Thomson 1994). The futility of Fromelles and its absence from this rhetoric symbolised a disconnection for those who survived from the evolving Anzac legacy. Pursuing recognition in this way validated their haunting personal memories and acknowledged their contribution to the war.

**The Politics of Commemoration: 1980–2010**

Over the last thirty years the Fromelles narrative has been bookended by a striking shift from relative obscurity to high public profile. Re-engagement with Fromelles was a result of individual agency and government involvement, both of which can be attributed to a renaissance of interest in war memory. In Australia we see this occurring in two ways. Anzac Day reassumed a central role in Australian civic culture as it emerged from the commemorative wasteland of the late 1960s and 1970s. In part this can be credited to the hyper-nationalism that surrounded the Bicentennial celebrations in 1988 and the 'entrenched indigenous opposition' to Australia Day.[17] The palatable alternative, fuelled by the new nationalism, was for a national day grounded in heroic struggle and sacrificial blooding (McKenna 2010). Anzac Day embodied that premise.

Within this cultural landscape public perceptions of war changed too. Noted French historian Pierre Nora positioned the 'memory boom' of

[16] 'Almost 6000 were mown down for nothing in futile battle of Fromelles', *Mufti*, 3 September 1966, p. 5.

[17] For an expanded discussion on this topic see McKenna 2010.

the 1970s and 1980s as a response to the atrocities of the Holocaust and the commemoration of trauma, but which more recently has expanded to include any reconnection with the past (cited in Winter 2006, 18, 19). The *nouvelle histoire* expounded by Nora (1989, 24) saw 'memory […] promoted to the centre of history' and afforded historians new opportunities to explore the way in which history is remembered at a personal, local, collective and ultimately national level. 'The task of remembering', Nora noted (1989, 15), 'makes everyone his own historian'. With this, new understandings emerged regarding the impact of war experienced on the battlefield. The traditional high diction tropes of heroism and valour were replaced by trauma and victimhood as the personal horrors of war were revealed. This, as Christina Twomey (2013) contends, was a significant factor in the reinvigoration of Anzac, and one that generated a renewed 'sympathy' for the Anzacs. First World War veterans were revered as national icons and families, buoyed by an interest in genealogy, were eager to place their ancestors at the heart of this powerful myth of nationhood.

After almost a century of direct personal remembrance, the responsibility for remembering Fromelles fell to the next generation. Individuals like Robin Corfield, who produced the definitive history of Fromelles in *Don't Forget Me Cobber: The Battle of Fromelles 19/20 July 1916, An Inquiry,* (2009),[18] sought to capture the experiences of his father and grandfather who had both fought at Fromelles (R. Corfield, personal communication, 1 September 2010). It would be in those pages of meticulously researched text that Melbourne schoolteacher Lambis Englezos found the initial clues regarding the missing Fromelles soldiers. He had found a discrepancy in the numbers. Of the 5,533 Australian casualties, 1,335 soldiers had no known grave. At VC Corner only the names of 1,299 soldiers are listed. At Villers-Bretonneux thirty-six were listed as missing. After further scrutiny Englezos believed a total of 191 soldiers were missing (Corfield 2009). The credibility of this calculation was confirmed by the details recorded in the Red Cross Wounded and Missing files. Intrigue had led Lambis Englezos to seek out the remaining Fromelles servicemen after reading a few paragraphs about the battle in Peter Charlton's *Pozières* (1986).

[18] This book was an expansion of his earlier book, *Hold hard, cobbers: the story of the 57th and 60th and 57/60th Australian Army Infantry Battalions 1912–1990*, Glenhuntly, 57th/60th Battalion AIF Association, 1992; in 2009 the book would be revised and reprinted as *Don't Forget Me Cobber.*

Over the following years Englezos developed close relationships with the Fromelles veterans—the '19th of July men', as he called them—that made Fromelles distinctly personal for him. Forging this link with the men only fuelled his determination to commemorate and remember them (L. Englezos, personal communication, 30 August 2010).

As veterans passed, families continued the practice of organising commemorative events. In 1991, on the 75th anniversary of Fromelles, a ceremony was held at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance. Robin Corfield, together with Englezos and Jacqui Todd, the daughter of Jack Kirfield, a Fromelles veteran and past secretary of the 60th Battalion Association, founded the Friends of the 15th Brigade. Its aim was to restore and maintain the commemorative practices particular to the brigade, echoing those initial services started by the battalion association in 1922.[19] At Englezos' behest, the first of many commemorative trees were planted in the Shrine grounds the same year, all dedicated to the various battalions that fought at Fromelles. Remarkably, it was the first acknowledgement of Fromelles in the Shrine grounds at that point (Corfield 2009).

This grassroots agency in commemoration resulted in significant developments in the Fromelles story. Englezos' championing of the missing soldiers was evidence of the renewed commitment to Anzac that was fostered between generations. His sense of 'knowing' the long dead men and his demand to find the soldiers was an expression of that connection (L. Englezos, personal communication, 30 August 2010). Ultimately it was his sense of responsibility to the men that would mobilise Englezos to push for the discovery, exhumation and reburial of the Fromelles soldiers, even against significant official inertia. While much of the agency for the rehabilitation of Fromelles was driven by descendants, veterans and individual campaigners, Fromelles remained in the shadow of Pozières for military historians. Outside Bean's Official History it had only courted paragraphs and chapters, as a footnote to the broader evaluation of the First World War and in particular the Western Front. Although never expressly overlooked, as an unsuccessful feint Fromelles did not seem to warrant the attention quickly directed at the longer and even more costly fighting at Pozières.[20]

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[19] Email correspondence with Lambis Englezos, 30 August 2010; Corfield 2009, pp. 432–433.

[20] Recent titles by military historians include Peter Pedersen (himself a descendant

The last decade however has witnessed a steady growth of published work documenting Fromelles. Early mentions were cited in Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years* (1974) and Patsy Adam-Smith's *The Anzacs* (1978), giving voice to the soldier's recollections, but it wasn't until the discovery of the Fromelles soldiers that historical evaluation increased, with the bulk of titles published post 2010.[21] The exception to this is historian Ross McMullin who has been a long-standing advocate of Fromelles, and has written widely on the subject since 1996 through his research interest in Pompey Elliott.[22] The phenomenon of Fromelles predominantly preoccupied the interest of social and cultural historians.

Official engagement with Fromelles occurred in a broader commemorative context. To mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the First World War the Howard (Liberal) government embarked on a memorial-building programme across the Western Front. Sculptor Peter Corlett was commissioned to memorialise the Battle of Fromelles. The bronze, entitled *Cobbers*, depicted Sergeant Simon Frazer of the 57th Battalion carrying a wounded member of the 60th Battalion across No Man's Land to safety. On 5 July 1998 the Australian Memorial Park at Fromelles was officially opened by the then Minister for Veterans' Affairs Bruce Scott and was attended by four surviving First World War veterans.[23] Together with the Fromelles Memorial Park, which cost $160,000,[24] the Australian Government's Le Hamel memorial

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of Fromelles soldiers), *Fromelles: French Flanders* (2004), Peter Burness, *Fromelles and The Somme: Australians on the Western Front—1916* (2006), Peter Barton, *The Lost Legions of Fromelles* (2014), as well as the aforementioned text by Roger Lees of the Australian Army History Unit.

[21] Additional titles include Paul Cobb, *Fromelles: 1916* (2007), Patrick Lindsay, *Fromelles* (2008), and Tim Lycett and Sandra Playle, *Fromelles: The Final Chapters* (2013).

[22] See Ross McMullin, 'Pompey Elliott and the Butcher of Fromelles', *Australian Magazine*, nº 20–21, July 1996, pp. 18–19, 22–24.

[23] 'International Memorials: Fromelles, Australian Park', *Office of Australian War Graves Journal*, 1997–1998, p. 25; 'Three days of ceremonies will commemorate end of WWI', media release, Office of the Minister of Defence, 3 July 1998, http://www.defence.gov.au/minister/1998/980703.html, accessed 22 September 2010.

[24] 'Commonwealth of Australia, Questions on Notice, 'Consultants', Department of Veterans' Affairs, 4 March 1998, http://parliinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/

(1998), costing $1.3 million,[25] joined memorials at Bullecourt (1992 and 1993) with the purpose of commemorating the 'triumph of the Australian spirit' across the Western Front (Pedersen 2004, 123, 124). The pivotal shift in refocusing attention from the Turkish Peninsula to the Western Front came in 1993 with the decision to exhume a body from Adelaide Cemetery to be interred in Canberra as Australia's Unknown Soldier. The growing interest in Fromelles can be seen as integral to the wider agenda of commemoration occurring on the Western Front.[26]

As Bruce Scates (2006, xxii) acknowledges, 'Australians discovered their nationhood' at Gallipoli and the peninsula remains 'to this day a compelling statement about what it meant (and means) to be Australian'. The Western Front was different. The devastating consequences of an industrialised war and prolonged trench warfare occupied a darker place in the Australian imagination. The Gallipoli campaign had cost 26,111 Australian casualties (including 8,141 deaths).[27] On the Western Front the casualties were 132,000 with 46,000 deaths.[28] In 2008 the national commemorative focus included the Western Front for the first time and an Anzac Day service was held at the national memorial at Villers-Bretonneux.[29]

With greater emphasis on the Western Front experience in Australian commemorative narratives, Fromelles was now reframed as the worst twenty-four hours in Australian military history, not least because of historian Ross McMullin's (2002) persistent advocacy of that device. The sentiment is widely endorsed by the Australian public, politicians and the media today.

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[25] 'Three days of ceremonies will commemorate end of WW1'.

[26] For the most recent scholarship on Western Front commemoration see Joan Beaumont, 'Australia's Global Memory Footprint: Memorial Building on the Western Front 1916–2015', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 46, nº 1.

[27] 'Gallipoli', Australian War Memorial*,* https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/gallipoli/, accessed 19 September 2015.

[28] Australians on the Western Front, http://www.ww1westernfront.gov.au, accessed 19 September 2015.

[29]'Anzac Day focus turns to Western Front', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 20 April 2008, online edition, http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/anzac-day-focus-turns-to-western-front/2008/04/19/1208025549025.html, accessed 19 September 2015.

The significance of framing Fromelles in this context enabled the battle to sit comfortably alongside other celebrated battles within the Anzac narrative. At the 2006 anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam, John Howard (cited in Lord 2006) paid tribute to both Fromelles and Long Tan, commenting:

> that although 50 years and thousands of miles apart, [both] had helped shape Australia and define the common characteristics of Australians—courage, initiative, individual fortitude and mateship.

Howard drew both battles into the national narrative, successfully linking 'Anzac past with Anzac present' (McKenna and Ward, cited in Scates 2010, 219). That same year at the Fromelles Memorial Park, the then Minister for Veterans' Affairs Bruce Billson (cited in Scates 2010, 219) spoke of 'service and sacrifice' and 'courage of the highest order—the mateship that stands at the heart of the Anzac Legend'. Similarly when the Victorian Premier John Brumby officiated at the unveiling of a second *Cobbers* statue in Melbourne in 2008 he was quick to salute the Anzac commonalities, citing those well-worn qualities of courage, sacrifice and mateship, stating that *Cobbers* (Fromelles) 'embodie[d] the Anzac spirit'.[30] Official endorsement of Fromelles meant that the battle was now positioned firmly within the national remembrance. However it was the persistent efforts of Lambis Englezos to find the missing soldiers that would cement Fromelles's place within the Anzac narrative, officially and informally, and forge a much closer connection to Anzac.

An unflinching media campaign waged by Englezos and his supporters to locate the missing dead propelled Fromelles even further into the mainstream. What had previously been the domain of familial remembrance and military history enthusiasts now caught the attention of both the public and greater historical appraisal. New books were published and newspapers ran interviews with Fromelles descendants. A *60 Minutes* (2006) segment consolidated public interest and elicited an emotional response. It presented Fromelles in all its battlefield horror and was indignant at the battle's anonymity. '[I] would hate to see our missing war dead as an inconvenience',

[30] 'Unveiling of Cobbers', Premier of Victoria, 19 July 2008, http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/premier/speeches.html?task=text&media_id=311, accessed 30 August 2010.

Englezos lamented for the programme. Public interest was reaching critical mass, and as Joan Beaumont (2015) has acknowledged, Australia's popular media played a critical role in constructing a contemporary memory of Fromelles.

Attitudes towards the discovery at Fromelles were heavily coloured by its renewed association with the Anzac legend. Broader public opinion eulogised the Fromelles soldiers as national heroes. 'Ian' from Sydney went so far as to call Lambis Englezos and Robin Corfield modern heroes for bringing Fromelles to the national attention. A Channel Nine News opinion poll gave a voice to the Australian public. Many were angered by the perceived idea of a government 'cover up' that continued to linger almost a century later; one respondent called it a 'bureaucratic scandal'. Others, like 'Matt', emphasised the necessity of teaching the importance of other battles like Fromelles, which shaped Australian history, in addition to Gallipoli. In many instances public opinion mirrored that of Fromelles advocates in 1919.[31] It was through this lens that the public justified their demands for exhumation and identification. Amidst the consenting majority though there were occasionally isolated voices of dissent. 'Andy' questioned the Fromelles project, arguing that it 'smacks of morbid curiosity and a publicity stunt. Mark these mens [sic] graves, but then let them lie in peace. You dishonour them.'[32]

On the 92nd anniversary of Fromelles, six years after Englezos began his public campaign to find the missing soldiers of Fromelles, a replica of Corlett's *Cobber* statue was unveiled at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. The statue was clear acknowledgment of public interest, given the Victorian government's willingness to contribute financial support, (matched

[31] These comments have been accessed from the website of Channel Nine News, see various postings in the columns entitled 'Disgrace Aplenty at Fromelles', 29 May 2008, http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=571197, accessed 23 September 2010.

[32] 'Andy', 'Remembering Fromelles' blog, *Commonwealth War Graves Commission,* 6 May 2009, http://www.cwgc.org/fromelles/blog/?p=28#comments, accessed 29 September 2010.

by Tattersall's George Adams Foundation).[33] Bruce Scates (2010, 229) noted that the statue represented a homecoming of sorts:

> [I]n the midst of the Fromelles controversy, it suggested that these men, once honoured only by the surrogate graves of memorials, were soon to be recovered, re-membered, re-embodied again.

The groundswell of interest that surrounded Fromelles in Australia was unique. British responses to 'their' Fromelles missing were somewhat mute by comparison, but no less heartfelt (Totaro 2010). Bruce Scates (cited in Totaro 2010) has suggested that Fromelles resonated with Australians by feeding the needs of a public 'greedy for war stories'. In part this may be true, but the politics of commemoration are undoubtedly complex. The tension between the broader public, who regard Fromelles as part of the Anzac tradition, and those who see the exploitation of the dead for political purposes is ongoing.

For the descendants of the Fromelles soldiers, remembering has always been the impetus, and an act that traversed generations. When Private Harry Willis' body was identified, his 93-year-old niece Marjorie Whitford was 'extremely happy'. She would finally be able to inscribe the epitaph written by her mother: 'Beloved son of John and Janet Willis of Alberton, Victoria' (cited in Totaro 2010). Margaret L. was a DNA match with her grandmother's cousin Private George Lucre. The process of undertaking the family history had given her a sense of 'knowing' her grandmother's cousin: 'distant to me but a relative none the less'. The identification process had offered her family a sense of reconciliation with the past (Margaret L., personal communication, 23 September 2010).

A public memory of Fromelles has gathered in strength, to the extent that the authenticity of private and individual memories had in part been consumed and reimagined by a broader social narrative, dictated by familial inheritance, and consumed by what Jay Winter (1995) describes as collective remembrance. As Fromelles cemented its place in the public consciousness, it was no longer defined by bureaucratic negotiation or the demands of descendants. These men, if we engage with the majority public consensus,

[33] 'Unveiling of Cobbers'.

had become the heart of the Australian nation as men whose sacrifice embodied the expression of national character.

**Fromelles in the Anzac rhetoric: 2010 onwards**

Fromelles has now assumed a prominent position in the Australian commemorative landscape, firmly articulated in Anzac rhetoric. Ensuring it is not forgotten by future generations, Fromelles now sits comfortably in school curricula between Gallipoli and the Somme as students commemorate the centenary of the First World War.[34] Historical accounts of the battle have been reframed for teenage reading, such as Carole Wilkinson's *Fromelles: Australia's Bloodiest Day at War* (2012), complete with companion teaching notes. At the newly renovated First World War galleries at the Australian War Memorial Fromelles features prominently as a significant moment on the Western Front. Since the dedication ceremony of the new cemetery in 2010, Fromelles has continued to inspire interest internationally. London's Imperial War Museum opened its *Remembering Fromelles* exhibition to coincide with the cemetery's dedication and welcomed thousands of visitors eager to understand the fascinating and complex story of recovery.

The cemetery at Fromelles and the Australian Memorial at V.C. Corner have become significant sites of pilgrimage and battlefield tourism on the Western Front. Australians predominantly write the entries in the visitors' book. Messages of gratitude and respect rest alongside promises to 'never forget' as they contain their sentiments to a few words. French and English citizens paying their respect echo similar sentiments. The global reach of Fromelles is such that visitors identified themselves from America, Japan, Canada and New Zealand.[35] Regional War Graves Commission Director, Piet Declercq (cited in Miranda 2014) expects Fromelles to be one of the most visited of the 300 cemeteries in the area, particularly since the new Fromelles museum has opened.

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[34] 'Anzac Centenary', *For Teachers, For Students*, http://www.forteachersforstudents.com.au/site/themed-curriculum/anzac-day/facts/, accessed 21 September 2015.

[35] Selection of responses taken from the Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Cemetery Visitor Book, 24 March–30 May 2012.

Officially opened 18 July 2014, the Fromelles Museum is located 120 metres from the cemetery, having moved from its original location in the Town Hall. The new museum houses thousands of artefacts that were found in the discovery and are used to tell the story of Fromelles. But it is the personal stories of the soldiers who fell at Fromelles that are most poignant. Declaring its official stake in the museum, the Australian government contributed AU$1 million to its construction. French partners have contributed over €1.8 million to this project.[36] Michael Ronaldson, Minister for Veterans' Affairs, declared the museum would ensure that the 'story of Australian service and sacrifice in this bloody battle' was never forgotten.[37]

More recently Fromelles was the subject of a musical entitled *The Front* that opened as part of the Adelaide Cabaret Festival in June 2015.[38] Billed as a musical about the bloodiest battle in ANZAC history, the production set out to depict the 'brutality of war and commemorate the love, loss and legacy of our WWI veterans', complete with 'soaring romantic melodies and infused with a uniquely Australian spirit'.[39] For so long Fromelles was the private realm of those intimately connected. The latest addition to the canon of literature on Fromelles comes from popular author and social commentator Peter FitzSimons; evidence itself of the battle's acceptance in popular culture. The timely publication of *Fromelles & Pozières: In the Trenches of Hell* (2015) eulogises the events of 19 and 20 July 1916 and elevates Fromelles's mythical status, the pagination of the book ironically skewed in Fromelles's favour. Supported by onerous footnoting, FitzSimons' self admission (xvii) of fudging quotes and infusing emotion to accommodate the storyline is perhaps the price paid for engaging the reader keen to understand the experience

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[36] 'Australian Remembrance Trail', accessed 29 July 2015, Australians on the Western Front 1914–1918, http://www.ww1westernfront.gov.au/australian-remembrance-trail/news.php, accessed 29 July 2015.

[37] 'New French museum remembers Australian and British war dead at Fromelles, Centenary News, http://www.centenarynews.com/article?id=3009, accessed 27 August 2015.

[38] 'Fromelles remembered in new musical', ABC Online, 7 July 2015, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-07/fromelles-remembered-in-new-musical/6528576, accessed 24 July 2015,.

[39] *The Front Musical,* http://www.thefrontmusical.com.au/#!about/c18bc, accessed 3 August 2015.

of Fromelles. The broad appeal and commercialisation of Fromelles, like that in *The Front,* raises concerns that the public's appetite, to reiterate Scates, 'greedy for war stories', feeds an Anzac industry that can at times breed cynicism, particularly regarding how Australians commemorate and remember their war dead.

As the Centenary of Anzac shifts focus to the Western Front in 1916, Fromelles will be remembered as a key part of the commemorative programme. As one of the twelve major sites along the new Australian Remembrance Trail that traverses France and Belgium, it will remind visitors of the events of Australia's bloodiest twenty-four hours and the nation's first engagement on the Western Front. This will further establish Fromelles within the physical commemorative landscape. Tour operators are already promoting Fromelles centenary battlefield tours as 'once in a lifetime' events,[40] where travellers can participate in anniversary commemorations and picnic lunches.[41] The Friends of the 15th Brigade are also arranging their own commemorative tour with Lambis Englezos and Mike O'Brien as joint Tour Leaders and Battlefield Guides.[42]

Such events come with an element of caution though. Joan J., who was unsuccessful in identifying her uncle Private John Patrick Larkin through DNA testing, would hate to see Fromelles reach similar proportions to that of the Anzac Cove ceremony. Instead she prefers the comparative anonymity of the local ceremony as an 'honourable and fitting' memory of the men, rather than grandiose commemorations (Joan J., personal communication, 30 September 2010). Her response is suggestive of the shift from private remembering to public collective commemoration that exposes what David W. Lloyd (1998, 43) has suggested as the 'dichotomy between tourist and pilgrim'. As long as such 'sacred places' are revered as keystone sites of national commemoration, cultural sightseers will always be drawn to locations defined by Australianness.

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[40] *WWI Australian Battlefield Tours: Fromelles and Western Front*, http://www.battlefield-tours.com.au/html/fromelles-australian-battlefie.html, accessed 29 July 2015.

[41] *Fromelles and Pozières Centenary 2016,* http://www.battlefields.com.au/index.php/tours/68, accessed 29 July 2015.

[42] Mike O'Brien was in charge of the identification and burial process of the Fromelles soldiers; *Friends of the 15th Brigade,* newsletter, 28 August 2015.

## Conclusion

For a century Fromelles has been framed by an anxious tension between forgetting and remembering. Closer analysis of the commemorative patterns surrounding the battle reveals that a long history of remembering had existed since 1916. The transition from intimate private memory, expressed by Fromelles veterans and their families, to today's expansive commemoration on a national level, was a result of both sustained familial remembrance and a growing reconnection with Anzac that was occurring more broadly with the passing of First World War veterans. Within this context the individual agency of Lambis Englezos, coupled with a commitment by the state to commemorate Australia's experience on the Western Front, helped to construct a public memory of Fromelles that was closely associated with national identity and Anzac. Now well established in the official state rhetoric, Fromelles is a unique case study through which to observe the shifting patterns of Australian war memory and the inherent politics of commemoration and commodification associated with honouring Australia's war dead.

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# AHEAD OF THEIR TIME: THE FRENCH ECONOMIC MISSION TO AUSTRALIA 1918

JACQUELINE DWYER

## Introduction

In the closing weeks of the Great War, Sydney was taken over by the enthusiastic welcome given to the delegates of an Economic Mission to Australia, sent on behalf of the government of France. They had that morning disembarked from the steamship *Sonoma* after their journey across the Pacific Ocean from San Francisco.[1]

The Mission's principal aim was to re-establish and enhance the trading conditions that had existed between France and Australia in the years preceding the war, taking advantage of Germany's eclipse. The French Department of Foreign Affairs hoped also to discuss the destiny of former German colonies in the South Pacific, and to resolve the pending situation of the New Hebrides.[2] These delegates were to spend three months in Australia, visiting the other state capitals and regional centres where similar welcomes awaited them, and where they were shown the potential trading resources of this nation.

This article proposes, through a more detailed description and analysis of the Mission than has been done to date, to cast light on French-Australian relations of the time, combining a number of sources. The Mission's official report for the general public, *The Economic Relations between France and Australia*, published in English in 1919, is a detailed assessment of their bilateral trade.[3] Especially valuable was Robert Aldrich's article (1989), 'La Mission Française en Australie de 1918', based on the diplomatic archives of the Quai d'Orsay. (Its title has been shortened to *Confidential Report.*) A third report is the *Rapport Thomsen.*

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[1] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1918, p. 6.

[2] Jean Gout, sub-director for Asia and Oceania Department Foreign Affairs, 10 June 1918, cited in Aldrich, 1989, p. 295.

[3] This title has been shortened in the text to *Economic Relations.*

Australian National Archives provided the Federal Government's detailed plans for the Mission's visit. Libraries could not supply other literature on the journey itself except albums of photographs, but newspaper articles were plentiful. The National Library of Australia TROVE search engine has allowed access to many press reports, which in turn permit descriptions of the individual delegates and of their ideas.[4]

In December 1917, Andrew Fisher, the former Prime Minister of Australia and later Australian High Commissioner in London, had proposed to the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs that they should send an official mission to Australia to plan together the recovery of their post-war economies. In the decade before the war, wool had been Australia's chief export, and, after Great Britain, France had been Australia's chief client. The French accepted to send a delegation, pointing out that 'if we can interest those at the head of this powerful and wealthy economy, we should find there an appreciable outlet for our luxury goods'.[5] This invitation was indeed foresightful, for the war was not yet won; General von Ludendorff was still planning a triple attack on Amiens in Picardy, and others in the Aisne and Flanders sectors. It took about six months to gather a suitable team of delegates for the Mission, which was to be led by the former Minister for Labour, Albert Métin. Most of those chosen had served in the trenches themselves, and represented agriculture, wool, silk, metallurgy and trade unions.

**Background**

Some of the roots of this innovative mission reached back almost twenty years, when two visiting scholars spent a considerable time studying social conditions in the cluster of colonies which Australia then was. One was Albert Métin, a dedicated and idealistic member of the French Chamber of Deputies.[6] He was the author of *Le socialisme sans doctrines* (1901), based

[4] Examples cited in the course of the article are representative, not exhaustive: contemporary newspaper reports are far too numerous for all but a sample to be taken into account here.

[5] Aldrich 1989, pp. 295–296. 'Si nous savons intéresser les hommes à la tête de cette démocratie puissante et riche, nous devons y trouver un débouché appréciable pour nos marchandises de luxe et fines.'

[6] The French National Assembly web site places him in the Radical Socialist party.

on his 18-month visit to explore labour conditions in Australia and New Zealand. This very perceptive assessment remains a valuable source for Australian historians. André Siegfried had made a similar journey to New Zealand, about which he wrote *La Démocratie en Nouvelle Zélande* (1904) that earned him a doctorate of letters.[7] He became a geographer, an academic, and subsequently wrote books on American, Canadian and British politics, thus fitting him for the role of general secretary to the Mission.

**Visit to the Somme**

Before leaving France, members of the Mission visited the Australian forces, guided by General Monash, and the delegates posed for a group photograph. One of them, the veteran General Paul Pau, said that they 'could not over thank General Monash.'[8] Métin addressed units from every state. He complimented them on the kindly sympathy with which they had treated the 'peasantry' in the war zone, and on the spirit of good fellowship existing between the French and Australian soldiers. He was greatly impressed by the fact that the Australians contributed to every branch of warfare from infantry to the most expert aviation work. Everything these men from overseas did was excellent. 'They seemed like old seasoned troops, yet they retained the splendid virility of youth.'[9]

**Visit to London**

The Mission left Paris in July 1918 for London where the delegates dined with the Australian Prime Minister, W. M. 'Billy' Hughes, and with the High Commissioner, Andrew Fisher. In relating his visit to the Australian forces, Métin marvelled that such work could be done by citizen soldiers. He had seen the mutual confidence existing between officers and men. 'Here was their strength and the enemy's weakness. Their discipline was not of caste, but of duty.'[10]

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7 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1918, p. 6.

8 *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 26 July 1918, p. 5.

9 *The Telegraph*, Brisbane, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

10 *The Observer*, Adelaide, 3 August 1918, p. 20.

General Pau, at that point just a member of the team, added: 'the sight of Australian volunteers filled my old soldier's heart with admiration. Though new, the Australian army now equals the best in Europe in military rules as well as bravery and dash. We French veterans not only pay tribute to their physique, noble bearing and valour, but to their cheerfulness—for cheerfulness is the basis for an army's strength.'[11]

From London, Prime Minister Hughes welcomed the Mission officially to Australia, stating that both nations had a common interest in New Caledonia and the New Hebrides, where there was a possibility of considerable trade. Métin, the socialist leader, and Thomsen, the union representative, would be able to speak with authority to Labour in Australia, and discuss their attitude towards the war.[12]

**Visit to USA**

The delegates sailed across the Atlantic to New York, where President Woodrow Wilson received them; America had entered the war as an ally on 6 April 1917. Métin again demonstrated his acuity in an interview with an Australian Press Association representative in New York, avoiding platitudes and stating two key issues: 'I am most anxious to reach Australia to study the conditions there with a view to establishing preferred arrangements for trade after the war. I am very interested in Australia's repatriation plans for her soldiers.'[13] 'Preferred arrangements for trade' remained the key to what the French desired from the Australians. Having suffered in past years from her exclusion from Imperial Preferences, France now sought special preferential status as an ally.

An undated article in *Le Petit Parisien* written by Métin indicates his thorough understanding of the country he was hoping soon to revisit:

> Mutual esteem, already developed by comradeship in the field, has been fortified by a common ideal. Australia is a democracy like France, but she is even more democratic than France, for she has recognised the right of women to the vote. Ahead of

[11] *The Farmer and Settler*, 2 August 1918, p. 1.

[12] *The Queenslander*, 3 August 1918, p. 12.

[13] *North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times*, Tasmania, August 1918, p. 8.

> Europeans, she has presented the example of social laws which have already earned her the name of 'a workman's paradise'. With the agrarian's point of view, she has sought to protect the interests of the small holder and simultaneously to give the rural workers the benefits of unionism. She also assists in the progress of cultivation, without interfering with the independence of farmers.
>
> Finally Australia, in relation to her small population, produces an excess of wool, meat and wheat and furnishes in addition more minerals, and metal than she has use for. Naturally then, she is a great exporter. In normal days, her export trade surpassed that of Japan and in proportion to her inhabitants, totalled in figures more than that of France. We ourselves figured largely as wool buyers and it was in the invaded areas that most of the clients carried on their business.[14]

The delegates travelled by rail to San Francisco, but there tragedy struck. Métin became ill shortly after his arrival and was unable to participate in the festivities. He retired to his room where he was later found unconscious on the floor, and he died shortly afterwards. Albert Métin was deeply mourned. After a simple ceremony, his body lay in state at the San Francisco City Hall, surrounded by American and French flags and four American soldiers to guard it. The French flag was flown at half-mast throughout the city.[15] Australia and the Mission would now be deprived of his economic and financial competence, and his wider understanding.

William Holman, Premier of New South Wales, was deeply shocked by the announcement of Métin's sudden death. As an idealistic young socialist, Holman met Métin on his first visit and had been looking forward to renewing their acquaintance. His statement to the press is worth quoting at length:

> I met Mr Métin 15 years ago—he was then Professor Métin of the Paris University, a member of the Chamber of Deputies and had been despatched to Australia to make a study of the economic situation. He spent the bulk of his time in Sydney and

[14] *Ballarat Courier*, 29 July 1918, p. 18.

[15] *L'Illustration*, Paris, 14 September 1918, Photograph, p. 265, July–December 1918. Bound edition.

> I saw a good deal of him. I was then a member of the Labor Party and he was making enquiries, which he then embodied in a book on Australia. He was a socialist of the academic type and was remarkably well informed on the labour movement throughout the world and of a very clear and penetrating thought. […] His socialism did not prevent him from becoming a patriot as much in peace as in war. His idea was that the worker should work for his country and also that the worker should fight for his country as distinguished from that of certain so-called socialists amongst us whose one anxiety is that they should neither work nor fight.
>
> Mr Métin's death will be an enormous blow to the prospects for success. He was a trained observer, trained in every way as legislator, administrator and student who would be the eye and the brain of the commission. It is to be hoped that his loss will not cause surviving comrades to abandon or postpone their visit and I am communicating the profound regrets of the NSW government to General Pau and I am urging this view very strongly upon them.
>
> But it is a heavy loss to the whole French nation of one of its most distinguished public men and I feel sure they will have deep sympathy from New South Wales.[16]

These strong words help explain the intensity of Premier Holman's personal welcome to the French Mission during their stay in New South Wales, discussed below. An ardent Francophile, Holman had been expelled from the Labor Party in 1917 with 17 others, for their stance supporting conscription in the referendum. His harsh language on that occasion described the party's attitude towards conscription and justified his own views on patriotism.

The future of the tour was momentarily in doubt, but a cable from the French government ordered the journey to proceed, and for General Pau to take on the leadership of the Mission.[17] General Pau was a popular veteran of the Franco-Prussian war, where he had lost his right arm; he spoke little English but would be helped by André Siegfried taking on the role of secretary to the Mission.

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[16] *National Times*, 18 August 1918, p. 2.

[17] *Economic Relations,* 1919, Preface.

Albert Métin's remains were returned to France with great respect, accompanied by Thomsen. His death, as we shall see, marked a distinct cleavage between what was now being called 'the Pau Mission' and the two trade union delegates, Messrs Thomsen and Hodée. The reconstituted Mission took an American ship, the *Sonoma*, across the Pacific Ocean to Sydney. The Mission's journey from France to Sydney had taken approximately 46 days.

**Members of the Mission**

The 1919 Report of the French Mission gives the following list of members:

> Général Pau, Head of Mission; André Siegfried, General Secretary; Commandant d'André, Aide de Camp to General Pau; Paul Thomsen, Labour Expert; Henri Corbière, Agricultural Expert; Meadows Smith, Hon. British Consul (specially commissioned by the British and Australian Governments to accompany the Mission); Louis Leclercq-Motte, Wool Expert; Marcel Mathieu, Specialist in Commerce; Georges Bader, Accountant, Specialist in Commerce and the Export Trade, Secretary to the Mission; Adolphe Hodée, Labour Expert.

Not on this list was a surprising last-minute recruit, who also arrived on the *Sonoma*, Mlle Augustine Soubeiran, the well-known Co-secretary of the French-Australian League of Help, who had been in Paris distributing the gifts from the League to people in need.[18] She explained to the press that though M. Métin had invited her to join the Mission, she was not exactly part of it; rather, she was embarking on a tour of regional towns of New South Wales to thank Australians for their gifts and tell them more of the work of the League.[19]

[18] See Brown and Dwyer, 2014. Premier Holman was Co-president of this League and gave it a great deal of support.

[19] *Newcastle Sun*, 11 October 1918, p. 6.

**The French Mission in New South Wales**

The *Sonoma* arrived in Sydney on a brilliant sunny morning, with people assembled to see the members of the Mission disembark from a decorated launch to Man O'War Steps, for there had been much advance publicity. The ferries saluted their arrival with loud whistling. At least a dozen cinematographers and cameramen recorded the scene. General Pau was wearing his blue service uniform with the empty sleeve hanging loosely, indicating his cruel legacy from the Franco-Prussian war. In the crush a photographer almost knocked him down, but the old soldier simply laughed. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 11 September devoted several pages to the welcome offered to the delegates. The first courtesy call was to Government House, a civic welcome at the Town Hall, then a state reception at Parliament House.

In La Perouse, General Pau laid a wreath on the French explorer's monument. They visited Fort Street High School, a model school at Brighton-Le-Sands, the State fish depots and Long Bay gaol, so that it became difficult to find the hours needed for discussions. They stayed in Sydney from 10th till 21st September before heading north to Queensland, then returned to New South Wales for nine days before leaving for Melbourne on 10th October.

The members of the Mission separated according to their varying interests and responsibilities. General Pau from the outset held wide appeal for the crowds, though he spoke little English and needed help with translations. His essential message was: 'We have fought side by side in war, so we shall continue to collaborate in all things in peace'.[20] On another occasion he settled the vexed question of Field Marshal Foch's name by exploding: 'It is Fosh, not Fock!' His warm approach and courteous manner endeared him instantly to the public.

André Siegfried endeavoured to fill the void left by Albert Métin's death by working extremely hard. Since his journey to New Zealand in his youth he had continued to write, and to teach at the École Libre des Sciences Politiques, and the Collège de France. His family background was also impressive. He was the son of Jules Siegfried, mayor of Le Havre, head of a large cotton corporation, and former French minister for Commerce; his mother, Julie Siegfried, served as a committee member of the French-

[20] *Barrier Miner,* 10 September 1918, p. 1.

Australian League of Help in Paris.[21] Among other things, Siegfried spoke at the University of Sydney, saying that intellectual ties should remain between the two countries, putting forward the idea that there should be an exchange between the two countries of students and professors, with appropriate scholarships.[22] This prophetic idea waited many decades before its fruition.

Louis Leclercq-Motte, whose particular responsibility was the renewal of the wool trade, was of special interest to Australia, for in the years preceding the war, wool had been by far Australia's largest export, and France was second only to Britain in her imports of Australian wool, well ahead of Belgium and Germany. The factories of Leclercq-Motte's family were the largest in Roubaix and were one of Australia's chief clients for wool before the war. This region had been occupied by the German invaders from the first weeks of the war (Bonte 2002, Nivet 2011). Leclercq-Motte looked enviously at the quantities of wool stored near Sydney Harbour. By mutual agreement, Britain had bought the entire Australian wool clip for the duration of the war and for one wool year after, and the value of this wool was appraised by former buyers before being shipped directly to Britain. He hoped the wool trade would resume quickly in peacetime and that the Germans would not be sold any Australian wool. 'A million people in the North lived on the wool trade, and we will want your support. We want to organise it so that the material will be poured from your vast stores to set the men to work immediately.[23] He was to repeat this plea in several of his visits to wool stores.

Henri Corbière, the agricultural expert, was a leading horse and cattle breeder in Normandy. He told journalists that when he was at home, he rose at 5 am and worked his own farm.[24] He found much to interest him in the subsequent journey to Brisbane, saying that he wanted to see all he could of Australia—sheep, cattle, horses, and farmland. 'We will want your wool, meat, wheat and perhaps your timber.' He spoke highly of Australian wines, which he considered better than the wines of Italy.

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[21] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1918, p. 4.

[22] *The Age,* Melbourne, 2 October 1918, p.10. This idea was retained in the Mission Report (*Economic Relations*) 1919, pp. 97–100.

[23] *The Age*, Melbourne, 14 September 1918, p. 14.

[24] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 September 1918, p. 5.

Marcel Mathieu was a silk manufacturer in Lyons. Part of his education had been in England, and he spoke English fluently. He visited the Commercial Travellers Club with Siegfried, Bader and Leclercq-Motte who spent two hours talking with representatives of wool, silk and cotton, chemical and hardware industries.[25]

Georges Bader, specialist in commerce and the wool trade, had worked in the French Bank in Melbourne before moving to Sydney to work with a wool firm, Wenz and C°, and had lived in Australia for 13 years. He was mobilised by the army in 1914 while visiting France to foster trade between the two countries. He served with the army until he left on the Mission.[26] These last four men were experts on the commodities that Australia had sold to France pre-war. The following table listed on page 54 of the *Economic Relations* shows that in 1913 wool was Australia's chief export to France, followed by wheat, then the rest in far lesser quantities:

VALUE OF FRENCH PURCHASES FROM AUSTRALIA IN 1913

| | |
|---|---|
| Wool | £7,429,856 |
| Sheep skins (for Mazamet) | £1,315,516 |
| Cereals (mostly wheat) | £361,604 |
| Copper | £157,043 |
| Zinc | £151,283 |
| Tallow | £95,070 |

N.B. Wool in that year had comprised 33.4% of Australia's exports.

Part of the Mission's journey to Brisbane was by private train and motor-car via Glen Innes, Grafton and Byron Bay. They were met at the border by the Premier of Queensland. A varied sequence of visits had been planned to show cattle stations, sheep stations, cane fields, wheat fields, orchards, vineyards, meat works and shearing sheds in the company of William Lennon, the Minister for Agriculture.[27]

[25] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1918, p. 6.

[26] *Brisbane Courier*, 21 September 1918. He would later be appointed French Trade Representative in Sydney.

[27] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 1918, p. 9.

In New South Wales, Premier Holman remained in close contact with the Mission members, attending the state functions held in their honour. At the French Consul-General's dinner on 12 September he gave a speech on 'Democracy'. He toured the Harbour Port on a launch with the delegates. After André Siegfried enquired as to the position of the arts in general and music in particular, he was an attentive listener when Premier Holman took him to a choral performance at the Conservatorium.

Possibly Holman's most valuable contribution was his participation in the group's week-end visit to Jenolan Caves, where, after visiting the Blue Mountains, the delegates were housed in the government-owned Caves Hotel.[28] The Premier arrived the next morning accompanied by André Siegfried, Thomas Bavin and a Mr Saxon.[29] Sunday was spent in separate working discussions; Holman and Siegfried spent the whole afternoon in close conference with Colonel Hurley, the newly appointed Trade Commissioner for NSW in London. The Premier then had a long consultation with Leclercq-Motte. That evening Holman accepted General Pau's suggestion that he address the group, speaking to them of the geographical, commercial and industrial history of Australia. This very strongly Francophile Premier was soon after rewarded with the medal of the *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* for his support of the French Australian League of Help.

André Siegfried made a constructive and well reported speech to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce in which he pointed out the present position of France's economy, with her main industrial areas still under German control, asking them to imagine England deprived of Manchester and Bradford and all of its factories. He said that he would ask the French government to establish a bureau of Commerce and Publicity in Australia saying: 'This is what the Germans understood but the French neglected'. Though a French Chamber of Commerce had been established in 1899, Australian protective measures under the new Federal Government were so severe that an even balance of trade had not been feasible. André Siegfried made his ideas clear about the future of tariff reforms, which he felt should be put to the Federal Government. The French view was that 'within the Allies there should be maintained something like a great family feeling in which the people who had suffered together should take advantage over those who had been their

[28] *Blue Mountains Echo,* 20 September 1918, p. 5.

[29] This was possibly A. C. Saxon, a Sydney timber merchant.

L'ILLUSTRATION
28 Décembre 1918
628 — N° 3956
Réception du général Pau et des membres de la mission française au palais du Parlement fédéral de Melbourne, le 11 octobre.

enemies'.[30] It is worth noting that in this statement, Siegfried was repeating a point that Métin had already made to the press in New York. It was, in other words, a French policy position, and not a personal viewpoint.

**The Mission in Victoria**

In 1918, Canberra was not yet built and Melbourne remained the effective capital of Australia. Federal Parliament sat in the Assembly Hall of the Victorian State Parliament, while the Victorian State Parliament sat in the Exhibition Building. We must recall however that the Prime Minister of Australia, W. M. 'Billy' Hughes, was in Europe preparing for the Peace Conference, while William Watt replaced him in Melbourne as acting Prime Minister.

Delegates of the French Mission left Sydney by train for Melbourne on 10 October. At the Victorian border at Albury they were met by Victorian State Ministers and the Victorian Premier. The train stopped at Seymour where representatives of the Federal ministry greeted them. Melbourne's reception to the Mission was highly orchestrated. Thousands gathered at Spencer Street Station where the ADC to the Governor-General welcomed the delegates. They were taken to motor-cars which proceeded slowly up Collins Street, lined by 20,000 school children wearing French colours, to be greeted on the steps fronting Federal Parliament House. School children sang the *Marseillaise* while the delegates were taken to the Queen's Hall to be presented to the Governor-General. They met William Watt, the Acting Prime Minister, and then members of both Houses.

Photographs of the tightly packed crowds in a French weekly magazine (shown on page 41), which had taken over six weeks to arrive by sea, displayed this splendid welcome.[31] Australian papers were lavish in their praise and faithfully recounted the many federal and state dinners and vice-regal occasions held in the Mission's honour. The Federal government archives indicate careful planning at top level to allow the delegates to observe the wealth of Victoria's agricultural and industrial resources.[32]

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[30] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 1918, p. 7.

[31] *L'Illustration,* Paris, vol. 28 December 1918, p. 628. Bound edition.

[32] French Mission Victorian and Federal Arrangements, National Archives of Australia 1918/1221 Part 3.3.

At André Siegfried's request it was arranged for him to meet members of the Round Table movement, which was proposing to create a Federated Union of the Dominions of the British Empire. Corbière, the agricultural expert, was invited to visit timber resources and the wheat stacks at Brooklyn. After careful inspection he found that the condition of the wheat was highly satisfactory, but that there remained the problem of insufficient shipping.[33] He visited the freezing works of Anglis and C° and the wool and skin stores at Dalgety and C°. The Mission also visited Tasmania, and was based in Launceston, but André Siegfried stayed in Melbourne, completing reports on the work of the Mission to date.

**Supply of Wool to French Manufacturers**

A special train took the delegates to Geelong where they visited the Federal Woollen Mills. About forty appraisers, former buyers who were countrymen of Leclercq-Motte, were due to appraise the wool stored there. Leclercq's pleas for the first supplies of wool to be sent to the north of France once the free market returned were now meeting a sympathetic response from Australia's leaders. Prime Minister Hughes said 'I cannot speak for Australia but I can speak for myself […] that while I live and have any influence in the counsels of Australia, Germany will not get a single bale.'[34] William Watt, his deputy, stated at the Commonwealth dinner at Parliament House that if Australia could put France in the position previously held by Germany in respect of trade with Australia, she would do so with pleasure.

Several regional paper articles hinted at the intensity of discussions concerning this issue, rendered more complex by the commitment to the 1915 Imperial purchase of the entire wool clip, which was still in effect. 'The Mission conferred with Mr Higgins, Chairman of the Central Wool Committee and Mr Watt, respecting the supplies of wool to French Manufacturers.'[35] 'Mr Corbiere talked to Senator Russell who is in charge of arrangements for

[33] *Molong Express*, 26 October 1918, p. 5.

[34] *The Sydney Stock & Station Journal*, 1 October 1918, p. 4.

[35] *The Gippsland Mercury,* 15 October 1918, 3. For the role of John Higgins, see Griffin, 1983.

shipping wheat. Mr Leclercq-Motte had a long interview with Mr Watt and Sir John Higgins in reference to supplies of wool to French manufacturers.'[36]

Several weeks later the discussions continued when André Siegfried and J. T. Meadows Smith called on William Watt to discuss trade between the Commonwealth and France. Leclercq-Motte had an interview with the Central Wool Committee, followed by a meeting between André Siegfried and the Board of Trade. These significant meetings, a sequel to those in mid-October, were noted in the *Economic Relations* (29) but the outcomes were omitted. A later reading of the *Confidential Report* sent to the Quai d'Orsay will relate the conclusion of the story, which was withheld from the *Economic Relations.*

As one of the key secondary aims of the Mission was to thank Australia for her military effort in France, General Pau's military responsibility was now to honour soldiers who were returning to Australia. The wounded came first, when they were fit to travel. Prime Minister Hughes visiting the Australian troops in France in 1917 had promised home leave for those of the 1st contingent to Gallipoli, and preparations were made to give them a splendid welcome home. A military parade was held, a file six miles long, with General Pau holding his one hand raised, taking the salute. During his stay in Australia he was made an Honorary General in the Australian forces.

The archives of the National Government indicate how their very comprehensive itinerary planned even before the Mission's arrival in Australia needed to be re-scheduled. A letter from the Premier of Victoria to the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out that changes were needed to ensure the Mission's presence at the Melbourne Cup in November.

The splendid Cup Day in 1918 was recorded in detail. General Pau was driven from the city to the racecourse amid the cheers of onlookers, and was invited to lunch by the four racing clubs. They announced that they would give the General a cheque for £2,000 for the *Société d'Assistance Maternelle et Infantile,* presided by Mme la Générale Michel and Mme Poincaré, wife of the French President.[37] This was a well-supported cause in Melbourne, fired by the enthusiasm of Charlotte Crivelli.[38]

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[36] *The Northwestern Advocate* 15 October 1918, p. 3.

[37] *The Argus*, 6 November 1918, p. 8.

[38] Colin Nettelbeck, 'Charlottte Crivelli (1868–1956) Patriot and Fundraiser', in Berti and Barko, 2015, pp. 338–352.

A surprise announcement was made by J. T. Meadows Smith that Paul Thomsen, the member of the Mission who had accompanied the remains of Albert Métin from San Francisco to France, was again *en route* to Australia. He said that Thomsen was a most faithful worker for labour in France and would be accompanied by Adolphe Hodée. Their visit was fraternal in nature and had no political significance. They should arrive in Sydney in the last week in November, which was just after the departure of the other delegates.[39]

The next day a special train took the Mission to Ballarat for a day's visit, then took them further to Adelaide where Messrs Corbière and Mathieu visited the Kuitpo Forest, a plantation forest meeting the needs of the people of South Australia.[40] Corbière had expressed interest in timber on his arrival in Sydney, but the *Economic Relations* contains little information on trading activity in this area, except in respect of small amounts of bark for tanning. André Siegfried spoke to the Council of Adelaide University on the educational system in France.

When some of the Mission delegates were welcomed in the Town Hall at Broken Hill, a child made a speech congratulating them on the Armistice which had been signed on 11 November. Outside, however, workers wearing red ribbons gathered in the street to sing the *Red Flag,* in support of the Bolshevik movement in Petrograd.[41] The delegates visited several mines, then continued by train to Kalgoorlie, then Perth, now well aware of the vastness of the country. Their week's visit to Perth was an opportunity to visit forests and vineyards in different areas. It was also arranged for them to attend an Aboriginal corroboree.[42]

The Mission's days in Melbourne brought gestures of friendship. Watt invited the delegates to a parliamentary luncheon and spoke of greater understanding between the two nations as trading partners. General Pau was made an Honorary Vice-President of the Royal Order of St George. The Council of the University of Melbourne held a special meeting to confer the honorary degree of Litt. D. upon André Siegfried.

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[39] *The Register,* Adelaide 5 November 1918, p. 6.

[40] *The Daily Herald*, Adelaide, 12 November 1918, p. 3.

[41] *Bendigo Advertiser*, 16 November 2018, p. 4. St Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1914 and subsequently Leningrad, after the Revolution.

[42] *The Western Australian*, 28 November 1918, p. 6.

Plans for the return to France were complicated by a worsening shortage of ships. Raiders, torpedoes and mines had caused many losses of ships and crews. The growing pandemic of pneumonic influenza resulted in further quarantine delays. In Melbourne, General Pau met Louis Bricard, a director of the *Messageries Maritimes* (the French shipping line) whose mail service had been suspended during the war when the French Government had requisitioned their ships to convey troops. The company had lost most of its Australian fleet during the war. Bricard offered to assist the Mission in studying the resumption of improved communication between France and Australia and was appointed to the Mission as an honorary member. The company was to rebuild larger ships to provide a monthly service to Australia.[43]

Back in Sydney, General Pau and members of the Mission volunteered to be inoculated against this new influenza.[44] They were to travel to New Zealand, by an indirect way, again via Melbourne. The faithful Premier Holman and the Solicitor General farewelled them at Sydney's Central Railway Station. From Melbourne, William Watt said good-bye on the deck of the *Runic* which took them to New Zealand. An editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* summed up the situation:

> General Pau and his colleagues when they leave this state will take with them the knowledge that they have accomplished more than they set out to do […] The work is not yet over. The representatives of Labour have still to tell us of the development of trade unionism in the industrial and political life of France.

J. T. Meadows Smith, whose name persisted in all newspaper articles, remained behind to meet the French Labour delegates, Paul Thomsen and Adolphe Hodée, who were to arrive in Sydney about a week later on the *Makura.* They appeared to appreciate his presence as interpreter.

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[43] For a full account of French shipping to Australia in this period, see Aldrich 1990, p. 120 ff.

[44] 'French Mission inoculated', *Newcastle Sun,* 9 December 1918, p. 5.

**The Labour Mission**

Paul Thomsen was an artist wood carver and a union representative. He had seen two years of war service before being invalided out. Adolphe Hodée, a younger man, was a union representative. He had studied horticulture and held an important post in the Paris botanical school. He was the general secretary of the Union of Gardeners of the Département de la Seine. They were greeted by members of the State Government and were conveyed to the Carlton Hotel where they stayed during their short Sydney visit. They had arranged to meet with local union officials.

In an interview, Thomsen stated that he would make a comparison between social legislation in Australia and France. Representing every class and interest in France, he would convey fraternal greetings to the Australian people and Australian workers in particular. He explained that after returning to France from San Francisco with the remains of Albert Métin, they had tried in vain to catch up with the other delegates but had been impeded, firstly by enemy submarine activity, then by quarantine restrictions. They were forty days late.[45]

The delays allowed only eight days for the Queensland visit. They were welcomed to the Bundaberg Sugar Refinery. In Brisbane they were received very hospitably and had a long interview with the Treasurer, E. G. Theodore, interpreted by J. T. Meadows Smith. Speaking to *The Argus*, Thomsen claimed that there were signs that the interests of Labour and Capital were drawing closer together. The visitors did not support compulsory arbitration, which they thought did not favour the workers. They aimed to arrive at an amicable understanding rather than carry disputes to their extreme.

The welcome was cooler as the Mission travelled south, particularly after Thomsen addressed a meeting in the Newcastle Trades Hall. Here he had hoped to hear the views of Australian industrialists but few of these attended and another unruly element did. Their reaction became aggressive after Thomsen declared his mistrust of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. Although a Socialist, he believed that Bolshevism had thrown back international reform by 50 years. 'Thomsen was accused of being a traitor and an imperialist jingo', reported the Orange *Leader*. 'France was accused of participating in a capitalist war in a country that employed Chinese labour […] and desired

[45] *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 23 December 1918, p.7.

possession of Alsace Lorraine for capitalist purposes'.[46] The Returned Soldiers League of Newcastle passed a resolution stating that they viewed with disgust this reception given to the French Mission.

Thomsen and Hodée were invited to attend a meeting of the Sydney Labour Council at the Sydney Trades Hall, which was open to the public who crowded the meeting. Thomsen made a short speech, translated by Meadows Smith. It consisted of fraternal greetings from the workers of France, expressing their gratitude to the workers of Australia in their struggle for freedom from autocracy. This gentle message, translated by Meadows Smith, was not in the mood of the meeting, and he was heckled unmercifully. Hodée, who spoke little English, decided not to speak at all.

Other unions tried to make amends. Thomsen and Hodée were invited by the Federated Furniture Trades Society of Australasia to a 'smoke concert' at the Trades Hall, the term 'smoke' indicating that his would be an all male occasion. They toasted the honoured visitors, the furnishing workers of France and the Labour Movement of Australia.

The delegates then went to Victoria, telling the press that their Mission was concerned with fostering friendly relations between the workers of both countries. When asked about the two Bolshevik demonstrations in Sydney and Newcastle, Meadows Smith replied that 'they had not caused any concerns'.[47] They were entertained by members of the Federal Cabinet where William Watt, the Deputy Prime Minister, advised them not to take too serious a view of the 'ebullitions' of a small section of the community. A social evening organised by the Victorian Branch of the Furniture Workers Union was held at the Melbourne Trades Hall where a number of musical items were performed. A journey to Tasmania was undertaken to study labour conditions, for which they were shown over factories near Launceston. They also visited splendid forests, and sawmills. They planned to return to Melbourne on the1st February, but again they were victims of quarantine restrictions. They waited an extra four days for a passage from Hobart, saying that they had enjoyed the visit immensely.[48]

On their return to Melbourne they were invited to dinner by the State government. The Governor-General was shown over the Herbarium in the company of members of the French Mission. This was of direct relevance

[46] *The Leader*, Orange, 8 January 1919, p. 8.

[47] *The Age*, Melbourne, 21 February 1919, p. 5.

[48] *The World,* Hobart, 4 February 1919, 7.

to the horticultural work of Adolphe Hodée and hints at a vice-regal act of kindness in arranging this visit, to be shared with his guest. The three delegates from the Mission were invited to Brighton as guests of the Victorian Seedmen and Nurserymen Association where Meadows Smith expressed hopes that seed exchanges would take place.

The *Sunday Times* headed an article 'French Mission takes Final Leave', saying that the Mission visited the Governor-General to say good-bye and would leave the following Saturday.[49] They sailed from Melbourne on the *Themistocles* on 1st March.

**The *Economic Relations Report***

The official report of the mission named *Economic Relations between France and Australia* was written for the general public as a book of just over 100 pages and published in 1919 in both French and Australian[50] editions. It did not describe the Labour part of the Mission at all, except for the note in small print following its list of delegates: 'Owing to certain adverse circumstances, Messrs Thomsen and Hodée who were both asked to study labour questions did not reach Australia till the Mission had already left it.'

Its opening description of the country and its people is followed by a chapter expressing the Mission's deeply felt appreciation of the welcome given by both the leaders of the nation and its people, then by another chapter on Australia's military assistance during the war. The following 65 pages conscientiously summarise the bilateral economic relations in the years preceding the Great War, drawing chiefly from the Commonwealth Statistician's Year Books. As we have seen, the attention of the Mission was occupied with the important problem of the post-war distribution of the wool, on which issue delegates held several interviews with the Wool Committee and the Federal Government.

Ten further pages are devoted to pertinent ideas on how to strengthen relations between the two nations by diplomatic or commercial means, tourist bureaux, and closer press relations.

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[49] *The Sunday Times*, Sydney, 23 February 1919, 14.

[50] *The Economic Relations between France and Australia*, Paris, 1919.

The final chapter promotes André Siegfried's enlightened ideas on strengthening ties between Australian andFrench Universities—an idea slow to thrive but now a reality, and of mutual benefit to both nations.

**The *Confidential Report***

A similar report was presented to the Quai d'Orsay, augmented by confidential information on social laws, tariffs, and compulsory arbitration. It applauds social legislation in Australia, quickly proceeding to the question of Asian immigration, so deeply feared by Australians, then states: 'Protectionism and exclusionist immigration policy indulged the Australian worker but slowed the economic development of the nation.'[51]

The second part assesses Australia's production, as in the *Economic Relations*. These pages contain confidential information, conversations with ministers, sections on tariffs, and a chapter on the situation of the South Pacific. Fortunately for scholars, Robert Aldrich's article has dwelt on this information, as it is not readily available. It clarifies how Australia dealt with the Mission's request to Sir John Higgins, president of the Wool Committee, for a supply of wool to be sent to northern France to enable the textile industry to emerge from its devastation under German occupation. It gives a brief account of how this problem was solved.[52] The growers agreed to the resale of wool already sent to London, a redistribution after the expiry of the contract with Britain, then concurred to send immediately 40,000 bales stored in a warehouse, and possibly priced with a preferential tariff. This was a positive outcome for Louis Leclercq-Motte, for the million people of the North who would find employment, and also for the returning soldiers who would grow the wool.

Australia and New Caledonia are not far apart and France and Australia hoped to take advantage of their proximity to benefit trade. Higgins, who was also founder and principal of the Australian Metals Exchange, spoke of coal reserves which could be useful for the treatment of Caledonian nickel, hinting at a possibility of a preferential accord. William Watt wrote more frankly,

[51] Cited in Aldrich 1989, p. 298, translation by the author of the current article.

[52] Aldrich 1989, p. 299. His footnote 11 leads to the Annexe and the conversation between Siegfried and Watt on 12 October 1918 as recorded above by Australian regional newspapers.

seeking in turn to receive preferential treatment for the Commonwealth, particularly with the exploitation of minerals from the French Pacific islands. Australia was then fearful of Japanese implantation in these colonies.

The third part of the *Confidential Report* begins with Australia's foreign trade and criticises France's skills in marketing, before moving on to the question of tariffs. Despairing of Australia ever renouncing her inflexible opposition to free trade, Albert Métin had raised the question of 'preferred arrangements for trade' in the New York press on his way to Australia. André Siegfried had spoken to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, now seeking a privileged status as an ally, similar to the preferential tariff of the British Empire, which had existed since 1908. In Melbourne, meetings were held between members of the delegation, the Board of Trade and William Watt. The Deputy Prime Minister accepted the principle of a reciprocal commercial accord but the extension of the imperial tariff rate was refused to French merchandise.

The fourth section of this report deals with party politics and was excluded from the *Economic Relations.* The Nationalist opponents to the Labor party were in power at the time of the French visit. Some twenty pages were devoted to the contentious issue of conscription, now irrelevant after the Armistice. It discusses Australia's foreign relations, especially the sensitive questions of the South Pacific, in particular the condominium of the New Hebrides, now the nation of Vanuatu.

The final chapter, shared with *Economic Relations,* deals with ways of ameliorating French-Australian relations and in particular the establishment of a commercial agency in Sydney. Georges Bader, after completing his responsibilities as a member of the Mission, was appointed Commercial Attaché,[53] but in the depression years that followed, no great strides were made in trade.

## The *Thomsen Report*

Paul Thomsen's report on the Labour Mission is the subject of another article by Robert Aldrich (Aldrich 1994). The two Labour men's late-coming mission to Australia had seemed a melancholy affair, but Thomsen wrote a positive report for the Quai d'Orsay. While not diffused widely, it showed a

[53] *Courrier Australien*, 7 February 1924, p. 4.

profound interest in Australia which he thought could sustain a population of 200 million. Thomsen did not seem perturbed by the Bolshevists' ideas that shed more noise than light. His two chapters on Australian society draw attention to the customs barriers, protectionist measures and the anomalies of immigration. His companion, Hodée, would later represent France in other missions to Canada, India and the USA.

**Conclusion**

Bilateral negotiations became more complex in 1919 due to the active participation in the Treaty of Versailles of the Prime Minister, 'Billy' Hughes, who obtained for Australia the administration of German Pacific colonies south of the Equator, under a League of Nations mandate.

The French did not obtain more advantageous tariffs than several of their commercial rivals. Preferential Imperial tariffs persisted, giving an advantage to Australian exporters, while French imports into Australia remained low. The goodwill generated by the comradeship of the Western Front and by the amicable visit of the Mission could not be expected to remain at the same intensity. In the short term there were few tangible benefits apart from the shipment of wool sent to northern France. Possibly the most important and durable benefit of the Mission was the widespread interchange of ideas.

Throughout the twentieth century Australia became more receptive to outside opinion concerning issues such as selective immigration and protection of trade by tariffs. It raised awareness internationally that Australia, despite its small population, was a prosperous nation and had a role to play on the global stage. It was not till December 1936 that a trade agreement contained in an exchange of notes between Australia and France was reached, alas, too close to the outbreak of the Second World War to be effective.[54]

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the French business world, now more expert in modern marketing, took advantage of a freer Australian economy by establishing a variety of substantial enterprises in Australia (Garnaut 2002). A French President, François Hollande, visited Australia in 2014, the first French President to do so. He made a tour of

[54] www.comlaw/details/C1936A00079.

inspection of Thales, a French high technology Defence contractor—a far cry from the Wool Exchange.

In 2015, a delegation of French universities signed a memorandum of understanding between the University of Sydney and COMUE,[55] a cluster of French universities and research organisations, ninety-eight years after André Siegfried had recommended such an exchange in his visit to this University. In the twenty-first century, more visibly, large numbers of young French people on working visas have arrived to investigate possibilities for their own future in the antipodes. Large numbers of Australian tourists visit France, and their French counterparts are reciprocating with enthusiasm. Certainly the authors of the reports of the Mission had this vision, but were simply ahead of their time.

*Sydney*

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

COLIN NETTELBECK

## 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.

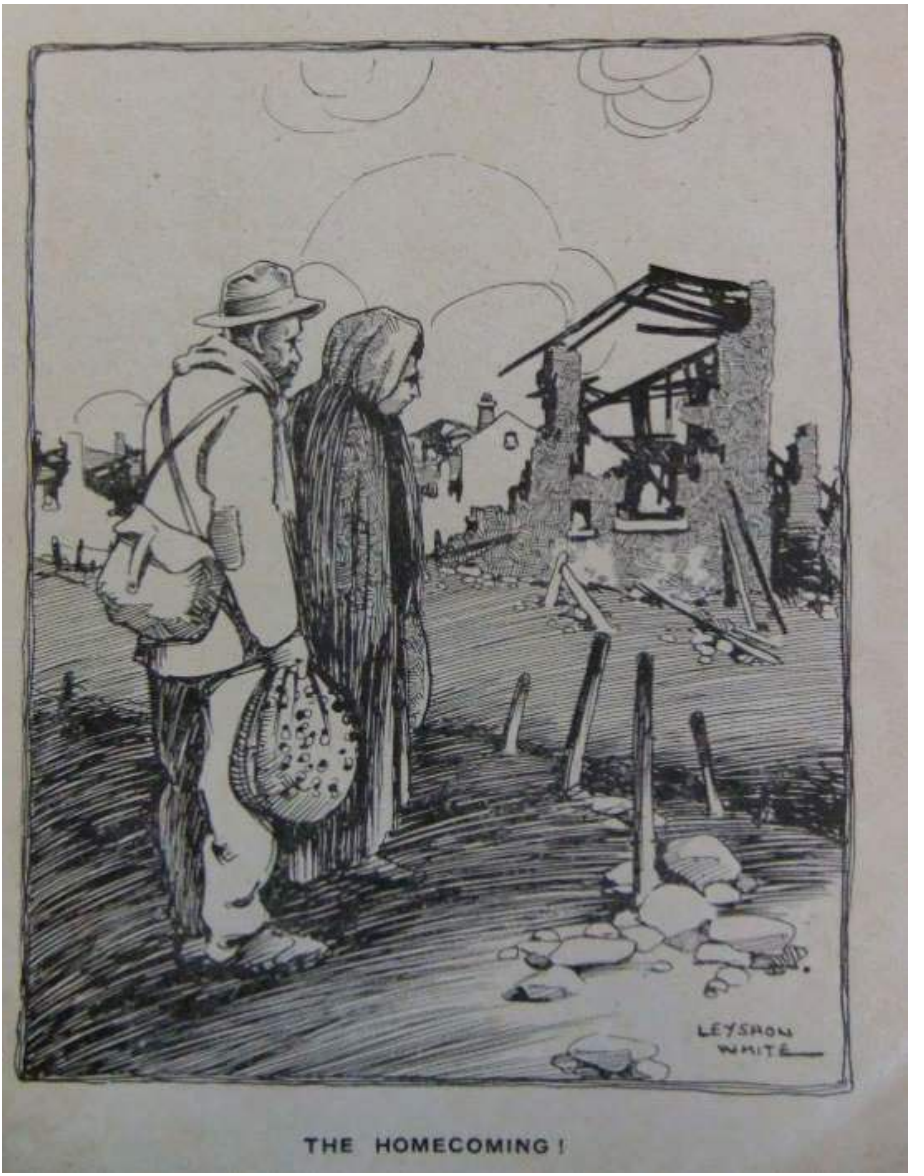
the opportunity to place six little caricatures as fillers (pp. 27, 35, 43, 44, 46, 49).

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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# AN AUSTRALIAN CHAPLAIN ON THE WESTERN FRONT, 1916

## EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY AND LETTERS OF THE REVEREND CHAPLAIN JOSEPH LUNDIE

JANE GILMOUR

> […] There is a little boy here about two years old [...] and we are great friends. I jabber French and English to him indiscriminately. The people speak a good deal of Flemish here so it is hard to make out their French as they go from one to the other. We manage somehow to rub along.
>
> I can hear an aeroplane[1] flying over us as I am writing this and the guns booming in the distance. Indeed I was wakened this morning about three o'clock by the continuous booming of heavy artillery, but I am beginning to get used to it. Of course we are still a good distance from the firing line.
>
> […] It is a treat to see the green fields and trees and the hawthorn hedges bursting into leaf after the ten weeks we had in the hot barren desert where we never saw anything but sand. We also appreciate the basin of water to wash in after our starvation allowance.

This letter, dated 10 April 1916, was written by my grandfather, the Reverend Joseph Lundie, who was a chaplain with the Third Infantry Brigade of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He was 46 years old at the time and was the Minister of St Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Toowoomba. He was attached to the 9th Battalion, which was made up of Queenslanders, some of whom he either knew personally or knew their families. This article explores the Australian experience of the First World War in France through a different lens, that of the chaplains who accompanied the AIF forces.

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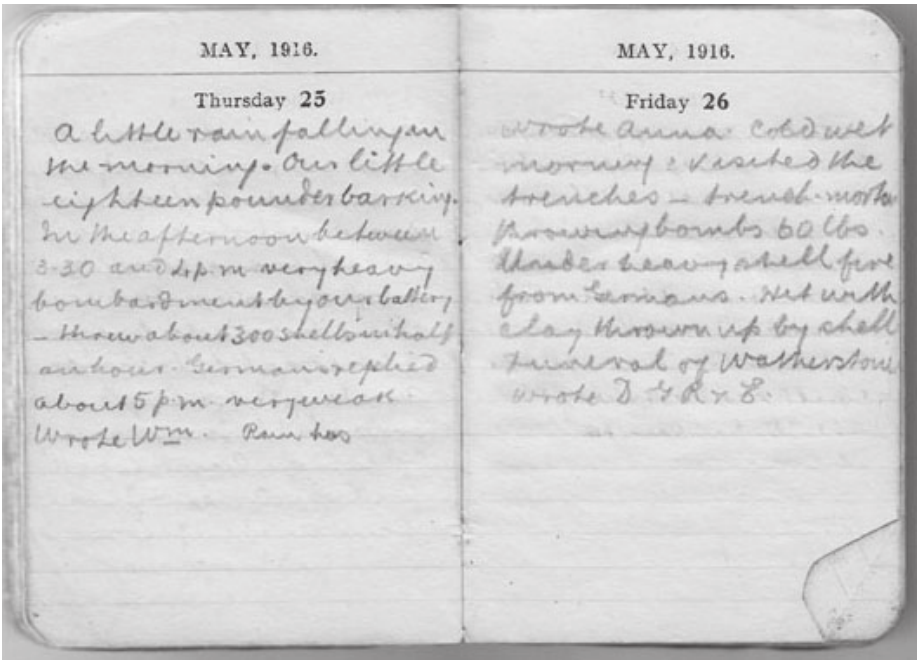
[1] Aeroplanes were used by both sides to 'photograph their opponents' trenches and back areas or to direct by wireless the fire of howitzers or heavy batteries upon targets hidden from artillery observers in their ordinary posts' (Bean 1941, 124).


MAY, 1916.

Thursday 25

A little rain falling in the morning. Our little eighteen pounder barking. In the afternoon between 3-30 and 4 p.m. very heavy bombardment by our battery – threw about 300 shells in half an hour. Germans replied about 5 p.m. very severe. Wrote Wm. Rum has

MAY, 1916.

Friday 26

Wrote Anna. Cold wet morning. Visited the trenches – trench mortar throwing bombs 60 lbs. Under heavy shell fire from Germans. Net with clay thrown up by shell. Funeral of Watherston. Wrote D & R x 8.

An extract from my Grandfather's pocket diary

I had known for some time that a few letters from my grandfather had been kept in the family. I was not aware of the existence of his little pocket diary. The diary, pictured above, measures only 10 cm by 7 cm. On some pages the writing is so small that it is quite hard to decipher. On other pages, the pencil writing has smudged and faded over the years. But mostly it is legible. The daily entries are necessarily brief, generally with some reference to the weather and then a summary of the activities of the day. They are both confronting and moving. There is constant reference to shelling, sniper fire and the booming of the big guns, to planes overhead, to deaths and funerals, but also to the little details of daily life.

The letters, on the other hand, are more fulsome, although they make little reference to the reality of the situation. There are only two letters from France, both dating from the first month of his time there, April 1916. In the first, he explains that the censorship is very strict and that they are hardly allowed to say anything in their letters home other than that they are well.

Captain Chaplain Joseph Lundie (standing)with two
other chaplains in Egypt before embarking for France

'We can only deal in generalities', he wrote. The letters do however, contain fascinating anecdotes about aspects of his life in France and the lives of the people around them.

I didn't know my grandfather; he died many years before I was born. My mother spoke rarely of him. I always had the impression from her that he was rather remote and that their life as a family was strict and very 'presbyterian'. The diary and letters suggest to me a different person—a warm and caring person who had volunteered to provide what succour and support he could to the young men who had enlisted, and who, in his letters home and his diary entries, expressed his deep care and love for his family, the young men on the front-line and the members of his parish back home.

As I read and transcribed the diary and letters, I referred constantly to maps, trying to identify the places in France where my grandfather had been based. I was interested to learn more about what had happened to the 9th Battalion. The diary entries were often cryptic, referring to events that had resulted in numbers of dead and injured or to senior army officers and I wanted to know more about these—what had really happened and what role these various people played. Bean's Official History as well as various other historical accounts became my research companions. I also decided that I would visit and see for myself the places which had been my grandfather's 'world' for those months when he was in France.

Joseph Lundie embarked in Melbourne on HMAT (His Majesty's Australian Transport) A64, *Demosthenes* on 16 July 1915, leaving behind his wife, Eva, and one-year old daughter (my aunt Margaret). He joined the Battalion in Egypt and then, as he states in his diary, was appointed on 8 January 1916 Chaplain to the Third Infantry Brigade of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). After several months in the desert, where the Battalion was recovering from the horrendous Gallipoli campaign and new reinforcements were being trained, they were transferred to France, landing in Marseille on 2 April. From Marseille, they travelled by train to their destination in northern France. As they travelled north along the Rhône Valley, the landscape was a continuing delight. 'Lovely country, trees green, fruit trees in blossom, hills terraced with vines', he wrote. They passed through Vienne, Macon, Dijon, then on to Saint-Cyr, St Germain-sur-Oise, Boulogne and Calais before turning back east to St Omer.

Three days after leaving Marseille, they de-trained at Godeswaersvelde and marched about 10 km to Merris, not far from Armentières. They

were stationed in what was known as 'the nursery'. The 3rd Brigade was part of the 1st Division which, together with the 2nd Division, made up 1 ANZAC on the Western Front. 2 ANZAC arrived on the Front three months later (Bean 1941, 299).

The 'nursery' was the Fleurbaix/Bois-Grenier section of the Front, a 15 km section that stretched from the River Lys, past Armentières to a point opposite Sugarloaf, a German-held strongpoint that jutted forward from their line and rose slightly above the surrounding landscape, near the village of Fromelles. The area had seen no serious fighting for a year and the British Expeditionary Forces used it as a 'nursery' where new formations could be introduced to trench warfare (Pedersen 2012, xxv).

For the first couple of weeks the Brigade was behind the front-line. Diary entries record the daily routine of buying goods for the mess, visiting the various billets where the men were housed and the occasional one-off event such as the distribution of metal helmets and training sessions for gas attacks.

Chaplain Lundie was interested to observe that the local people seemed to be getting on with their lives much as though the war wasn't happening right around them. 'It is strange to see the farmers working away in their fields as if there was no war going on', he wrote in one letter. 'They must be making a lot of money as we pay big prices for milk, butter, eggs and sometimes fowls. We paid 10 shillings[2] for a pair of fowls for yesterday's dinner and it was worth it as a change from our normal fare'.[3] His diary entries contained many observations that were not included in letters home—the funeral of a child, the destruction of the churches and other buildings in the villages, the balloons and aeroplanes they saw regularly, the constant cold and wet and the muddy roads.

On 18 April, they left for the trenches—a ten-mile walk over muddy roads and in cold sleet.

[2] The equivalent of $47 in today's money, using the RBA's currency converter.

[3] Letter dated 10 April 1916.

> Passed Sailly-sur-la-Lys, with its church all knocked about with shells and burned. Bivouacked in room riddled with bullets—looking glass, walls, door, windows—all smashed. At Le Doulieu, the church had been burned by the Germans before they left.

The following day they rose at 4 am and left at 4.30 for Rouge de Bout[4], arriving at 5.30 am, where the 9th Battalion took over billets in farmhouses and cottages along the surrounding lanes. They were about two miles from the front line at this point. 'Guns firing all around us', he wrote. 'Went for a walk, saw the weathercock house all riddled—roof nearly all shattered. 18 shells fell the day before near the weathercock …'[5]

> 20 April. Woke about 6 am by shellfire from our guns. [...] German shelling began about 1 pm. C Company lost 25-50 men. Boy with leg shattered—bravery. Burial at 9.30 pm. Had to wait until near midnight—machine guns and rifle fire all round the line and plane lights. Very sad day. Father J and I buried men in same grave.

What had happened on that day? How had they lost so many men when they weren't even at the front? The official record for that day confirmed that one officer, Lieutenant A. E. Fothergill, and twenty-four men had been killed and one medical officer and forty-eight others wounded (Bean 1941, 139). They had been caught by shellfire behind the lines. Both sides used this practice of shelling behind the lines. A number of men had taken shelter in a building, which had taken the full brunt of the shelling. Chaplain Lundie recorded, on the last pages of his little diary, the names of all those buried, together with their burial place—some of them in the common grave in what was called the 13th London cemetery and then others on the two following days in the

[4] In spite of Rouge de Bout being referred to by Bean in his official history, it has not been possible to locate this place name on any current map.

[5] Weather vanes were important as they indicated the direction of the wind and therefore the likelihood—or not—of gas attack.

Merville and Sailly cemeteries. The chaplains were required to provide detailed reports to the authorities in London so that the graves could be identified in the future.

> 21 April. [...] Heavy shell-fire all round us—see them bursting about 200 yards away. 101 shells fell in one place in two hours. Dust of red tiles like smoke. Marched out in pouring rain. Reached billets quite soaked and very cold. 22 April. Still raining and very cold. Went to C Company to have a chat with the men. Rode to cemetery to bury men. Went in motor to Merville where funerals took place. Saw some of our boys in the hospital. [...].
>
> 23 April (Sunday). Parade service in farm. Good attendance. Memorial service for Anzac men. Beautiful sunshine. [...] Rode on cycle to Sailly for funeral of Kent. Plenty of aeroplanes.
>
> 24 April. Beautiful morning. Sat outside writing letters. Censored letters all afternoon. Went for a walk with Dr Gibson. Twilight until eight o'clock, daybreak about 4 am.

A regular task for chaplains was censoring letters. It was critical that none of the men's letters home provided any details that might have been of use to the enemy. Indeed his own letters home were headed 'somewhere in northern France' and the place names in his diary are just initialised.

On the 25 April, Anzac Day, there was a special parade of the battalion, which was addressed by Brigadier MacLagan and General Plumer. MacLagan was the Commanding Officer of the Third Brigade. He had led the Brigade at Gallipoli. General Herbert Plumer was a British military man who was appointed Commanding Officer of the Second Army in 1915. He was a meticulous planner, cautious and popular among his men, even if he was not liked by Haig, the Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Forces.[6]

Chaplain Lundie records the presence of other top military brass—Major-General Walker and General White. Walker, like Plumer, was a British military man, who was appointed Commander of the First Australian Division from 1916 to May 1918. General Cyril Brudenell White was Chief of Staff to Sir William Birdwood who was Commander of the AIF from October 1915 to March 1918.

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[6] www.firstworldwar.com/bio/plumer.htm, accessed March 2015.

Just two days later, on 27 April, the troops were reviewed by Sir Douglas Haig. He stopped and spoke to Chaplain Lundie, asking him if he had been at Gallipoli. He then said to him that they were both doing the same thing—'striving to teach the men grit and endurance'. My grandfather seemed impressed by Haig. A 'strong-looking character', he wrote, who 'knows his job'. History has, of course, judged Haig less kindly than my grandfather did after his brief meeting with him.

On 3 May, the Battalion moved up to the front line. They were just a mile back from the firing line. With the Battalion now in the front line, diary entries record visits to the trenches, to the different companies and nearby battalions, often in the company of medical officers or another chaplain, services held, guns roaring and the continual presence of planes overhead. Aeroplane duels were a regular occurrence and on 4 May, Chaplain Lundie saw one hit nearby and two German planes brought down. There were also trips to the hospital located in Estaires to visit the injured. To get there he would either walk or go by bicycle, crossing the Lys river by barge. On one such visit, a 'plane dropped two bombs, one fell 30–40 yards from me in a ploughed field. Clouds very low and could hear sharp whistle before it fell'.

> 21 May (Sunday). At 12.30 am M.O.[7] called to trenches. Went with him. Hamilton badly injured with bomb. Returned under fire at 4 am. Had services with platoons in reserve. Buried Private Dalton, a sniper spattering bullets around our boots.
>
> 22 May. Buried (name illegible), shot through the head. Wrote Mrs Hamilton about her husband's wounds. Heavy bombardment by our guns. Germans replying. [...] Swallows' nest in Headquarters' billet and sparrows' nest in our dining room.

Death was all around them, but the little details of nature—nests heralding spring and new life—provided welcome relief from the relentless shelling and firing and the tragedy of lost lives, the funerals and the correspondence with parents or wives.

One day, when he visited the trenches, he was able to see the German trenches. No-man's land was anything from 70 to 450 metres wide in this area. The trenches were not really dug into the ground. The water table was

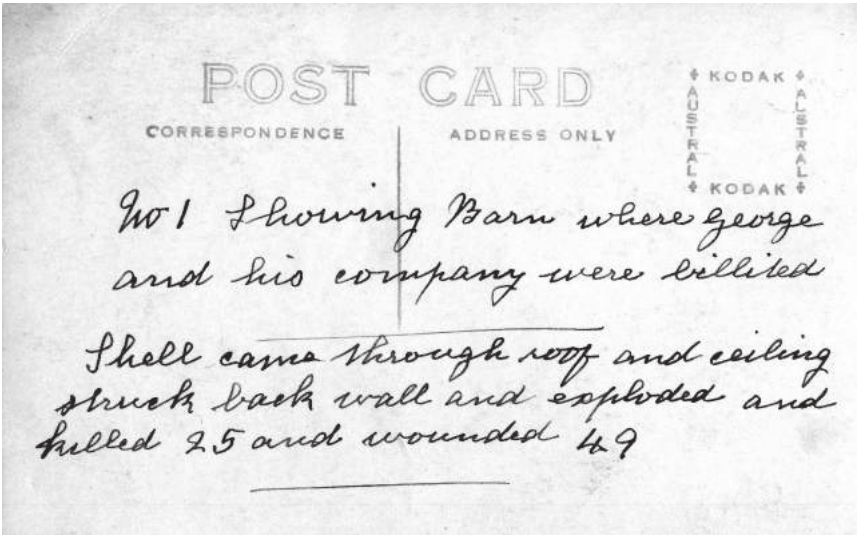
[7] Medical Officer.

On the left is a photograph of the remains of the shelled barn at Cordonnerie Farm where George and his men were billeted. Twenty five men lost their lives and 49 were wounded, during the attack by the Germans. A postcard describing the events is on page 87.

too high to allow this to happen. So the front line was really a breastwork[8] of earth-filled sandbags. In this area the support line was generally 70–90 metres back, supposedly far enough back to prevent both lines being bombarded simultaneously. The reserve line was then another 450 metres behind that. Communication trenches, often called 'avenues', spaced about 230 metres apart, led to the front-line system (Pedersen 2012, 1).

Battalion headquarters were generally in sandbag shelters 600–800 metres back from the front line on one of the main avenues of communication. The battalion commander, senior major, adjutant, medical officer, signal and intelligence officers, as well as runners were quartered there. Sometimes the

[8] Above-ground trenches.




chaplains were quartered there, other times with the brigade staff (Bean 1941, 80). From his diary entries, it would seem that Chaplain Lundie was quartered with the battalion staff. Each brigade had four chaplains: two Anglicans, one Catholic and one other Protestant denomination. Although chaplains were generally attached to a battalion, as Joseph Lundie was to the Ninth, they were expected to administer to all their denominational adherents across the brigade (Gladwin 2013, 34).

Initially on the Western Front, chaplains were not allowed 'up the line'. This was, however, relaxed when the commanders recognised the value of the chaplains in sustaining the morale of the soldiers when they were in the front line. Clearly, Chaplain Lundie was not prevented from going forward and indeed did so regularly.

On Monday 29 May, the doctor was called to the trenches at 1 am. 'Walker shot through the thigh', reads the diary. They waited for 'stand to' and then returned at 4 am. In the trenches 'stand to arms' was just before dawn; after an hour the order to 'stand-down' was given. Similarly at dusk.

On 30 May, Chaplain Lundie visited the trenches of B and C companies, returning after 1 pm.

> Shelling from Germans began before reached dug-out and continued for 2 hours. At 8 pm tremendous artillery bombardment

> on extreme right of 11th Battalion. Shells bursting over parapets. Looked like general attack. A German raiding party came over but driven back by 10 pm. Very few casualties. Townson killed by machine gun at parapet.

In fact on that day, the 9th and 11th Battalions lost 131 men when the Germans struck at Cordonnerie Farm, 3 km from Bridoux. The 9th Battalion's losses were small compared with those of the 11th, which lost 111 killed or wounded and six unaccounted for (Pedersen 2012, 3 and Bean 1941, 212).

They awoke to a hazy morning the following day with a taube[9] overhead that was driven away by allied forces' planes. Chaplain Lundie buried Townson in Rue-du-Bois cemetery and visited the trenches of C and D companies. 'Wrote a short note to Eva and enclosed some buttercups and daisies. Shells falling very near our billet', he recorded.

The diary entries for the first week of June continue in a similar vein. The references to heavy shelling, casualties and funerals were constant. There were occasional 'quiet' days, but for the most part, the shelling and artillery attacks rarely let up. Planes were a permanent presence and from time to time there were gas attacks. He regularly visited the troops in the trenches and dug-outs of the men, recording some of the names the troops had given them: 'Home for Waifs and Strays', 'Abode of Rats', 'The Vicarage', 'Rest of the Weary'.

On 6 June, they were moved back to the reserve line to give the men a rest. They were stationed at Rouge de Bout. 'Quiet out here after the firing line', he wrote. But there was no escape from the shelling and firing. As he went to the Rue-du-Bois cemetery at 10 pm one night, to bury a man, there were bullets whizzing overhead. Shells fell in the nearby fields and bullets hit the road, as he rode around the billets. Gas alarms during the night meant getting up and dressed with gas mask on. On one night the gas passed about half a mile below them. 'Leaves of pea wilted by gas, one child poisoned, several people sick', he wrote.

Deaths of men he knew were always recorded in his diary and on 19 June it was Captain Arthur Warren, formerly a school teacher in Ipswich, who had been shot dead in no-man's land, when he was returning from a preliminary patrol prior to a major raid (Harvey 1941, 115). Two days later

[9] A taube was a German monoplane, used primarily for observation purposes.

Chaplain Lundie wrote to Captain Warren's mother, as he had to so many others. The funerals were becoming more frequent.

But as June was coming to an end, so too was his posting. He was to be relieved and had leave to go to England and Ireland (where he had been born and educated) and thence to return to Australia. He visited various companies to say farewell and then on his last Sunday in France, he rode out to A Company where he held a service. The Captain gave three cheers for the 'padre'.

On 26 June, Chaplain Lundie left Rouge de Bout at 3 am and was driven to Steenwerck. From there he took the train to Boulogne and then crossed the Channel—'a calm crossing accompanied by a destroyer'.

His had not been a long tour of duty. He was relieved to be leaving, but would have been sad to have been leaving behind his 'Toowoomba boys', knowing what lay ahead for them. In one letter home he asked about 'the St Stephen's folk [his parish in Toowoomba].

> Tell them I often think of them and pray for them as I am sure they do for me and all our dear lads. Glad to see about the opening of the Honour Board. I am afraid a good many of them will never see Toowoomba again as the fighting here is going to be very severe' (letter of 10 April 1916).

Apart from this one reference, his letters focussed on the positive. The trees were covered in blossom, the fields were full of daisies and yellow dandelion flowers and the birds were singing peacefully, he wrote, but above it all he could hear the 'growling of the cannon'. It reminds one of the old hymn, 'where every prospect is pleasing and only man is vile' (letter of 28 April 1916).

Joseph Lundie arrived back in Australia on board *The Marathon*, on 24 September 1916. He had been away for 15 months. For those he left behind in France, the ensuing months and years were to take a devastating toll. Between April and June, the months when he had been with them, the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions—the 9th Battalion was part of the 1st Division—had suffered 2,384 casualties. By the latter part of this period, the 'nursery' had become bloody. The troops were conducting regular raids at night to try to divert attention from the build-up of troops further south on the Somme.

Chaplain Lundie's diary, with its record of constant sniping, artillery fire and shelling bombardments, is corroborated by official records (Bean 1941, 284).

In early July, the 9th Battalion was transferred to Pozières, where it took part in the Somme offensive. This Anglo-French offensive had been in planning for some time. It was an attack on a 35-kilometre front by thirteen British and French divisions operating north and south of the Somme River. The attack began on 1 July 1916 and, while meeting with considerable success in the southern region, was a comparative failure in the portion of the line opposite Bapaume, a town which was one of the final objectives.

By successive attacks, however, the British advanced their line to a position in front of Pozières, a village on the Albert–Bapaume road, on a height commanding the surrounding country in all directions. The next step was to take Pozières which, together with Thiepval to its north-west, was holding up the left flank of the allied advance towards Bapaume. Three attempts to capture the village had failed and the 1st Australian Division was selected for a further attempt, while the British divisions made an advance on either flank (Case Study, The Scrivener Family, Australian War Memorial website).

Within just a few days, the Battalion lost seventeen officers and 299 men. The entire 1st Division sustained 5,285 casualties (Bean 1941, 593). Pozières[10] had been obliterated. As the men of the 1st Division left the battlefield, to be replaced by the 2nd Division, they 'looked like men who had been in Hell', wrote Sergeant Edgar Rule of the 14th Battalion. 'Each man looked drawn and haggard, and so dazed they seemed to be walking in a dream, and their eyes looked glassy and starey.' (Quoted by Bean 1941, 599). The men of the 9th Battalion had never experienced an artillery barrage like this.

I visited the Western Front in September 2014, going to the places my grandfather mentioned in his diary. It is a flat featureless landscape. The

[10] In 1922, Prime Minister Hughes suggested that Brisbane 'adopt' Pozières. Perhaps the reason this did not proceed was there was already a connection with Pozières in Queensland, with one of the soldier settlements on the Darling Downs named after Pozières, along a railway line that was called the Amiens line, that linked a small number of rural districts all named after battle sites in France—Bullecourt, Bapaume, Messine and others. The railway line was opened by Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1920.

Church of St Vaast at Sailly, which my grandfather had seen all 'knocked about with shells and burned', has been rebuilt, like most of the towns and villages throughout this area. From Sailly we went on to Merville, which had been a billeting and hospital centre. There is a large cemetery in Merville and a number of the headstones carried the Australian badge of the rising sun. Amongst them were several men who had been with the 9th Battalion and who had died in April/May 1916. Some of these would have been originally buried by my grandfather.

As we continued along the narrow roads through this flat farming landscape towards Fromelles, it was easy to see how difficult and dangerous trench warfare would have been in this environment. There were ditches running alongside the roads to take the water run-off from the fields. There was no shelter other than that offered by trees. The salient known as Sugarloaf near Fromelles was nothing more than a rise of a few metres above the surrounding flatness. The battle of Fromelles, which took place here, on 19 July 1916, was the worst military disaster Australia has ever suffered. The Fifth Division had arrived in France in May, and had taken over this part of the line after the First Division left. It suffered 5,533 casualties, almost 2,000 of them killed in action, for not an inch of land gained. From their position on slightly higher ground and their machine gun emplacements in the Sugarloaf salient, the Germans were able to direct flanking fire and grazing fire (where the fire does not rise above the height of a standing man) against the advancing Australian and British troops. The following day, after the attack had been called off, no-man's land, where we were now standing, was a scene of unspeakable horror, mutilated bodies lying everywhere. One witness described the scene in the Australian line afterwards as worse than 'the stock of a thousand butcher-shops' (Pedersen 2008).

We visited Rue Pétillon cemeteries and VC Corner cemeteries, both smaller than the cemetery at Merville. This landscape, with its criss-crossing of narrow departmental roads, is itself a cemetery, said our guide. It was fought over throughout the Great War and whilst there are many thousands of soldiers buried in cemeteries and common graves, there are equally many thousands more buried in the fields where they fell. The ties that bind Australia and France are bathed in the blood of those thousands of soldiers who died here on the Western Front.

On his return from the Front my grandfather spoke publicly about the need for reinforcements to be sent to the Front. The numbers of dead

and wounded were beginning to tell on morale back home and there was a serious decline in the number of volunteers. The Labor Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, realised that volunteers were not going to fulfil the numbers required to maintain the Australian divisions. Australia's Defence Act of 1903 and 1904 already provided for men between 18 and 60 to be called up in time of war and in 1911 compulsory military training was introduced for all. However, these men could not be required to serve overseas. Hughes had visited the Western Front and believed that it was a moral duty for all eligible men to serve. He was also under pressure from the British Government to maintain five divisions overseas; to do so Australia needed 5,000 men to sign up each month.

Hughes knew he didn't have the numbers in the Senate to pass an amendment to the Defence Act and so he decided to take the issue to the people in a referendum. The issue was bitterly contested. Most of Hughes' own Labor Party colleagues opposed conscription. This was an issue which divided Australian society on religious, political and social lines. There was a strong peace movement in Australia and many in the trade union movement felt that this was a war of capitalist interests. Others objected on the grounds that it was England's war, not Australia's. The fighting soldiers themselves had mixed feelings about conscription: some didn't want to be joined by those who were 'lily-livered', others thought of their brothers and others at home whom they didn't wish to draw in. Many took the line that they would not compel men to endure what they had been through themselves, whilst others believed that 'it was unfair that shirkers were not bearing their fair share' (Henderson 1919, 84; Ergo State Library of Victoria).

'Why all this talk about conscription', the Reverend Lundie asked. 'Are you going to leave those fellows in the lurch? Are you going to raise the white flag?' He talked about how lucky Australia was not to have fighting on our soil and spoke of the ruined homes and villages he had seen in France, but that did not mean we should not be prepared to be in this war 'right to the bitter end, no matter how long it will take. [...] If you could only see what I have seen you would have the same feeling as I have. We are going to win, but remember that it is going to be a hard fight and it will be a long fight and that it will be a costly fight' (*Brisbane Courier,* 19 October 1916).

The referendum was held on 28 October and the proposal was narrowly defeated, 51% to 49%, partly because it was rejected by a majority of serving soldiers. The issue split the nation, including the Labor Party, and

Hughes took his supporters to join with the Opposition in a new break-away party, the Nationalist Party. The following year, as enlistments continued to decline, and Britain was asking for a sixth Australian division, Hughes put a modified proposal to the people. Once again, the issue divided the nation and it was defeated, this time by a slightly larger majority than in the previous year. Again, most of the troops voted against conscription.[11]

My grandfather must have been disappointed that the lack of volunteers had meant that conscription was deemed necessary to raise the numbers of troops. In urging people to vote in favour of it, he drew on his sense of fairness and obligation to the men who were there—and indeed to the memory of those who had already lost their lives. To him, this was a moral, not political, issue.

The Reverend Captain Joseph Lundie had been one of some 414 clergymen who had volunteered to accompany Australian troops into battle in this war, and one of the 70 Presbyterian ministers to have done so. The average age of the chaplains was between 30 and 40 (Gladwin 2013, 34–35). My grandfather was nearly 46 when he returned from his tour of duty, only two years short of the age limit for chaplains imposed by the army. Many chaplains served only for a year, but those who served longer believed it was important to do so as the effectiveness of a chaplain among the troops was cumulative and depended on how much time he spent with them (Report from Senior Chaplain Miles, AWM, cited in Gladwin 2013, 74).

In 1919, the Reverend Lundie was appointed Minister of the Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, NSW. In his first sermon there, he drew on his experience of the war when he spoke of the compassionate God. 'Thousands of Australians had gone into the valley of death, but they did not suffer alone', he said. This message of a compassionate religion, of comradeship and communion, is what had made a difference to the troops in the field.

The role of the chaplains must never have been easy. They were essentially men of peace, but were part of a military machine that was relentlessly killing and maiming people. The horror of what was happening did not make Chaplain Lundie waver in his faith; it remained a source of strength and he did his best to share this with the men around him. The Anglican chaplain

[11] State Library of NSW, https://ww1.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/australias-conscription-debate.

Reverend Kenneth Henderson wrote about the chaplains' role when tending to the wounded and dying in the casualty clearing stations and the hospitals:

> We do all we can to catch their scattered senses as they hurry past on their lonely journey: to awaken them to the love of God that is calling them [...]. (Henderson 1919, 39)

Another chaplain, Reverend Gerard Tucker, who later went on to establish the Brotherhood of St Laurence, wrote in his letters home to his mother of his experience in the casualty clearing stations, following the battle of Messine in June 1917:

> Life is one long round of visiting the dying and burying the dead—no time even to write to the mourners; that will come later. Our success has been great, but all success means sacrifice. We see the sacrifice here, but oh, the heroism. (Tucker 1919, 141)

Historian Bill Gammage studied the diaries and letters of some 1000 Australians who fought in the Great War. He noted in his preface to *The Broken Years* that there were three things the diggers did not write about: religion, politics and sex, leading him to conclude that:

> […] the average Australian soldier was not religious. He was not a keen churchman: he avoided church parades, or if he could not avoid them he tended to show sudden enthusiasm for whichever denomination worshipped within easy marching distance. He distrusted chaplains, and sometimes detested them, because he was an Australian, and because they were officers, enjoying the privileges of leaders but not the concomitant risks and responsibilities of battle. (Gammage 2010, xv)

Other evidence suggests, however, that there was a broad base of religion among the men serving in the AIF. Many of them had amongst their personal effects Bibles, hymn books, prayer books and other religious material (Gladwin 2013, 77). And whilst they inevitably grew indifferent to the sight of death on the battlefield—it was the only way they could continue to function—they

were never indifferent to the burial of the dead, revealing 'a deep instinct that burial made some sort of spiritual difference' (Henderson 1919, 78-80).

The chaplain's role was essentially one of spiritual succour. Sectarianism had no place on the battlefield, as Chaplain Lundie himself wrote in one of his letters when he spoke of the futility of some chaplains insisting on being able to hold their own denominational services. There was no place for evangelical enthusiasm and the battlefield was no place for recruiting souls. 'The padre', wrote Kenneth Henderson, Chaplain of the 12th Infantry Brigade, 'being the only unofficial element in a very official world, is used as a sympathetic medium by all sorts and conditions of men'.

My grandfather's diary provides a link across almost one hundred years to the daily life of a man of faith who, unlike the serving men, did not have to 'go over the top' but who shared so many of the other daily experiences of the troops— the cold and the mud, the constant falling of shells and snipers' bullets, the insidious gas attacks, the horror of mangled bodies and pitiless death. The chaplains knew the unspeakable cost of this trench warfare, as they buried the dead night after night and wrote to the bereaved families back home. For them the war was not about glory or honour, nor was it about fighting for country or the Empire. Not once did Chaplain Lundie mention these terms in either his diary or his letters. It was, as he said himself on his return to Brisbane, about fighting for 'peace with righteousness' (*Brisbane Courier*, 1916). The role of the chaplains was to serve as a link, along with the nurses, 'between the orderly civilised world of picnics, country walks, clean sheets and spirituality and the irrational debilitating world of fear, suffering, death and destruction' (Linder 2000,140).

*Melbourne*

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# ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN DIGGERS AND *POILUS*: FINDING THE HISTORY IN FAMILY HISTORY

PAULINE GEORGELIN

This article investigates the intersection between family history and its wider context. It aims to explore aspects of the interactions between French and Australian soldiers during the First World War. It also tells the story of my grandfather Joseph Georgelin, born in France, who moved to the Channel Islands, then to Australia, and then returned to France as a digger. Through the prism of family history research, I aim to explore how the story of one individual, my grandfather, is linked to the broader history of the war. Moreover, this exploration has led to the discovery of stories of great bravery, friendship and cooperation between the diggers and their French counterparts, the *poilus*, emblematic of the broader story of French-Australian relations during this period. This personal link to the history of the AIF in France led to a wider investigation of the Australians' experiences there and in particular the interactions between Australian and French soldiers in 1918. A continuing process, the attempt to discover details about the personal story has led to the discovery of the more public one. Ziino (2015, 126) has described this as the 'dialectical relationship between public and family stories of the war, as each continually constitutes the other.' I will outline the background to my family history research and the questions which this inspired. After giving some details and historical context of my grandfather's story, I will focus on the period of April to July 1918 and the stories of interactions between *poilus* and diggers at that time. Finally I will reflect on some further experiences of one 'Frenchman in the AIF'.

## The family history context

In recent years, the approaching centenary of the First World War rekindled my long-held interest in family history and I found myself, along with thousands of other Australians, delving back into our personal and collective histories and investigating our links with this period which was so significant in Australian and world history. The project was also inspired by two other events: firstly inheriting a box of family archives from my mother; and secondly a family trip to France in 2010 which included retracing my

grandfather's steps on the Western Front. However, as I continued to delve into the story, more questions emerged. Unfortunately my grandfather left no diary, and as far as I can tell, no letters. So I began searching for missing pieces of the puzzle from other sources. Our precious family copy of *The History of the 14th Battalion* (Wanliss 1929), published in the decade after the war, was a good starting point.[1] The growing wealth of archival material being digitised and accessible on-line, both in Australia and France, provided further clues to the story.

The investigation thus led me to explore wider topics. My grandfather's army mate had reminisced about him to me when I was young. How his nickname was 'Froggy', how useful he was as an interpreter when they had time off in the French villages. Being his mate brought benefits when communicating with the locals! He also earned extra pay on the sea voyage home, after the war, as a French instructor in the shipboard education program. Starting with just the few known facts and anecdotes, I decided to investigate these elements of my grandfather's story.

Joseph's time on the Western Front coincided with a period when a significant amount of contact between the French and Australians was occurring. In early 1918, about 120,000 Australians were in France and Belgium (Burness 2008). Personal accounts describe the diggers' interactions with their French comrades as the Australians moved south to the Somme in the spring of 1918. How did his experience correspond with such accounts? As a French Australian, did 'having a foot in both camps', contribute to the relationships that developed between French and Australian soldiers? Was being a French speaker in the AIF a common or an unusual thing? I also wondered if the French Government knew where he was. Why didn't he join the French Army, and should he have done so? There was correspondence in his military records which shows that the French Consulate was trying to locate him after the war, but no indication as to why.

Another aspect of Joseph's story comes from his family's experiences. He had two cousins serving in the French army, Pierre and René Georgelin. Pierre was killed in action in 1915 but René survived and had a family. On my first trip to France I met René's widow, Caroline, and she told me Joseph and René had met while they were both serving on the Western Front. Joseph

[1] This unit diary, long out of print, has recently been digitised by the State Library of Victoria and is accessible online at http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/128509.

had told his cousin that Australia was a great place and he should consider migrating there. Years later, I read again the poignant and sobering message written on the back of René's photo 'My portrait on my return from hell, from the front if you prefer.'[2] The photo fascinated me, and I wondered where and how this meeting would have taken place, given the difficulties of communication and great movements of men to and from different areas. Was it planned or a chance meeting? How much opportunity was there for French and Australian soldiers to meet each other, and what would have been the nature of such encounters? This question led me to investigate the significant period in 1918 when French and Australian soldiers were in fact fighting alongside each other.

Some very good existing studies explore the interactions between the Aussies and the French civilians. In 2012, Ross Coulthart published *The Lost Diggers*, inspired by the discovery of a treasure trove of photographic plates in a farmhouse in Vignacourt.[3] Gibson's *Behind the Front* (2014) examines the experiences of the British Army in France and Belgium and both positive and negative interactions with the local populations. Although written from the broader perspective of the British Army, it also includes some anecdotes which relate to the AIF's experiences, as well as those of the Canadians and New Zealanders.

Greenhalgh (2005) gives an extensive and informative account of the interactions on the government and command level and the evolution and development of the Franco-British Coalition. *Victory through Coalition* details the processes, politics and communications between the British and French leaders necessary for the successful functioning of this coalition. However, for the reasons outlined above it was the more personal interactions between the French and Australian soldiers which interested me, and I wanted to find out how this co-operation was experienced by the front-line Australian and French soldiers as they fought side-by-side. While researching I discovered various photos and documents dating from April, May and June 1918 which refer to the 'International Posts', zones of liaison between the French and Australian armies. I began investigating the records relating to both the French

[2] Mon portrait à mon retour de l'enfer, du front si tu aime [sic] mieux.

[3] The photographs have been touring the country since 5th April 2014 in an exhibition sponsored by the Australian War Memorial. See https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/remember-me/.

and Australian units who were there. The comments and opinions expressed in French unit diaries and histories show that the French soldiers, by this time, were distinguishing *les Australiens* among the British and were particularly appreciative of their presence. Various Australian units were involved in this period of French-Australian co-operation, including my grandfather's unit, and their diaries include many comments about their French counterparts.

## From France to Jersey to Australia

Joseph Georgelin was a native of Brittany. His family was from the small village of Ploeuc in the department of Côtes du Nord (now Côtes d'Armor) where his father was the miller. When he was young his family moved to Jersey in the Channel Islands. They were part of a large French population which settled there in the late nineteenth century. Economic migrants from Brittany and Normandy, escaping rural poverty in their own regions, they were drawn by the need for labour in Jersey's booming agricultural industries. By the early twentieth century, the French guest-workers had become a significant part of the island's economy and population. According to the 1901 census, the French made up at least 11% of the island's population, and a further 30% of Jersey's children had a French-born father (Ronayne 2014, 28). This growth in the French population was not without tension, as in 1900 there were anti-French riots in the town of St Helier, and in 1906 the Jersey government was prompted to commission a report, examining how to prevent the local population being swamped.

Joseph's ship left from Antwerp in December 1912. He arrived in Melbourne in February 1913, with 'just a shilling in his pocket' and quickly found work as a gardener at Billilla, a wealthy estate in Brighton. In some ways he was typical of many French migrants to Australia during this period. Analysis of migration and census records shows that most were unskilled or semi-skilled and were single young men. Roughly 48% of French nationals arriving between 1892 and 1914 belonged to the service, labourer or agricultural worker category (Stuer 1982, 155). Even though, according to Zeldin, 'unlike other European migrants, the French were not pushed to emigrate by poverty or unemployment' and were often professionals, he also describes typical French migrants as 'enterprising individuals, making their own choice' (1977, 90).

Stuer also concludes that French immigration was 'mainly a movement of individuals unconnected with large settlement groups', and the French 'came to Australia "to do their own thing", not to reproduce a French colony within a host society' (1982, 145). Joseph's profile corresponds neatly with Stuer's comment.[4] Joseph did retain his French and Jersey cultural identity throughout his life; however, he did not maintain links to the French community in Melbourne. In fact, his strongest sense of belonging to a community was shaped by his war experiences in the AIF and as with many returned soldiers, the battalion was his second family.

Joseph also had an unusual profile in that when he emigrated he was a French citizen, and came from a French community, but that community was based in the Channel Islands (a dependency of the British Crown which has its own unique cultural and linguistic traditions). In all decisions to migrate, there are push and pull factors. The question of what those factors were for Joseph remains to be answered. The French community in Jersey was well established and sizeable. Life there was relatively comfortable compared to the poverty of Brittany, but was difficult nonetheless. Also, as foreign-born residents, the French tenant farmers were not allowed to own land in Jersey. Economic factors may well have been part of the decision.

Another mysterious element of the story is a broken engagement: a young woman was left behind in Jersey, with a promise that he would send for her in due course. However, that woman, Clara, never made it to Australia and did not become my grandmother. Did he set off for Australia as a way out of the relationship? Or was it simply that war, history and distance intervened? Clara never married, and always remained close to the Georgelin family. So a romance, avoiding military service, economic reasons, and an adventurous spirit probably all combined in varying measures to inspire the decision.

**Return to France**

In 1916, just a few years after his arrival in Australia, Joseph enlisted in the AIF as an infantryman, in the 14th Battalion. When war was declared, the French population in Jersey had organised for mobilisation. Joseph's younger brother

[4] Stuer does acknowledge the various dynamic and important French community organisations which did exist in Australia at that time, such as the Alliance Française, the consulates, wool buyers, bankers and so on; but these were clearly not the working class French migrants like Joseph.

Jean joined his French unit. However, due to a knee injury during training, he did not serve at the front. Meanwhile, in Australia, Joseph Georgelin was probably faced with a dilemma. He had left Jersey without completing his military service and he would have been faced with harsh penalties if he returned. Initially at 5'4" Joseph would have been too short to join the AIF because of its height restrictions, but by 1916 these had been lowered. Certainly, encouragement to enlist was all around: *The Argus* of Saturday 26 August 1916 included appeals to both Australians and Frenchmen. 'Call for Men: Recruiting in Victoria' was printed alongside 'French For The Colours—All French citizens of Victoria born in Noumea […] are requested to report immediately.' Enlistment in the AIF, which had been declining during the earlier months of 1916, peaked again during September to October.

Joseph Georgelin (right) with his brothers (standing) and an unknown French soldier

The rise in volunteers at this time is attributed to the Australian government's 1916 Call to Arms appeal, as well as the anticipation of the first conscription referendum on 28 October 1916 (Beaumont 2013; Ziino 2010).

So, it was in the context of this spike that in October 1916 Joseph enlisted in the Australian Army, joining the infantry. According to his 1921 naturalisation papers, he spent three years in Brighton, but by the time he enlisted he was living and working at Moreland Park—the estate of the Dare family in what is now Coburg. The Dares' only son, Charles Dare, was an officer in the AIF and had commanded the 14th Battalion in Gallipoli and France before being invalided to desk duties

in late 1916. So Joseph Georgelin enlisted in the 14th Battalion and, after initial training, sailed for Europe in December 1916. He arrived in England in February 1917 and spent the next few months training in Wiltshire.

He arrived at Le Havre in early June 1917. Returning as a soldier to Belgium and Northern France, he would have travelled through the same countryside where, just a few years before, he had boarded his ship to Australia. His service record shows that he was very similar to other Aussie soldiers in his relaxed view of regulations—during his first couple of weeks in France, he was fined a day's pay for being absent without leave from 8.30 pm until apprehended by the military police at 9.45. Having a bit too much fun in the estaminet and not wanting to return to camp was quite a common misdemeanour.

During the early part of 1917 the 14th Battalion had taken part in the disastrous battle of Bullecourt, where poor planning and leadership had resulted in appalling losses.[5] Reinforcements, Joseph among them, were vital. Joseph took his place in D company, commanded by the famous, charismatic and decorated hero Captain Albert Jacka VC. The 14th played its part in many major battles during 1917–1918, among them Polygon Wood, Passchendaele, Hamel and Amiens.[6] In October 1917 Joseph was wounded by a shell while in the front line near Passchendaele, but was well enough to rejoin his unit after three weeks of medical care. Space here does not permit a detailed presentation of his involvement, as I intend to examine the specific French-Australian connections of the 'International Post'.

## Encounters between *Poilus* and Diggers, 1918: the 'International Post'

For a few months in 1918, the French and Australian armies co-operated and fought alongside each other. The Australians were stationed at the end of

[5] Of the total number of officers killed in the 14th Battalion for the entire war, 25% were killed at Bullecourt (Wanliss 1929, p. 210). Official figures in February 1919 gave 14th Battalion deaths as 1049 for the whole war, 646 of them in France and Belgium. The Battalion's heaviest casualties in France were at Pozières and Bullecourt. This does not include the ongoing toll of death and suffering which occurred after the war.

[6] Wanliss 1929, Bean 1942, Carlyon 2006 and Beaumont 2013 provide good accounts of the battles.

the British section of the line, with the French army to their right. Existing histories provide us with details of the events and battles of this period, through individual experiences and official accounts. What has been less well documented is the liaison posts, referred to as 'international posts', which were established at the junction of the French and Australian armies. Several different units were involved on each side, as they took turns manning the front lines and taking rest behind the lines. Sometimes their experiences were dramatic and played a significant role in the outcomes of battles. The episode at Hangard Wood, described below, was one key example. At other times, during lulls in the fighting, diggers and *poilus* could interact and socialise in a somewhat more relaxed manner. The various diaries and journals of the units involved include comments and observations, mostly of a positive nature, which demonstrate the attitude of French and Australian soldiers towards each other. The language barrier was overcome both by official interpreters and bi-lingual soldiers on each side. The AIF included a wide range of French speakers, from many different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.[7]

In March 1918, the well-documented German spring offensive, Operation Michael, was launched. Australian troops stationed in Belgium were rushed south to help resist the German advance. Among these was Joseph Georgelin's 14th Battalion. *The History of the 14th Battalion* describes the scene as Australians arrived at Bienvillers-aux-Bois, near Arras. En route they passed many fleeing French refugees. As they realised the Australians were 'advancing rapidly to the rescue, they broke into loud cries: "Les Australiens! Vivent les Australiens! Vous les tiendrez !" (you will stop them)' (Wanliss 1929, 266–267). The 14th Battalion took part in a successful counter attack at Hébuterne and held off the Germans during the following weeks. It would not arrive in the Villers-Bretonneux sector until later in April. Joseph's participation in the international post did not begin until then. However, by early April, other Australian units were stationed at Hangard Wood near Villers-Bretonneux, alongside the French.

[7] For information on French and Belgian born members of the AIF, sources include the 'Mapping our Anzacs' website, http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/places, and De Pierre's *Allies Forever /Alliés pour Toujours.*

**Hangard Wood 9 April 1918: a call for help**

The 19th and 20th Battalions from New South Wales and part of the 5th Brigade took part in fierce fighting along with British and French troops. On the extreme right of the British armies, the 20th Battalion was in liaison with the 165th French Infantry Regiment. On 9 April the French were holding the village of Hangard and, along with the Australians, had been subject to heavy bombardment. They feared further German attacks and sent a message to the 20th Battalion, asking for help.

I discovered in the archives of the Australian War Memorial a letter written by the commander of the French troops on the evening of 9 April 1918 and an accompanying document recounting the events of that night.[8] The letter conveys the urgency and desperate nature of their call for help: 'I implore you to lend us half a company, to help us to hold the village until the arrival of reinforcements [...] we are ordered to hold Hangard at all costs.' Written in pencil, and hastily scrawled, the note was taken by 'two French runners who were greatly distressed' to the Australians on their immediate left. The message was read by Captain Morgan Jones, who 'at once, took all the available men he had […] No 7 Platoon, with Lewis guns, and set off, guided by the runners, to Hangard.' Captain Morgan Jones and his men 'remained with the French until daylight the following morning.' The document continues: 'the French Commander was especially thankful as his regiment had only come into this sector of the line the previous day and the *poilus* were naturally pleased at finding the Australians on their left.'

Captain Claude Morgan Jones was a journalist working for the *Sydney Evening News* when he enlisted in June 1915. A public school education in England had provided him with the ability to 'speak and write French and have knowledge of German' (NAA B2455). The 5th Brigade's unit diary also gives a detailed chronology of the desperate events of that day and the importance of their continued liaison with the French (AWM4 23/5/34).

Bean also described the event: 'small German parties penetrated the village and temporarily captured the cemetery east of it, but they were thrown out by a French counter-attack. Men of the 20th Battalion were greatly impressed with the spirit of the French infantry, who in the thick of

[8] AWM / PR 90/091. To my knowledge, this note has not been referred to in published accounts of the battle.

the bombardment were continually jumping up to get a shot at the enemy' (1942, 514).

What of the French records? Sources now available online include the JMO—*Journal des Marches et Opérations*—and many unit histories. Both the JMO and the *Historique du 165e régiment d'Infanterie* refer to help provided by a 'bataillon voisin anglais'. On this occasion the English speakers were regarded as generic 'Anglais' (*Historique du 165e régiment* 1920, 12).

On 12 April, the battle for control of Hangard Wood continued, with Australians, British and French still sharing the front. Bean described the action of that day: 'The right flank post [...] was shared with the 165th French regiment of Infantry [...] Lieutenant Colyer, in charge of this post, maintained an intimate understanding of the French, whose officer he used to visit every morning. This morning, on his way back from that visit, Colyer was killed' (1942, 515). Reports of his death stated 'he was in the French lines at the time as an interpreter' (Red Cross report AWM 1DRL/0428). Lieutenant Colyer was a teacher who had completed an Arts degree at Sydney University, and had trained at the Signal School in Belgium in January 1918. One could assume that he had studied French at university, and perhaps even taught it in school. Having joined up as a private, his subsequent promotion through the ranks, training and appointment as interpreter show that he was a man of talent and intellect (NAA: B2455, COLYER H M).

**Villers-Bretonneux**

The loss and re-capture of Villers-Bretonneux on Anzac Day 1918 is a pivotal story of the Australians' experience on the Western Front. According to General Monash, it was after this that the demarcation line between the British and French Armies was reorganised, and fixed just south of Villers-Bretonneux. 'The new Fourth Army became the flank British Army in contact with the French. The Australian Corps became the south flank of that Army' (1920, 37). However Australian units had already been fighting alongside the French, as we have seen. Joseph's 14th Battalion reached Villers-Bretonneux on 28 April, taking its place to hold the line. The 14th Battalion chronicler Edgar Rule recorded: 'We came into contact with numbers of French soldiers, and a very fine lot they were' (1999, 115).

However, the feelings of mutual admiration were not always universal, nor without controversy. The 24 April 1918 report by liaison

officer Captain Renondeau expressed concern that feelings of resentment and suspicion towards the French on the part of the British High Command were trickling down to the ranks. This had resulted in 'certain incidents' to the point where, on 23 April at Vignacourt, the French and Australian troops had exchanged blows.[9]

**Monument Wood 3 May 1918: 'a joint attack'**

After the loss and subsequent re-capture of Villers-Bretonneux on 24–25 April, the nearby areas of Hangard Wood and Monument Wood remained in German hands. The Australians were ordered to take Monument Wood and a joint attack was planned with the French on their right. The 'magnificent French colonial division—the Moroccan' (Bean 1942, 629) had arrived in the Villers-Bretonneux area on 26 April. The French units included the 8th Zouaves and the 3rd, 4th and 7th Tirailleurs.[10] It seems initial impressions were not favourable as 'the Australian guides allotted for leading up the 8th Zouaves were late, and although they afterwards met the column, the French commander reported that "they were of no help whatever, being completely ignorant as to the position of the elements to be relieved"' (Bean 1942).

Over the next few days things improved as French, British and Australian commanders planned the next phase of the battle and soldiers took their positions. The 48th Battalion diary states that a liaison post was formed with the French to their right, and an officer sent to the French headquarters.

Bean describes the relations between the 48th Battalion and the nearby French: 'The 48th remained quietly in Cachy Switch until the night of the operation. The hospitable French-Moroccans on its right flank kept inviting every Australian who came their way to share with them the bottles of wine of which they kept bringing sackfuls from Villers-Bretonneux' (1942, 648). The 14th Battalion was also in the front line just to the north of the town and the *History* relates how in the evening the men would go into the

[9] Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 17N/362. The resentment was attributed to Foch assuming supreme command of the Allies on the Western Front. For more on the context see Greenhalgh (2015, pp. 210–214).

[10] Tirailleurs and Zouaves were troops of the French colonial army from North Africa. Zouaves were usually European, Tirailleurs units usually a mixture of French officers and native soldiers.

empty town, making the most of the comforts of civilisation which remained. Beds, bedding, food and even clothing were utilised to temporarily relieve the discomfort of sleeping in 'verminous surroundings' (Wanliss 1929, 278).

The history of the 3rd Tirailleurs describes their experience in the line with the Australians, taking their place beside them on 29 April. The Australians are described as 'our valiant neighbours' who had previously retaken the village of Villers-Bretonneux 'during an audacious night attack'. Alongside the Australians, the 3rd Tirailleurs planned a joint attack on Monument Wood on 3 May 1918. During this battle, Charles Williams, a former French foreign legionnaire, was awarded the Croix de Guerre for courageously venturing out into no-man's-land to bring in wounded under fire. Setting out in search of a wounded French officer, he cried '*Puisque c'est un officier français qui est tombé, c'est moi qui vais le rapporter* [sic].'[11] The 3rd Tirailleur's history describes the good relations between their soldiers and the Australians:

> Relationships marked by honesty, friendliness and good humour had been established between the Arabs and Kabyles of North Africa, and the soldiers from Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and other parts of the Australian continent. There were joyous exchanges of cigarettes, tobacco, wine, jam and even the occasional pot of soup. During the lulls in the fighting, our native soldiers would get out their cards and our allies would join in and play. Words were rare, it is true, but gestures were enough to enable communication. And from this daily domestic business, under the shells, a real and genuine friendship was born. Australians and *tirailleurs*, placed on the 'suture' which joined the French and British armies.[12]

[11] As it is a French officer who has fallen, it's I who will bring him in.

[12] Des relations pleines de franchise, de cordialité et de bonne humeur s'étaient établies dans les tranchées entre Arabes ou Kabyles de l'Afrique du Nord et les soldats de Queensland, de Victoria, de la Nouvelle-Galles du Sud ou autres lieux du continent australien. On échangeait joyeusement des cigarettes, du tabac, un peu de « pinard », des conserves, parfois même une gamelle de soupe. Aux heures d'accalmie, nos indigènes sortaient leurs cartes espagnoles, et nos alliés participaient à la partie. Les paroles étaient rares, il est vrai, mais on se comprenait par gestes, cela suffisait amplement. Et, de ce commerce aussi familial que journalier, sous les obus, naissait une réelle et sincère sympathie. Australiens et

On the night of May 13–14 the 14th Battalion, with D company on the right, found itself alongside French troops comprising the Colonial Moroccan Division, at Monument Wood near Villers-Bretonneux.

> The entente cordiale was soon happily cemented. The '*Poste Internationale* [sic]' established on the extreme left of the French, and the extreme right of the British Army, was jointly tenanted by a handful of French and 14th Battalion men. Several 14th men in this post enjoyed the unique experience of being the last man on the right flank of the British Army on the whole Western Front. The Zouaves liked our men… (Wanliss 1929, 280)

At this point, Joseph Georgelin's D company made up the 'handful of men enjoying this unique experience.' It is fascinating to consider both the vast differences and the similarities between him and the Moroccan soldiers, and the inherent questions of identity. What did it mean to be French? A Breton, a member of the French community in Jersey, a member of the AIF on the one hand, French Colonial Troops on the other, part of the French army, francophone, yet many of them not born in France. It creates an interesting picture of the diversity of *la Francophonie*. A comparison of the two sets of colonial troops fighting side by side and the different political and social assumptions regarding their involvement would be interesting to explore further.

**June 1918—Cordial relations and photo opportunities**

In June, it was the turn of the 37th Battalion to share the front line alongside the French. The 37th Battalion was stationed along the Villers-Bretonneux–Amiens Road, holding a defensive line and preparing for a possible attack from the Germans. Plans were outlined for the counter-attack which would necessarily follow, detailing liaison with other units and methods of

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tirailleurs placés à la « suture » des armées franco-britanniques.

communication required. At that time, an official war photographer captured the scene as the French and Australian lines connected.

**June and July 1918—Monash on 'Adjacent French Divisions'**

On May 30 1918, General Monash was appointed commander of the unified Australian Corps. He writes that in the early part of June the Australians were 'in immediate contact with General Toulorge's 31st French Corps' and that this 'junction of the French and British Armies offered a tempting point of weakness' to the Germans (Monash 1920, 42). The liaison and communication between the Australians and French continued to be crucial, as they remained prepared for any further attacks on Amiens.

During June and July, Monash realised that no further German offensives were likely and that the time was right for the allies to 'seize the

Australians of the 37th Battalion with French Colonial troops in the International Post before Monument Wood. AWM E02559

initiative' (1920, 69). After the success of the battle of Hamel on July 4, he began to plan the Amiens offensive. His feelings towards the French soldiers on his right, however, were not entirely positive. In spite of the scenes of hearty fraternisation and comradeship which had been features of the international posts, the differences of language and temperament between the two armies created 'a circumstance which troubled me sorely'. He explains that his hesitation about the French was due to 'an entirely different outlook and policy' (1920, 70–71).

**July 1918—Official appreciation**

After the victory at Hamel, Joseph Georgelin's 14th Battalion was present on 7 July when Clemenceau came to the Amiens area to thank the Australians for their victory and compliment them on their valour (Wanliss 1929, 310). Monash also talks of the widespread good will generated at the time. The French inhabitants of Amiens were 'highly elated at the victory' (1920, 63). The *fête nationale* was also approaching. On 14 July 1918 the *préfet* of the department of the Somme, Alfred Morain, presided over a 'humble but memorable repast' (64) in the deserted and devastated city, inviting about twenty representatives of the French and British armies, including Monash, as well as representatives of the city of Amiens.

The Australians took part in more of the fighting until November 1918, as the Germans were finally defeated. With the Allied victory now assured, the new challenge became the demobilisation and repatriation of the men. The creation of a new common purpose, a successful transition back to civilian life, was achieved through the AIF Education Service under the direction of General Monash.

**Teaching French—The AIF Education Service**

The AIF Education Service had been created in early 1918, inspired by the scheme already established by the Canadian Army. As the war drew to a close, it expanded and became a vital part of the demobilisation department. In preparation for civilian life, learning and teaching became a focus. It was a valuable element in the process of demobilisation for the thousands of Australians in France and Britain. The AIF Education Service provided a range of benefits to the soldiers, giving them a purpose, a useful way to

spend their time and the chance to learn new skills they could carry into civilian life. It also created possibilities to further strengthen ties with the local civilians, this time in the context of peace and reconstruction.

In early 1919, still in France, Joseph Georgelin was appointed to the AIF Education Service. After receiving some training, he was promoted to Temporary Corporal on 19 January and became a French instructor. He went on leave in early February, then spent March and April with the Education Service in France. The 14th Battalion records show that, during this period, the men were receiving French lessons while in France awaiting repatriation. The AIF counted many French speakers in its ranks, although they were a minority. The language skills of professionals, school-teachers, sons of the Australian French community, and immigrants from a variety of social backgrounds, could now be put to use in classrooms and on the troopships. Most returning troopships included French among the wide variety of classes taught on-board. The instructors were also a varied lot—one of them was a wool-buyer, another a butcher. A native command of the language seems to have been as relevant in choosing the instructors as any formal qualification.

Joseph returned to Australia on HMAT *Militiades*, leaving from Southampton on 30 April, and arriving in Australia on 19 June. On the return journey to Australia, he was one of three French instructors on his ship. Classes were taught three mornings per week, and the timetable and syllabus of classes is preserved in the Australian War Memorial's archives. As he was a gardener by profession and (to my knowledge) had no greater qualification for the job than being a native speaker, he must have found it helpful that textbooks were provided (from England) as well as instruction on which chapters to cover each session (AWM20 6444/1/2).

**After the war—making a life in Australia**

Even though Joseph had fought with the AIF, and had even voted in an election, in 1921 he was requested by the government to register as an alien. This probably prompted his decision to become a naturalised Australian citizen. His alien registration form is cancelled, with the word 'naturalised' written across it. He had clearly decided where his future lay. He was not political, but was patriotic. When World War II arrived, he enlisted again as a

member of the Reserve and was assigned to 'part-time duty'. On the enlistment papers, soldiers were asked to mention any special skills or abilities that they were able to contribute. He listed simply 'French'.

I have no evidence that the Australian army availed itself of his language skills during the Second World War, but being French could always be considered an asset. By 1951, Joseph was running a successful florist business and was a well-known local identity. A magazine article in *Woman's Day and Home*[13] referred to him as 'Frenchman Joseph Georgelin' and one has the impression the epithet bestowed a certain positive image of style upon his business!

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Researching family history is a winding path, with unexpected discoveries and trajectories that bring up new questions. I have followed the chronology of my grandfather's journey to Australia, the events, and what motivated him. But there is also a story of my own journey, starting with my affection for my gentle grandpa who taught me a few words of French when I was little. Later, when I was 18, I visited France with my parents. We went to the little village of Ploeuc and were thrilled to see the mill and cottage where Joseph was born. We walked through the cemetery and saw that Georgelin is a common name in that area. We met our French relatives and heard family history stories. A few years later I went back to Ploeuc and looked up the archives in the *mairie*. Bound copies were available going back to 1870. I asked the staff member where the earlier ones were. She led me to an ancient building next door, and up a winding staircase to a room in the tower. 'These are the older archives', she explained. The walls were full of shelves of yellowed dusty tomes, dating back to the 1600s. 'Here's the key: when you go out for lunch could you remember to lock the door?' And there I was, left alone with all that history. I loved it! Now the digital age has changed the nature of historical research, but my interest and passion in the subject continue to grow.

My grandfather's journey took him a long way from his roots in rural Brittany. Yet his life and values show that he continued the tradition of being close to the land, and growing things. I'm sure his profession helped him

[13] *Woman's Day and Home* 19 Feb 1951 p. 11 (copy in possession of the author's family).

recover from the trauma of the war and establish a connection to his new country. I also think that his time in the AIF and the strong connections to his Aussie fellow soldiers would have strengthened his link to his new country and his identity as a French Australian.

Les Carlyon writes: 'One anecdote sometimes tells more about an event than boxes of official documents' (2006, 570). In examining the actions and feelings of the ordinary soldiers, it is interesting to ask to what extent they reflect official attitudes, and to what extent they help inform them. The goodwill and admiration expressed by the soldiers demonstrate the positive side of this evolving relationship, and there are many more examples to be found in diaries and personal accounts, and more stories to tell. The cementing of cordial relations at the most basic level is, I think, a fundamental part of the greater picture which is the huge landscape of French-Australian relations.

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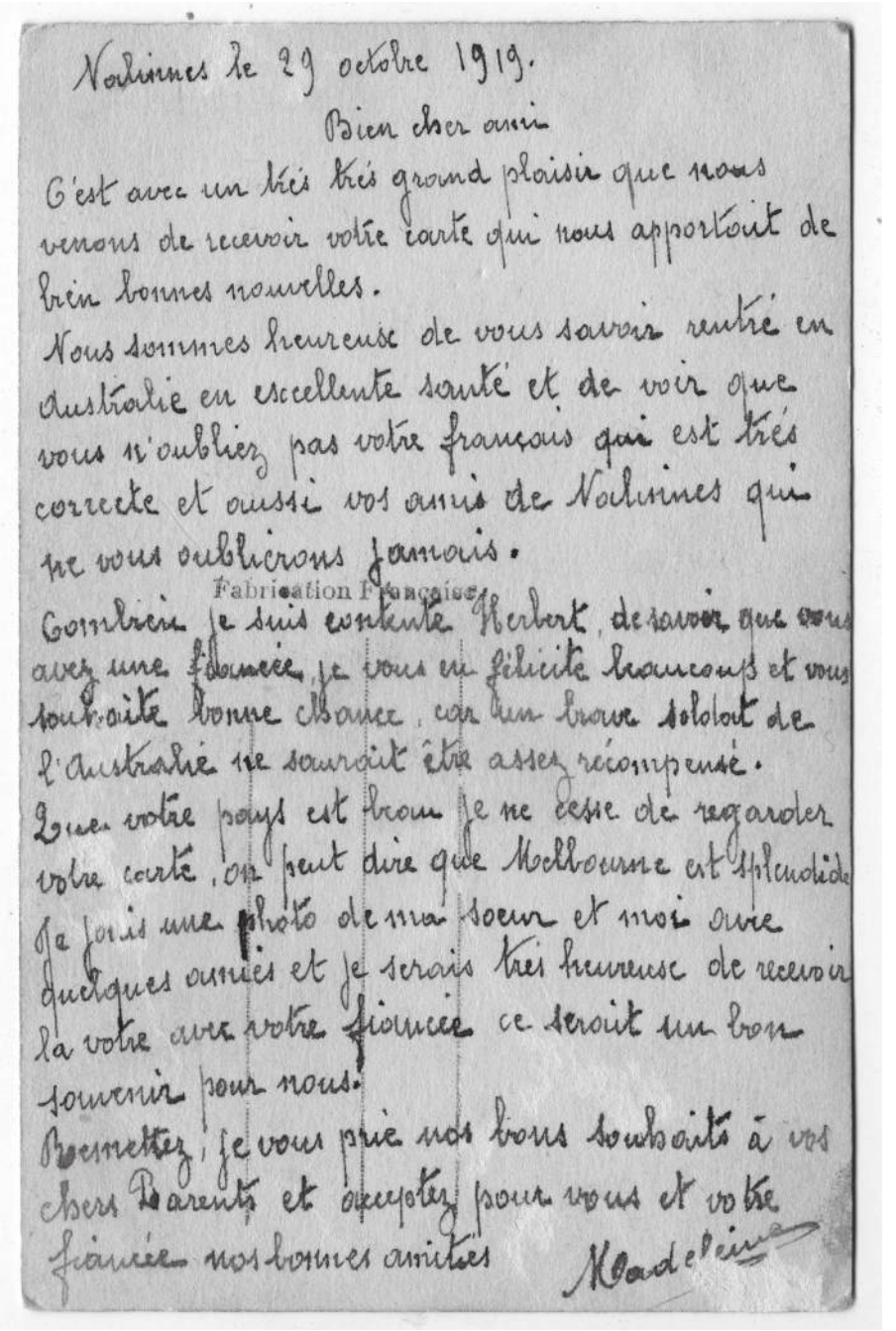
# '*UN BON SOUVENIR POUR NOUS*': AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS BILLETED IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM AFTER WORLD WAR I

JILLIAN DURANCE

The two sides of the postcard shown on the following pages are the starting point for an exploration of the wartime connections between the Australian soldiers and the people of France and Belgium. An interpretation of the text can lead us to examine the ways in which those contacts were founded on a sense of mutual gratitude. By 1918, the Australian troops had played an essential role in the liberation of their countries. In return, the Australians were rewarded with often kind, if not generous, hospitality. Closer relationships also brought about a new awareness of Australians as having their own national identity. There was a sharing of language and culture. Diaries, letters, postcards, field magazines and battalion histories written close to the Great War period provide personal and intimate testimony as to the depth of those friendships and the quality of those cultural interactions that were often forged in the homes of the French and Belgian families. One such document, this postcard written by a young Belgian woman and sent to an Australian soldier, Private Herbert Godber, opens a small domestic window onto the broader landscape of interchange between troops of the First Australian Imperial Force and the people of France and Belgium.This largely peaceful co-existence of just a few months often led to enduring friendships.

Towards the end of 1919, Madeleine's postcard arrived at the Diamond Creek home of Private Herbert Alfred Godber in semi-rural Victoria, north-east of Melbourne. She had written it from her home in Nalinnes, Belgium, on 29 October 1919. The image on the front of the card with the word 'Chrismas' [sic] suggests that Madeleine had written it with sufficient time for it to arrive before Christmas and possibly in response to a postcard he had sent her on his return. It took at least six weeks by ship for the mail to reach Australia and the postcard may have arrived in time for Christmas. Unbeknown to Madeleine, Herbert had already married on 4 October 1919, three months after his return to Victoria. We do not know Madeleine's family name but Herbert Godber was the author's grandfather.

Private Godber was a member of the 21st Battalion, part of the 6th Brigade, and had been fighting on the Western Front since early 1916. He was



Malines le 29 octobre 1919.

Bien cher ami

C'est avec un très très grand plaisir que nous venons de recevoir votre carte qui nous apportait de bien bonnes nouvelles.

Nous sommes heureuse de vous savoir rentré en Australie en excellente santé et de voir que vous n'oubliez pas votre français qui est très correcte et aussi vos amis de Malines qui ne vous oublierons jamais.

Fabrication Française

Combien je suis contente Herbert, de savoir que vous avez une fiancée, je vous en félicite beaucoup et vous souhaite bonne chance, car un brave soldat de l'Australie ne saurait être assez récompensé.

Que votre pays est beau je ne cesse de regarder votre carte, on peut dire que Melbourne est splendide.

Je joins une photo de ma soeur et moi avec quelques amies et je serais très heureuse de recevoir la votre avec votre fiancée ce serait un bon souvenir pour nous.

Excusez, je vous prie nos bons souhaits à vos chers Parents et acceptez pour vous et votre fiancée nos bonnes amitiés

Madeleine

Bons souhaits
de
Christmas
E·M
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also a bandsman who had accompanied his battalion on route marches and performed at many concerts to entertain the troops and help raise their morale (Durance 2015). Like many of his fellow soldiers, Herbert Godber had waited for many months to return home after the war ended on 11 November 1918. During that time he lived in the post-war villages, billeted in the homes of French and Belgian families. After spending a few weeks in the French village of La Chaussée, Herbert arrived with the 6th Brigade in Nalinnes-Haies in the Charleroi region of Belgium, on 20 December 1918. Charleroi is located in the 'Walloon' or French-speaking part of Belgium.

In Nalinnes Herbert stayed in the home of a Belgian family and met a young woman named Madeleine. It is unclear whether she was part of the host family, but her postcard was accompanied by a photograph of herself and her sister, with a few girlfriends. It seemed that Madeleine and Herbert had become good friends during his stay in Nalinnes. After a few weeks he was moved with members of the 24th Battalion to the Charleroi suburb of Marcinelle. Herbert was among one of the last contingents of soldiers to leave Belgium in April 1919. But not before he had formed a warm relationship with Madeleine and learned perhaps sufficient French to interpret her postcard. Madeleine wrote:

> Bien cher ami,
> C'est avec un très très grand plaisir que nous venons de recevoir votre carte qui nous apportait de bien bonnes nouvelles. Nous sommes heureux de vous savoir rentré en Australie en excellente santé et de voir que vous n'oubliez pas votre français qui est très correcte [sic] et aussi vos amis de Nalinnes qui ne vous oublierons [sic] jamais. Combien je suis contente Herbert de savoir que vous avez une fiancée. Je vous en félicite beaucoup et vous souhaite bonne chance car un brave soldat de l'Australie ne saurait être assez recompensé. Que votre pays est beau. Je ne cesse de regarder votre carte, on peut dire que Melbourne est splendide. Je joins une photo de ma soeur et moi avec quelques amies et je serais très heureuse de recevoir la votre [sic] avec votre fiancée, ce serait un bon souvenir pour nous. Remettez je vous prie nos bons souhaits à vos chers parents et acceptez pour vous et votre fiancée nos bonnes amitiés.[1]

[1] My very dear friend,
It is with very very great pleasure that we have just received your card that

The photograph of Madeleine, her sister and friends has long since disappeared; nor is there any other evidence of their correspondence in the family archives; but the postcard survives. Herbert kept it for nearly 60 years, from 1919 when he was 27 years old until the time he died in 1980, at the age of 87. Perhaps the postcard held a significant memory, although he never mentioned it. But sometimes he would hum the traditional little tune, *La Madelon,* known to all the soldiers in France. Perhaps there was a link between the popular song and the girl he knew all those years ago.

Like Herbert Godber, many soldiers often formed firm friendships with their French and Belgian hosts, including the younger women. Some of these relationships became sexual liaisons, while a few culminated in marriage proposals and actual marriages (Lejeune 2014, 13, 76). The tone of Madeleine's postcard is consistently formal, yet very warm. It gives no hint of anything more, neither a promise nor a profession of romantic love. Besides, she may have known that Herbert had corresponded with Ivy Partington, as well as her sisters, throughout the war. Herbert and Ivy had known each other since childhood. Herbert, sober, steady and religious and always carrying her portrait, most likely remained faithful to his Australian sweetheart. Madeleine's words suggest that Herbert had made a reasonable attempt to communicate with her in French. She compliments him on the beauty of his home town. She also assures him that his good fortune in having a fiancée is somehow his due. Her comments about his bravery and commitment parallel many that were expressed at the time. Herbert, like thousands of others, had travelled far to fight for what they thought to be a worthwhile cause.

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brought us such good news. We are happy that you have returned to Australia in good health and to see that you have not forgotten your French which is very correct, and your friends in Nalinnes who will never forget you. How happy I am Herbert to know that you have a fiancée, I congratulate and wish you good luck; a brave Australian soldier deserves the very best. How beautiful your country is. I never stop admiring your postcard, you could say that Melbourne looks splendid. I am sending a photo of my sister and myself with some friends and I would be very happy to have one of you with your fiancée—it would be a good souvenir for us. Please send our kind regards to your dear parents and accept our best wishes for you and your fiancée.

In the days before the Great War, very few Australians had the opportunity to travel overseas. While many Australian soldiers would have known about France from their schooldays, very few had the chance to visit. The Australian military campaigns of 1915 had been confined to the Gallipoli Peninsula of Turkey. By early 1916, thousands of Australian troops began to travel from the southern port of Marseille to the Somme region and other parts of northern France. By 1917, they had moved to the battlefields of Flanders and Belgium. The Australians brought their particular accents and ways of speaking English, very different humour, 'larrikin' attitudes to authority and 'disrespectful' attitudes to foreigners in general. But they also quickly developed an appreciation of French culture, landscape and farming practices. After the deserts of Egypt and the rugged, scrubby terrain of the Gallipoli peninsula, French scenery was green and lush, a welcome change after the sand, heat and discomforts of the Egyptian desert (Gammage 1975, 126).

Soldiers' letters home as well as their personal diaries report extensively on the new worlds that their travels opened up for them. They not only noted the beauty of the landscape, but also the productivity of the land. Travelling through the southern regions of France from Marseille to the northern battlefields in early 1916, Private Clair Whiteside, an orchardist in his civilian life, wrote to his father back in Narre Warren, Victoria: 'Never before had any of us seen such country. Not a spot wasted that could be cultivated […] nowhere was anything neglected, no broken down sheds, not a neglected patch of vines, yet there was a war on' (Whiteside 1999, 42). A number of soldiers observed that they were not surprised that the French wanted to fight for it, something they respected.

Madeleine's postcard to Herbert Godber implies that he, like so many other Australians, was willing to engage with his hosts in their own language. From the earliest days in France there were opportunities for soldiers to learn French or practise what little they knew (Harvey 1920, 69). Mutual need often created opportunities for an exchange in French. Some soldiers may have found that they knew more French than their hosts knew English. As Whiteside explained to his family at home, on his way to the battlefields, amidst the waving and blowing of kisses, he occasionally used his 'imperfect French', raising a few smiles. On another occasion, he tried to buy bread and eggs, in an old kitchen in a typical farmhouse, and found that 'the old lady

didn't have a word of English, and the old dad who sat in the corner chair took little interest in the proceedings' (Whiteside 1999, 43).

Opportunities for language learning were inherent in the nature of the war waged on French soil. While photographic images of the Great War predominantly depict familiar scenes of soldiers in mud-filled trenches, and the many action shots of going 'over the top', there are also photographs of ruined villages among the smoke of shell-fire. While some areas were evacuated of civilians during the worst of the fighting, there were many stories of soldiers meeting with, conversing with, and doing business with the hardy civilians who had stayed on in the war zone, often sheltering from the heavy bombardments in the cellars under their houses (Harvey 1920, 233). Stories abound of soldiers being greeted by villagers who had dared to remain in houses under shellfire, particularly during 1918 when the Germans were in retreat. French 'publicans' ran the popular estaminets where soldiers went to find a drink, and farmers provided supplements to army rations. The generally fleeting nature of these relationships and exchanges in the French language was soon to change with the coming of peace.

At the end of the war, Australian troops were billeted in French villages or further north in the Walloon area of Belgium. For both troops and civilians it was a period of 'relative serenity', or 'the calm after the storm' (*Red and White Diamond* n° 4 December 1918, 12). Brigades were billeted in their own areas spread throughout the former Western Front, but the experiences of the men were similar in that everywhere there was an appreciation of their efforts in securing the liberation of towns, villages and farms. The French and Belgian civilians were encouraged to host the soldiers in their homes. In many homes soldiers paid a nominal rent for their accommodation, while in others they were fêted 'as honoured guests'. They stayed in homes that were sometimes damaged and in the devastated area that 'ran for over 250 miles in and around the old Western Front'. Over the course of four years of war, France had lost 1,650 towns and villages and over half a million homes (Heywood and Steel 2015, 310).

The largely favourable reputation the Australians had earned for themselves was most likely further heightened by the speech in their honour

given by Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, on 7 July after the Australian successes at Villers-Bretonneux and the battle of Hamel:

> When the Australians came to France, the French people expected a great deal of you. […] We knew that you would fight a real fight but we did not know from the beginning you would astonish the whole continent. I shall go back tomorrow and say to my countrymen, 'I have seen the Australians, I have looked in their faces, I know that these men will fight alongside of us again until the cause for which we are all fighting is safe for us and for our children'.[2]

Clemenceau's speech reflects his gratitude and confidence that his country would soon be liberated by the Allied Forces, but the Australians had made a particular impression. His words carry a special, admiring respect for the soldiers of a small faraway democracy that had made such an enormous commitment and many sacrifices—to achieve that freedom. This view was shared by many of the population (Harvey1920, 305). The appreciation is also reflected in Madeleine's words to Herbert Godber when she calls him *un brave soldat* who deserved the very best.

Being billeted in the villages exposed the Australian soldiers to a welcome return to normality despite the destruction and disruption they saw around them. Sometimes troops volunteered to help with the harvest and labour in the field, giving them, in return, a sense of normal routine, order and usefulness. In Nalinnes there was plenty of work, stacking the beetroot harvest for winter feed (Lejeune 2014, 49).

Elsewhere in France, Clair Whiteside, noting that the apple trees had been neglected over the war years, 'had a bit of a yarn on the matter' with a couple of local growers (Whiteside 1999, 170). Herbert Godber, another orchardist, may well have done the same. Among the brigades were men with other useful skills. The tradesmen of the pioneer battalions, when they were not constructing crosses for the graves for the battalion dead, were sometimes employed to repair buildings and played a role in repairing the region's road that had been damaged in the fighting, as the official reparations of war had

[2] Speech quoted from a plaque at the Australian Corps Memorial Park at Le Hamel, France.

not yet begun (Harvey 1920, 307). Such volunteer work further enhanced their welcome.

It was not only the economic life of the villages that benefited from the presence of so many able-bodied men. Their social life was also enriched. The battalion bands played music in the streets and squares (Lejeune 2014, 38). There were many balls and impromptu dances held in decorated school and cinema halls, where the same battalion bands supplied the music, tucked away on a balcony, while the couples whirled below. The women, at first rather 'timid', were soon learning new dances in the arms of Australian soldiers and soon discovered 'that the men were not the wild bushmen that they had expected to meet' (Lejeune, 2014, 47). Such balls were immensely popular and 'dancing continued to the early hours of the morning' (Austin 1997, 227). The Australians, despite their recent ordeals, were 'full of effervescence and enthusiasm' (Lejeune 2014, 7).

Exuberance, greater freedom and perhaps more relaxed discipline did lead to occasional problems however, particularly with drunkenness. Some took 'their carousing to excess […] that small percentage of the men in the class who lose their balance at the sight of a bottle get noisy at times and put the wind up the villagers'. (*Red and White Diamond* nº 3 November 1918, 3) While it should be acknowledged that Australian observers would express a more lenient and relaxed attitude to such behaviour, it seems that the Australian presence had widespread approval. W. J. Harvey could report in the 24th Battalion's journal that 'the troops are getting on well with the French inhabitants in the village. The civilians and the diggers have already become excellent friends' (ibid.) Less forgivable seem to have been the snowball fights or *les blancs combats* of January 1919, where the first snowfalls were greeted by a series of snow fights between the Australians and young Nalinnois. The fights often got out of hand when snowballs contained rocks and stones that damaged village buildings (Lejeune 2014, 45). Again, the locals had more to lose when they bore the brunt of such disorderly, even aggressive behaviour.

There were many acts of goodwill, however, that compensated for the negative influences of 'that small percentage'. Throughout the billeting areas, the officers and men organised Christmas parties and *matinées enfantines* that were very popular among young children and their parents. Many who were children at war's end held lifelong memories of those happy events. Ghislain Servais of Nalinnes later recalled the pudding that jumped about on the table as the children danced to the band music around the room, while a young

Raymond Lebrun remembered being treated to his first cinema experience as part of his *matinée enfantine* at Nalinnes in 1919 (Lejeune 2014,16). The journalist reporting for the local *La Gazette* described the occasion as *une fête charmante* and observed among the Australian officers presiding *une tendresse touchante*, especially for the orphans, both Belgian and French (Lejeune 2014, 44).

The organisation of such Christmas and children's parties relied on the co-operation of the local authorities who were in charge of their own public buildings. On Christmas Day 1918, the 39th Battalion, billeted in snowy Bouillancourt sat down to Christmas dinner, each company gathered as a unit. The officers had their own dinner in the school hall that had been put at their disposal by the schoolmaster. The officers had also each donated a sum of money to provide a Christmas treat for the village children whose lives were still deprived and 'drab' from the exigencies of war. A Christmas tree, interestingly described as an 'Australian' rather than a French tradition, was placed in a large marquee. Lieutenant C. T. Mason, dressed as Father Christmas, distributed gifts to the children of Bouillancourt and nearby Busmenard. While Lieutenant O. R. Brown clowned around in the disguise of a buccaneer, the battalion band played Christmas carols. The children also received chocolates and cake. The schoolmaster, noting that the officers and men, deprived of being with their own families, had 'adopted' the village children instead, gave a speech of thanks:

> We will keep for years the worthiest recollection of your generosity […] As equality is a trait of Australian character, each and all shall receive his or her share [of presents]. In Australia it is not a practice to make distinctions between the rich and the poor because distinction is made by the hand of Chance or Fortune […] This remark I wish you to remember: The Australian officers are always good to their men and for this reason we know them as a courageous army. They have supported the noble aims of the war rigorously and with animation, and this will go down in history […] I ask you to keep this fête ever-green in your memory […] always keep the remembrance of the friends of France who left their parents, homes, wives and children without regret to succour us in our time of trouble and adversity. (Paterson 1934, 246)

There were many instances where shared hardship built a sense of empathy and trust between French civilians and the Australian troops who had stayed in and sometimes fought in their villages. This close proximity led to a situation where people could get to know each other and grow beyond the stereotypes many of them may have carried. It provided greater scope for initiating and developing friendships and consolidating language skills. The troops could build on the foundations of respect and gratitude that they had already earned in their earlier three years in the region. Social life was shared, rather than segregated. Many friendships grew out of a sense of mutual need among people of many different age groups. And as we see from the schoolmaster's words at Bouillancourt, the qualities of generosity, courage and equality that were demonstrated at times were acknowledged and sometimes judged to be a typical Australian characteristic.

While the coming of peace brought more pleasant experiences for both hosts and their Australian guests, there were still shadows in the background. The Germans in their haste to leave the occupied areas had left many dumps of unexploded ordnance, particularly in the Charleroi district. Both civilians and soldiers were caught up, killed and wounded in the inevitable explosions, and both shared in the mourning that followed (Lejeune 2014, 61). The death of Medical Officer Captain Clarence Cecil Haines on 4 April 1919 was keenly felt. He had gone to assist local civilians who had been wounded at an explosion near the station at Charleroi, when he himself was mortally wounded in the same way. 'The greatest regret has been expressed among the local population and troops at [his] death, on account of his unselfish services' (*Geelong Advertiser* 8 May 1919). This shared grief and acknowledgement of another's 'sacrifice' would certainly have brought people closer together.

Captain Haines was one of the many soldiers who had stayed on in Belgium. As we know, while many veterans of the Anzac campaign who were lucky enough to have survived the Western Front were the first to leave in October 1918, others who were uninjured or who had enlisted later, had to wait many months before a troopship became available. In December 1918, when Herbert Godber arrived in Nalinnes, the prospect of home was still a long way off. For some of the troops, it was a long wait. Herbert Godber would not embark on the *Mahia* until June 1919. Troops were still under army discipline and while army routine took up some time, they no longer

had a war to fight. They did, however, have the future prospect of peacetime occupations for which they had time and opportunity to train.

By November 1918, the Australian soldiers were being encouraged to take courses in those subjects, skills and trades that would help them on their return (*Red and White Diamond* nº 3 November 1918, 11). Under the auspices of the AIF, an Education Service was set up and commenced operations in the towns and villages where soldiers were billeted. Soldiers could take advantage of classes and lectures in a wide range of areas—in agricultural subjects such as fruit growing and commercial egg farming as well as vocational subjects that included shorthand, bookkeeping and motor mechanics. Soldiers could also study mathematics, English and French (Paterson 1934, 244). The pre-war peace occupations of many soldiers gave them the necessary background to teach, while educational officers as well as teachers were appointed from the reservoir of talent within the army itself. Professional teachers in civilian life, like Lieutenant Horace Fenton of the 8th Battalion, were often put in charge of their battalion's educational program (Austin 1997, 227).

In addition, the resources of local areas were put to good use. In Nalinnes in the 1918–1919 winter, soldiers were also offered educational tours of local factories, particularly the iron working and other metallurgical enterprises. Some were given temporary work in the electrical industry.

Jules Hiernaux, the principal of the Université du Travail de Charleroi, put at the disposal of soldiers in that area amenities and classes for 500 students (*Red and White Diamond* nº 6 January 1919, 3). Herbert Godber may have taken subjects that would later set him on the path to becoming an electrical engineer once he returned to Australia, but he most certainly also took French lessons.

For Herbert and many of his fellow soldiers, knowing a bit of French would have made social interactions as well as travelling a little easier, while misunderstandings formed the basis of stories that became the focus for hilarity, humour and entertainment. There was the story of one 24th Battalion soldier whose fumbling sign language and many mispronounced words led his French host to believe that it was 'raining inside his boot', when it was simply 'leaking' (*Red and White Diamond* nº 6 January 1919, 3). Another

story, published in the 24th Battalion field journal, perhaps served as a reminder about the value of having another language:

> The Colonel's groom has commenced to study French. He didn't think it worthwhile till, a few days ago, he was forced to change his mind. He asked the lady at the billet to call him at 7.30 on a certain morning. His French was so excellent that the lady understood him to say that he had to travel seven and a half kilometres before breakfast, so she got him up at 4.30, so he would have enough time to do it. (*Red and White Diamond* nº 3 November 1918, 3)

Like many other Australian soldiers, Herbert Godber later taught his own children (and grandchildren) French words and phrases. He referred to his daughter and son as his *enfants*, fed them *blancmange* and *poires*, *oranges* and *chocolat*. The words *merci*, *bonjour* and *très bien* were regularly sprinkled through his conversations. These words and phrases, along with the place names of the battles in which he fought—Pozières, Bullecourt, Mont St Quentin—became part of the family lore that was replicated in many other homes of Australian soldiers who had fought on the Western Front.

Those relics of Private Godber's experience filtered down to yet another generation beyond yet another war. Among the first words of French the author ever learned were: *Voulez-vous promener* [sic] *avec moi ce soir mademoiselle*? ('Come out with me this evening, miss?') *Après la guerre* ('after the war' or 'nothing doing') was the required and rehearsed response. This exchange was enacted by many soldiers and young women in France as a kind of flirtatious 'play'. Many descendants of Australian Great War soldiers went on to develop an interest in the French language and that shared history with France and Belgium in the Great War.

Madeleine's message to Herbert Godber exemplifies the most enduring legacy of those times: the bond of friendship between the people of France, Belgium and Australia. This is reflected in the way Australian visitors are received in those historical areas, in Villers-Bretonneux in particular. It is within the small villages of the French and Belgian people that those ties of friendship were most securely strengthened. In some ways those homes and families took the place, not only of the soldiers' Australian homes, but also the 'home' that their battalion had become during the fighting. Loyalty

was strong among men 'whose very existence depended on the others, who would share their last franc or crust with each other, bound together till victory or death' (Gammage 1975, 229). The battalion was described by some as 'a family', by others as 'home' (*Red and White Diamond* nº 7 1919, 10). This loyalty among the members of each battalion also extended to their commanding officers. Good commanding officers were not only respected, they were also 'beloved' of their men. At the warm farewell the officers gave to Colonel James of the 24th Battalion, he was described as 'father of his men' (*Red and White Diamond* nº 7 February1919, 10). For Herbert Godber and those other soldiers whose battalions had disbanded, the warm welcome of a Belgian home and family would have been particularly appreciated.

With the end of the war the necessity for that close bond between 'brothers in arms' had loosened a little and in the warmth of civilian homes new kinds of friendship and a more 'normal' sense of family life were formed. Madeleine's postcard alludes to the nature of these relationships, with her reference to her sisters and their friends. For Herbert Godber, Nalinnes may have been 'a home away from home'. Sergeant W. J. Harvey describes the process of integration and domesticity more generally in an article headlined 'Entente Cordiale':

> Here and there we have discovered even common diggers snuggling into real beds with white sheets in rooms rented from the village inhabitants and nice little dinners served up on dining room tables […] The change is a welcome one after shell-hole life. The family clothes lines are adorned (?) by the washables of the soldiers, and around the family tables in the evenings the Aussies are found making themselves at home with 'papa', 'mama', and some of the lads even come the 'sister stakes' with the daughters of the household, while les garçons appear to take delight in the presence of their big Aussie brothers. This touch of home life, though it be only the quality of French peasantry in most cases [sic] is a treat for men on active service, especially for men who have been so long away from their own homes, and it testifies to the esteem in which our boys are held by the people in whose country they are now so well and favourably known. (*Red and White Diamond* nº 3 November 1918, 4)

Such was the pull of the home life offered by the French and Belgians that attendance at education classes often suffered as well as organised social events. Captain Wright of the 7th Battalion, billeted in the Belgian village of Couillet, reported that 'all ranks have been living in the happiest possible times with civilians, and everybody has made friends here and the people are so cosy and snug, drinking coffee in front of kitchen stoves that it is exceedingly difficult to drag them out' (Austin 2004, 262). Soldiers would only attend concerts if they could bring their Belgian friends. A strong sense of community was forged in the sharing of meals, in attending common social events and significant celebrations. While there was mutual joy in an engagement or wedding party, there was also the shared sorrow at the continuing loss of lives, from ordnance explosions in particular.

The intensity of the friendships forged over the last months of the war and the few weeks of living in Nalinnes and elsewhere is reflected in the heartfelt farewells at the end of their stay. The Australians were only moving a short way to a neighbouring suburb of Charleroi, but one soldier reported that 'his hostess commenced weeping three days before the departure', a regret that was only heightened when the remaining troops finally left the region (*The Red and White Diamond* nº 7 February 1919, 4 ). It was as though the Australians were witnessing their long-ago send-offs from Australia all over again: 'it reminds one of the departure of the troopships from Australia with ma, pa, mademoiselle and all the family along to bid a last farewell to some digger who has endeared himself to them all', reported Captain Cecil Fletcher (*Guyra Argus* 31 July 1919). Much the same sentiment was expressed nearly a century later in Jules Dardennes's account of that time:

> They tasted the charm of our villages, wept, laughed, sang, danced and created a circle of sympathy around themselves, but most of all, they found among us the warmth of the homes they had left behind (Lejeune 2014, 8).

Just as there was gratitude on both sides, so too, the feelings of sadness and regret at the final farewell were not altogether one-sided. 'The people of Nalinnes have our sincere thanks for the generosity they displayed during our short sojourn in their midst […] there were hearty handshakes, copious kisses and sincere '*bon chances*' [sic] (*The Red and White Diamond* nº 7 February 1919, 7). Many anecdotes speak eloquently of the nature of the relationship

that existed between the Australian soldier generally and his Belgian host. Harry Massie wrote to a young Nalinnes friend, Lucy Gauthier, many years later and recalled the happy times when they would go gathering herbs for the meals that Lucy's aunt would cook for them all:

> I have often thought of you all and those who did so much for us at that time. Perhaps some people might say that it is nothing to give a little good or other comfort, but to be thousands of miles away from home yet made to feel that you WERE HOME, well it gave one a very wonderful feeling. (Lejeune 2014, 81)

It was not only in correspondence that those friendships were continued. Henry Massie returned to Australia, where, in honour of the village that welcomed him so warmly, he named his home *Villa Nalinnes* (Lejeune 2014, 80). Another soldier, in order to keep the good memories alive, changed his hometown name of 'Lockhart Creek', near Tallangatta, Victoria, to 'Charleroi' (Lejeune 2014, 82). Yet another returned soldier called his daughter 'Denise' after the daughter of his hosts (Lejeune 2014, 77).

By its very nature the hospitality of French and Belgian communities was ephemeral as a vast distance would soon stretch between them. But the relationships that flourished in the ruined villages of the war would transform and ultimately endure. They were relationships founded upon a mostly favourable reputation and shaped by mutual respect. They were relationships that transcended the immediate sense of gratitude. The firm friendships that developed were characterised by trust and often deep affection that lasted much longer than the time it had taken for them to develop. Private Wally Atkins assured his host Albert Pourigneux of Nalinnes in March 1919: 'You will always be in our thoughts, because you were the best friends we ever had in France and Belgium' (Lejeune 2014, 11).

Despite the inevitable downsides, disturbances and bad behaviour among some Australian soldiers that was reported on both sides, the mostly beneficial experience of their brief stay seems to have taken on a greater significance with the passing of time. 'Little did they know', wrote Jules Dardennes, mayor of Nalinnes in 2014, 'that their presence among us would be one of the most moving chapters in the history of our village' (Lejeune 2014, 12). Among the ruins of a destructive war came an abiding friendship, a deep gratitude, a curiosity in another culture and language and finally, for

the Australians, the gift of belonging, a reassuring reminder that ultimately their own hearths and homes awaited them. In some cases, connections strengthened over the years and became enriched with the passing of time. Even after all these years, it is remarkable that the vestiges of this warm friendship remain in the collective memory of both the Australian, French and Belgian people. Madeleine's postcard to Herbert is a symbolic testament to the quality of that relationship and memory. Herbert Godber arrived back in Australia aboard the *Mahia* in July 1919. On 4 October 1919 he married his fiancée, Ivy Partington, in the garden of her parents' home in Greensborough, Victoria. He wore his army uniform because, as the family story goes, he did not yet have a suit. Herbert never forgot his French and kept forever his postcard from Madeleine, perhaps never forgetting his friends in Belgium, friends who had intended always to remember him. We do not know whether he sent Madeleine the photo that she requested, as *un bon souvenir pour nous* ('a good souvenir for us'), but their brief friendship parallels the many that formed in that post-war period between the soldiers of the 1st AIF and the liberated people of France and Belgium.

*Moyarra, South Gippsland*

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# VILLERS-BRETONNEUX: A DIFFERENT LANDSCAPE

## AN AUTHOR'S REFLECTION ON REMEMBRANCE OF THE GREAT WAR IN AUSTRALIA AND FRANCE

ANDREW PLANT

My work as an author and illustrator of children's picture books had for many years focussed on natural history. With the approach of the centenary of the Great War, I decided to take on quite a different subject—the role of the First Australian Imperial Force in France.

A search at the time of Australian children's books on the Great War revealed several about Gallipoli, especially Simpson and his donkey, but very few about the Western Front. The sprawling nature of the battles in Belgium and France makes it a difficult subject for younger readers. This has led to a situation where many people, older as well as younger, seem to equate the Great War principally with Gallipoli, the Western Front being seen more as a British fight. In the last few years this perception has begun to shift, and should do so even more as the Anzac Centenary commemorations move to France and Belgium.

I realised that to effectively communicate a story to younger readers, I needed a narrow focus on a single event. I can't remember where I first read about the battle of Villers-Bretonneux, but once I found out about it, and particularly what happened subsequently, and continues till today, I was stunned. This was a story that needed to be told, about events with a similar resonance in Australia's history as Gallipoli, yet, inexplicably, almost unknown to the general community. So *The Poppy* was born, a picture book that would attempt, in a small way, to gently introduce children to a momentous event.

The Battle of Villers-Bretonneux occurred in the last year of the war. In March 1918 the Germans commenced their final major offensive, which almost gave them victory. Although Operation Michael was stopped in many places, in the Somme the Germans punched a 60 km hole in the British lines. They were only 30 km from the vital railhead of Amiens, which was only 120 km from Paris.

Thanks largely to the Australian and Canadian Corps the offensive was stopped. It was during this time that the battle of Villers-Bretonneux took place, on 24/25 April 1918, ending on the third Anzac Day. General John Monash was at this time commander of the 3rd Division, and contrary to a common belief that he had a part in the battle, he in fact had no direct involvement. It was his 3rd Division, however, which had held Villers-Bretonneux until relieved by the 8th British Division on April 23, who then lost it to the Germans the next day. The British were tired but, fortunately for the Allies, two formidable AIF commanders and their brigades were available for a counter-attack.

Brigadier General Harold Edward Elliott (1878–1931) led the 15th Brigade of the Fifth Division. His men called him 'Pompey', a nickname which he disliked but which he could never shake off. He was famous for his stern discipline when training the 7th Battalion at Broadmeadows. On the day of the Gallipoli landing, 25 April 1915, Elliott was wounded and evacuated, not returning until early June. He soon won a reputation for cool courage. At Lone Pine on 8 August he relieved part of the 1st Brigade and for the next twenty-four hours held off the vicious Turkish counter attacks in hand-to-hand fighting. Of the seven Victoria Crosses awarded for Lone Pine, four went to Elliott's battalion but his own work was not recognised. This was the beginning of an irritation for Elliott, which would later become an obsession.

In March 1916 he had been given the job of organising the 15th (Victorian) Brigade in the new 5th Division and was promoted to brigadier general. In July Elliott began his service on the Western Front where he fought in most of the great battles of the AIF. His Brigade took shocking losses at Fromelles, which was their first action, when his two assaulting battalions suffered 1452 casualties in less than twenty-four hours. Elliott had vigorously protested that No-Man's-Land was too wide and that the attack was hopeless, poorly and hurriedly planned. The resulting slaughter nearly broke him, but after the battle, he went along the line, quietly greeting or consoling every survivor he could find, before returning silently to his headquarters and weeping inconsolably.

Thereafter, Elliott could be a difficult subordinate when the safety of his men was involved. At least twice after Fromelles he protested so

vehemently against attacks ordered by 5th Division headquarters that the operations were cancelled. His men loved him for it. Charles Bean described Elliott as:

> […] an outstandingly strong, capable, and sympathetic leader; and in his directness and simplicity, and in a baffling streak of humility that shot through his seemingly absorbing vanity, there were elements of real greatness (Bean 1941, 523).

After the war, he was deeply involved in the affairs of returned soldiers and redrafted the constitution of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, which is now the RSL.

The perceived injustices that Elliott suffered during the war, in particular his lack of promotion to a divisional command, began to obsess him more acutely upon his return to Australia. Elliott had what would now be described as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. It became so severe that in 1931, at 52 years of age, Elliott took his own life while receiving treatment as an in-patient in a private hospital in Malvern, Victoria. After a short funeral service at his home at 56 Prospect Hill Road, his casket was drawn, with full military honours on a horse-drawn gun carriage to the Burwood General Cemetery. Thousands lined the funeral route.

The other Australian leader, Brigadier General Thomas William Glasgow (1876–1955), led the 13th Brigade of the 4th Division. He had served in the South African War as a lieutenant. In 1901 he was mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Distinguished Service Order. He enlisted at the outbreak of war and was appointed major in the 2nd Light Horse Regiment. He fought at Gallipoli, and on 7 August he led 200 New South Wales Light-horsemen in an attack on Dead Man's Ridge. All but 46 were killed or wounded. Glasgow was among the last to retire, carrying with him one of his wounded troopers.

In March 1916 when the 4th and 5th Divisions were formed, Glasgow was given command of the 13th Infantry Brigade. He led the Brigade in many important actions including those at Pozières, Messines, Passchendaele, Mouquet Farm and Dernancourt. In June Glasgow was promoted major

general and appointed commander of the 1st Division in Flanders, and was part of the successful offensive that ended the war. It was this promotion that Elliott had so desperately desired. Bean (1941) described Glasgow as:

> […] transparent as his own Queensland sky, but rugged as the Queensland hills, he was slow and even shy in giving his opinion, but, when he spoke, his good sense, force of will, and honesty of purpose carried their way in councils of war (571).

So we have two very different personalities leading the two brigades at Villers-Bretonneux—the fiery, temperamental, ambitious Elliott, and the calmer, taciturn, solid Glasgow. Both men, however, shared essential characteristics that made them supreme leaders of soldiers: they both had a firm grasp of tactics in modern warfare; they were in the front lines with their men to see the battle grounds for themselves, and to make decisions based on personal observations; they both had the courage to stand up to anyone when given orders they believed to be foolhardy or pointless; and, despite both being stern disciplinarians, they both cared deeply for the welfare of their men, and fought tenaciously to prevent useless casualties among them.

The German attack on Villers-Bretonneux on April 24 began with artillery, using both mustard gas and high explosive rounds. The German infantry with fourteen supporting tanks broke through the British 8th Division, making a 5 km wide gap in the British lines. This was followed by the first ever engagement between opposing tanks. Three British Mark IV tanks were involved, and although all were damaged, the German tanks either fled or were destroyed.

However, Villers-Bretonneux had fallen to the Germans who, from the north of the town, could clearly see the spires of Amiens Cathedral. Along with some British battalions, the job of retaking Villers-Bretonneux was assigned to Glasgow's and Elliott's brigades with some British support. The British wanted to attack as soon as the brigades were assembled, but Elliott and Glasgow saw that this would lead to a massacre. Glasgow, having reconnoitred the position, refused British orders to attack across the enemy's front. He said, 'Tell us what you want us to do Sir, but you must let us do it our own way' (Pedersen 2004, 107). He refused to attack at 8 pm in daylight: 'If it was God Almighty who gave the order, we couldn't do it in daylight.

Here is all your artillery largely out of action and the enemy with all his guns in position' (108).

The plan to recapture Villers-Bretonneux was relatively simple, but difficult and dangerous. The Germans had been able to place a significant number of men and machine guns in the town and along the railway embankment to the south and west. They had also established themselves in the woods to the west of the town. The Australian plan was for a surprise night attack, with no preliminary artillery bombardment. Two battalions (the 51st and 52nd Battalions, about 1,500 men) of the 13th Brigade, would attack eastwards to the south of Villers-Bretonneux. Three battalions (the 57th, 59th and 60th Battalions, about 2,400 men) of the 15th Brigade, would similarly attack from the north of the town towards the east and then swing south-east. Thus would the Germans be encircled and trapped.

However, against success were the facts that the planning had been done hastily, with many changes due to disagreements between the British and Australian commanders; the attack was being carried out over ground that the 13th Brigade had never seen, against an enemy who had been given substantial time to prepare a defence; and the whole operation was being done at night.

The 13th Brigade's southern attack began at 10 pm. Captain Robert Forsyth, medical officer of the 52nd Battalion, recalled:

> […] an officer shouted 'Still'. I could see a long single line of men standing motionless as far as I could see in either direction, and, as the light faded, the darkness in front started to tap, tap, tap, and bullets whistled round and the line shuffled forward with rifles at the ready like men strolling into fern after rabbits. The whistle of bullets became a swish and patter, and boys fell all round me, generally without a sound (cited in Bean 1941, 582).

This 'swish and patter' was in fact a deadly torrent of fire from enemy machine guns in the Bois d'Aquenne woods to their left. The British had assured Glasgow that the woodland was free of Germans—whereas at least six German machine gun posts were there. The left end of the advancing Australian line was cut to pieces. Lieutenant Clifford Sadlier wrote:

> We wondered what had struck us. Before we had gone fifty yards, 39 out of 42 in my platoon were in the mud either dead or wounded. I hit the deck and saw that Charlie Stokes from another platoon was still alive, and two bombers […] had also escaped the fire. I knew that if we did not clear out the edge of that wood, the 51st Battalion would be sitting ducks (Pederson 2004, 115).

Lieutenant Sadlier and Sergeant Stokes gathered another seven men and together they assaulted the Germans with grenades. Sadlier was badly wounded after taking out three machine guns, so Stokes and the two surviving men destroyed the rest of them. Sadlier was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions. Stokes, despite having a citation that was virtually identical, was awarded the DCM instead, probably because he was only a sergeant. Despite taking heavy casualties the two battalions swept on towards their objectives. One German officer later wrote:

> They were magnificent. Nothing seemed to stop them. When our fire was heaviest, they just disappeared in shell holes and came up as soon as it slackened. When we used Verey lights they stood still and were hard to see (Unnamed German officer, quoted in Browning 2000, 157).

By dawn on 25 April, the 51st and 52nd Battalions had not quite achieved their objectives but they had broken through the German positions to the south of Villers-Bretonneux and established a fairly secure line.

The northern attack battalions, the 15th Brigade, did not begin their advance until an hour after the appointed time. As the 59th Battalion advanced, they unleashed a banshee yell that was heard by the 13th Brigade fighting well over a kilometer away. This was a ferocious, often hand-to-hand attack, and as long as the night advance lasted, no quarter was shown to the Germans.

Very few prisoners were taken. Sgt Walter Downing of the 57th remembered:

> A snarl came from the throat of the mob, the fierce, low growl of tigers scenting blood. There was a howling as of demons as the 57th, fighting mad, drove through the wire, through the 59th, who sprang to their sides—through the enemy. […] Baying like

> hell hounds, they […] charged. There was no quarter on either side. [The Germans] had no chance in the wild onslaught of maddened men [… The Australians] were bathed in spurting blood. They killed and killed. Bayonets passed with ease through grey-clad bodies, and were withdrawn with a sucking sound. […] One huge Australian advanced firing a Lewis gun from the shoulder, spraying the ground with lead. […] It is unlikely that any of the enemy escaped their swift, relentless pursuers. They were slaughtered against the lurid glare of the fire in the town. (Downing 1998, 118–119)

And so by the morning of April 25 the Australians, with some assistance from British units, had virtually surrounded Villers-Bretonneux. It took the rest of that day and into 26 April to completely secure the town and to establish a new front line east of it. It marked the end of the German offensive on the Somme which had begun with great success in March. Nearly four thousand Australians charged into battle that night. About a third of them—one thousand, three hundred men—died liberating the town. There were 2,500 casualties overall.

The victory at Villers-Bretonneux stunned everyone who witnessed it, on both sides. The highly decorated British Brigadier General George Grogan VC asserted that the attack was 'perhaps the greatest individual feat of the war' (Pederson 1004, 140). British Major Neville Lytton, OBE, wrote:

> The importance of Villers-Bretonneux cannot be over-estimated. The Australians […] made one of the most astounding manoeuvres of the war. [… The] battlefield discipline of the Australians must be absolutely perfect, no matter what their billet discipline might be. […] Even if the Australians achieved nothing else in this war […], they would have won the right to be considered among the greatest fighting races of the world. (Lytton 1921, 163–164)

The Australian commanders were justifiably proud of what their men had achieved, and gave credit where it was due. Elliott wrote:

> The fight became a soldiers' fight purely and simply, and neither myself nor the Battalion Commanders could exercise any control upon it. The success was due to the energy and determination of

> junior commanders and the courage of the troops. (Cited in Bean 1941, 641–642)

* * *

In 2011 I lived in Paris for three months. In September, through a bizarre set of coincidences I ended up staying in Villers-Bretonneux with the past-president of the Franco-Australian Association. I spent most of my time photographing, sketching and researching locations for my book, and visited the two local schools—the Collège Jacques Brel and the École Victoria. I returned in November with some of the completed paintings, and worked at the schools for a few days, despite my appalling French. Fortunately, as I told the students, I can draw in French quite well!

The history of the École Victoria (the Victoria School) is where the extraordinary post-war part of the story begins. After the war, Villers-Bretonneux was adopted by the city of Melbourne. Such adoption happened in a number of places in Australia, with French towns adopted and money raised to help in their reconstruction. Victorian schoolchildren donated their pennies to help rebuild the town's school. To this day it is called the École Victoria, and is situated on Rue du Victoria. On a long board above the playground, in sky blue letters on a golden background, are the words 'Do Not Forget Australia'. The same words, in French, are in every classroom.

Interestingly, the École Victoria is only one of a very few French schools of this period to have a hall. Unlike Australian schools, halls simply weren't part of the average French school. This is an Australian-style school hall in the French landscape. The roof space of the hall has now become the Franco-Australian Museum. It is quite lovely to be quietly walking through the exhibition, with its unavoidable focus on sacrifice and loss, and to hear the sounds of children playing in the courtyard below. It is probably the most fitting memorial that any of the soldiers who were involved could have desired—a school full of happy, laughing kids who have no personal experience of war.

Of course, there is an official memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. A couple of kilometres north of the town, on a low, broad hill over which the 15th Brigade advanced on that April night in 1918, is the Australian National Memorial. It is dedicated to those Australians with no known grave in France,

those whose bodies were never found. Engraved on its stone walls are over ten thousand names.

To stand before that seemingly endless rollcall of the vanished is both deeply moving and brutally confronting. It is impossible to truly comprehend the horror that those silent names represent. Indeed, for many of the diggers returning to Australia after the war, the futility of trying to describe their experiences to those they had left behind became a source of deep frustration, anger and depression. Many returned servicemen wrote of the extraordinary disconnect they felt to everyone else, the loneliness and isolation.

> They found it difficult to become civilians in spirit, for the war was etched into their souls. […] They had killed men, and their bloodied hands turned awkwardly to gentler tasks and pleasures. […] Once a year they were honoured for their part in the war, but they found it hard to accept an attitude which others easily adopted, that what was part of Australian life was also part of Australia's past'. (Gammage 1975, 275)

The wide, clean landscape to which many soldiers returned was so utterly alien to the Western Front that it may as well have been another planet. Many ex-soldiers never spoke of their experiences, except in the comradely safety of their local RSL. Others withdrew from society completely, even denying they ever went to war. The Western Front, to the average Australian, became a vague, dark morass of relentless slaughter that offered no respite from despair. It was a conflict of huge complexity and unimaginable horror that ground on for years, and was totally beyond the comprehension of anyone who had not been there. It was simply too vast, too awful, too depressing and very different from the conflict at Gallipoli, a relatively brief campaign in a very specific location. Even the landscape itself made it somehow more accessible to Australians—a hot, dry beach and scrubby cliffs. It also occurred in the first months of the conflict, long before the sickening reality of modern industrial warfare became apparent. In those early months, an air of a grand adventure still hovered over the battle. It was somehow a *cleaner* campaign, almost noble. After all, celebrating a noble defeat was a great British tradition. That is a huge over-simplification of course, but the actual events have become less important than the symbolic nature of what occurred—the first time Australians fought *as* Australians, and they did it magnificently. A mythology

grew, and a large part of it is myth. But its significance to our history cannot be denied.

For many years, the Australian experience in France has often been overshadowed by Gallipoli. Now I don't believe for a moment that the significance of Gallipoli should in any way be diminished, but I do believe that the Western Front deserves far more recognition. Years of war and hundreds of actions are not easy concepts for people to grasp, and so we tend to look for a moment that represents the broader idea. I believe the battle of Villers-Bretonneux is that moment; an Australian action, against terrible odds, that ended in a victory many historians consider one of the turning points of the war. And the coincidence of the date the town was reclaimed, 25 April—Anzac Day—adds to the resonance. Even on the night itself, the significance of the date was not lost on the men. Sergeant Downing wrote:

> The moon sank behind clouds. There were houses burning in the town, throwing a sinister light on the scene. It was past midnight. Men muttered 'It's Anzac Day,' smiling to each other, enlivened by the omen'. (Downing 1998, 117)

Yet despite this, it is the French, rather than Australians, who have truly kept the memory alive. Only now, in the last few years, do we seem as a nation to be embracing the commemoration of the battle of Villers-Bretonneux. That is why I felt I needed to tell this story. That is why I wrote *The Poppy*, and why I wrote it for children. I believe that the name Villers-Bretonneux should be as much a part of our national consciousness as Gallipoli. And I believe that it is as children we need to learn this part of our history, so that, difficult as it is to pronounce, Villers-Bretonneux becomes a familiar part of an Australian child's vernacular, as Australian as kangaroo, Uluru, the Reef, and Gallipoli.

If you doubt that the battle of Villers-Bretonneux was indeed a defining moment, still honoured and remembered, let me finish with the following brief story. In February 2009, devastating bushfires swept through Victoria. Hundreds were killed and injured. Thousands were left homeless, entire towns rased. The burnt landscapes reminded many people of, and were frequently described as, a war zone. In Villers-Bretonneux, the people heard of the tragedy. They remembered the words at the Victoria School, the promises made by their grandparents to never forget a debt. The small

town raised 13,000 Euros nearly ($21,000) and donated it to help rebuild the Strathewen Primary School, which had been totally destroyed in the fires.

*N'oublions jamais l'Australie*, Never Forget Australia. Never forget the lives that were given, the lives that were lost. The people of Villers-Bretonneux never have. Nor should we.

*Melbourne*

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# ‘JE SUIS EN AUSTRALIE’: A PERSONAL MEMOIR OF VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

ANNE BRASSART [1]

‘I am in Australia!’ Those were the words we screamed as children when stepping with delight on the thick lawn of the Australian cemetery in Villers-Bretonneux. Under the vast sky, blue or grey, here was ‘Australia’, here was immensity, here was freedom. On the soft green turf, we could run and run, first to the centre of the lawn where the tall stone cross stood, supporting an impressively big sword, point down. We would climb the very high steps leading to the foot of the cross and then we would go on as far as the majestic tower dominating the Memorial. It was a race to see who would reach it first. But we never went inside. It had been damaged during the last war (1939–1945), and was unsafe. Behind the tower, at the far end of what was for us ‘Australia’, there were no tombs but big bushes which were ideal for playing hide and seek or other games that did not require anything but running and sometimes singing. Lots of delighted children’s laughter rose to the sky!

We knew that the *Mémorial* was a burial place for the Australian soldiers, and also some from Canada and New Zealand, but because it looked more like a park, and was not at all a sad place, we did not think of it as a cemetery. The vastness of it, especially for small children, and the open fields all around it, sloping gently down to the valley of the Somme, gave us an exciting feeling of liberty. And because we had walked from our house for what seemed a long time to this place—very isolated in those days—my mother pushing the pram of the last born (we became a family of six in Villers-Bretonneux), we felt very far from home. The immense lawn surrounded with flowers and standing slabs of stone felt like another world, at a great distance from our French village. We might well have been on the other side of the Earth. Each tombstone corresponded to one soldier. Thousands of them, and France had given this piece of land to Australia for ever so that they should be at home in their graves. It was no longer France for us, it *was* ‘Australia’.

[1] Recollections by Annie Brassart, (now Anne Brassart-Evans) former inhabitant of Villers-Bretonneux and president of the Franco-Australian Association of that village from 2007 to 2009.

We were not allowed to play close to the graves but once my mother made me decipher names engraved on the tombstones, and she had a sad face when saying the age of the dead men. For a child of four or five, the age of twenty or even nineteen is unthinkably old. It was not death nor the young age of the victims that could make an impression on the very little girl I was. It was the expression of sorrow on my mother's face. Often she would make us admire the flowers along the rows of tombs, and how well the cemetery was looked after.

When we, the older three, were old enough to ride a bicycle, she started taking us to the swimming-pool in Corbie, with her last born in a basket on her own bicycle. The swimming pool was then a primitive place with cold dark green water directly from the river Somme. I did not like it at all, but the reward for me was that we would stop on the way back for a rest at the Memorial and have a good run on the grass. Once she must have cycled there with my father who took a photograph of her sitting on the low wall on the side of the large stairs at the entrance of the cemetery, nursing her last born baby. A peaceful scene of a young French woman in a flowery dress, breastfeeding her son where thousands of Australian women's sons had been killed less than thirty years before—young strangers now resting in the soil of Picardie. Many years later, as a mature woman visiting Gallipoli for the first time, I was reminded of this moment of my mother's life when I read the extract of Mustapha Kemal's speech in homage to the soldiers killed in that most disastrous of battles: *'*You the mothers who sent their sons from far away countries wipe away your tears. Your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.'

I wish I had anecdotes to tell about an Australian who stayed on in 1918 after the end of the First World War, but that was too long ago, and reference to the Second World War prevailed in my childhood, the First World War being encapsulated within it. Even though I was not old enough to be aware of it at the time, it should be said that above all, after 1945 the people of France wanted to start a normal life again, to rebuild once more what had been destroyed and to live in peace, without fear. War had to be put behind.

This is what the Right Honourable H. V. Evatt missed when he wrote in the 1950s: 'What seems just as urgent (as repairing the Memorial) is some means of renewing the bonds that link Melbourne with the village school. There is a pathetic cardboard notice "Never forget Australia" but

there is absolutely nothing in recent years to keep alive the tradition of the AIF in the minds of the new generation of France'.[2] 'In recent years', France had been occupied by the Germans and all signs of gratefulness to the Australians for having beaten them in Villers-Bretonneux and everywhere were forbidden and had to be destroyed. 'The village school' he is referring to is what was then known as 'l'école des garçons', the boys' school, named *École Victoria* after its reconstruction by the Australians and its inauguration in 1927. Until the 1960s, girls and boys went to separate schools. The girls' school of Villers-Bretonneux, a large 19th century brick building, was one of the rare structures not to be totally destroyed in April 1918 during the battle to recapture the village from the Germans. It was briefly used as a war hospital, then became again the girls' school. I was a pupil there with my sister in the 1950s. I have only one memory of hearing about Australia in class: one teacher showed us where it was, with a knitting needle piercing an orange diagonally. It went in through what represented France and came out on the other side where Australia was marked. 'You cannot go any further. As soon as you leave Australia, you start coming back, whichever side you go,' That fact was particularly intriguing for me. We all knew that very strange animals lived there, carrying their babies in their front pocket. But we did not know much else from school at that time.

My brothers went to the other school, the 'école des garçons'. Were they aware that their school had been rebuilt by the Australians? The elder one told me that he knew it, but not from the teachers. He heard it mentioned, as I did too, in conversations at home between my parents and family or friends. He vaguely remembers a panel bearing the word 'Australia' under the playground shelter (*le préau*), probably the same one mentioned by Dr Evatt. My brother remembers better the strange animals carved at the top of the wood panelling in the assembly hall. The teachers did call the attention of the children to them, and they knew they were animals that really existed in a remote country called Australia. He also remembers the long walks with the school to the Memorial for a ceremony with military music, and to the French War Monument in the centre of the village, the 'Monument aux Morts'. In France we do not erect monuments to War, but to all the Dead who perished

[2] Allan Blankfield and Robin S. Corfield, *Never forget Australia, n'oublions jamais l'Australie—Australia and Villers-Bretonneux (1918–1993*), Melbourne, The Villers-Bretonneux 75th Anniversary Pilgrimage Project Committee, 1993.

in the war. To this day, I feel the shiver that went through me when the single trumpet of the village band, in the total silence, would play the few tragic notes of 'L'appel aux Morts', the call to the Dead.

That same brother remembers the visit of a group of strangers in his classroom, accompanied by 'Monsieur Rinet'. He knew him well because Léon Rinet was a friend of my parents, owner of a weaving factory and town councillor, just like my father. But he does not remember being told that these visitors were Australians. He only guessed it because we knew, in the family, that Monsieur Rinet, a tall handsome man, intelligent and forward-looking and his wife, a very nice woman called Louisette, always smiling and generous, were involved with the Australians, but no *Waltzing Mathilda* was sung then, nothing was explained to the pupils, neither about the visitors nor the reason for their visit in their class. Or perhaps they did not pay much attention, too busy to enjoy their little boys' lives.

One day our parents told us that an orphan girl was going to stay with us for a holiday in Villers-Bretonneux. She was thirteen, very old for us, as we were far from being teenagers yet, and her name was Gudrun, which made my young brothers giggle enormously. They also explained that she would be coming to France with a group of children who would stay with other families in the village. They were German children whose families had been killed during the war. Church charities were looking after them in Germany. My parents were members of a Catholic association of young married couples who were seeking to live by the Gospel's difficult demand to love and forgive one another, even enemies. They were modest precursors of the forgiveness and promise of peace that de Gaulle and Adenauer solemnly sealed in Rheims cathedral on the 8th of July 1962 in the name of their two countries.

Thus we learned, with Gudrun's visit, that *les Boches* were not only the dreadful enemy, but that they also had children who had suffered because of the madness of war. In the late 1950s my father's work took us away from Villers-Bretonneux, or just 'Villers' as we usually call our village. Another life began for the family.

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It was only after a long life in various parts of France and several other countries that destiny brought me back to Villers, my childhood village, only to leave it again in 2012, this time married to an Australian. From 2004 to

2009, as I was alone then and had some free time, I became very involved in the Franco-Australian Association of Villers-Bretonneux. In 2007 after the death of the President, the dedicated Monsieur Thierry (Jean-Pierre, as the Australians always called him), I accepted to be elected President of the Association only to give the members of the committee time to find someone else. I could not commit myself to taking over the responsibility for long, as I was about to leave France again to work abroad.

During those few years back in Villers I had the pleasure of discovering in depth the whole magnificent story linked with my dear childhood impressions of the Australian Memorial. The First World War took a shape of its own, as the first part of the bloody tragedy that culminated into the Second World War, with its gruesome French experience of defeat, partition of the country, German occupation, civil war between the Vichy French and the Free French, deportation of Frenchmen to work in Germany and the horrors of concentration camps to eliminate Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, *Résistants* and all those brave French people who had tried to help them. Compared to that, the First World War appeared to me like the last of the old-time wars.

Concerning Villers-Bretonneux, I learned of the bravery of the Australian brigades sent in April 1918 to that weak point in the Western Front, between the allied armies, British to the north and French to the south. The Germans had taken advantage of this weakness to capture the village and intended to push on to Longueau, and its important railway junction, a few kilometres away from Amiens. It is important to note that the population of the village had been evacuated as soon as the German advance was known in March 1918. My grandparents, then young parents of my father born in 1914, and my aunt in 1916, went to Boves, not very far south, but on the other side of the battle line. Reminiscing in her old age, my aunt told me of that miniature exodus and of her awareness of the difficulties for everyday survival in Boves. And when they were allowed to go back to Villers, they found only ruins. *Plus rien*! she said with emphasis. My grandfather's wool weaving factory (one of the many *bonneteries* that were the wealth of Villers in those days), the house, everything in that area including the boys' school and the church were nothing but rubble on the ground. And everyone was more or less in the same catastrophic situation that many inhabitants had known already in 1871 after the ferocious invasion by Prussians. But that is another older story of war.

I became familiar with the names of the two exceptional Brigadiers-General who led their men to victory, William Glasgow and Pompey Elliott—and also Sadlier and Stokes—the bravest of the brave. But I am no strategic expert. I could not go into details of this important battle. The new visitors centre with an interpretation centre which is being built this year (2015) at the Memorial will no doubt do it very well. As brilliantly and efficiently led as the battle was, more than one thousand young men lost their lives that night—and many more, counting the dead Germans—that great night of victory corresponding to the date of the defeat in Gallipoli three years earlier. They were buried as best as possible in this destroyed village, a temporary cemetery in a field, with rough crosses made of wood taken from the ruins of the village, and names painted on them, with dates of the deceased if they were known.

For me, the most moving photograph of those times of mourning can be seen in the Museum in Victoria School, the original being at the War Memorial in Canberra. It is a simple scene of girls of Villers-Bretonneux laying flowers on the fresh tombs of the dead soldiers. The vases look like old jam jars, as makeshift as the crosses. From the girls' appearance one can guess at the poor circumstances of their lives but they *are* alive and young, and showing gratitude and respect to the dead strangers buried in the chalky soil of their destroyed but liberated village.

I became aware of one marvellous fact that I always liked to emphasise to the visitors of the Museum. Long before creating their National Memorial (pictured next page) that stands splendidly on the hill outside the village, the Australians helped to rebuild Villers-Bretonneux and, most significantly, the boys' school that had been completely demolished in 1918. The living children taken care of before the Dead, as brave and respected as they were! The school was inaugurated on ANZAC Day 1927 whereas the inauguration of the Memorial by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth took place only on the 22nd July 1938, shortly before the start of the Second World War. The school benefitted from a special treatment as it was entirely 'Australian made', from the architect's drawings to the importation of the wood for the floors and panelling of the walls in the hall that we call the 'Salle Victoria'. That hall is, in itself, an exception in France because we do not have assembly halls as they had originally a religious purpose. The only place where you can gather all the pupils of one French school would be, typically enough, the dining-hall! Nowadays, it is called the *salle polyvalente*.

Family members walk to the Villers–Bretonneux Australian National Memorial which dominates the skyline and is the entrance to the War cemetery

The strange carved animals that my brother remembered from his school days were the creation of the Australian sculptor John Grant and his students from the Daylesford Technical College in Victoria. They represent fauna and flora indigenous to Australia, completely exotic for the French. On ANZAC Day 2008, I had the pleasure of welcoming the sculptor's grand-daughter to Villers-Bretonneux. She donated a painting done by her grandfather to the Museum.

That same day I was pleased to meet a very old lady who was visiting for the first time 'the school that I gave a penny to for its reconstruction'. It is a lovely way to put it, as the story is told, romanticised a little for pedagogical purposes. Why not? The people of Australia, especially the state of Victoria responded with great generosity to the Government's appeal for funds to help the reconstruction of France. Villers-Bretonneux was 'adopted' by Melbourne.

Returning to the Villers of my childhood, I rediscovered its reality and I understood gradually how the Australian connection 'sadly ignored by the new generation of France', according to Dr Evatt in the 1950s, had been resurrected in more recent years. It started in 1950 when a group of friends, Léon Rinet and Marcel Pillon among them, decided to put together a number of items that they had collected from the last wars. So much was left on the battlefields—munitions, arms, everyday life objects from the trenches,

all sorts of things which were just unwanted reminders of war at first, but gradually took on a historical value for those who were collectors at heart. They were given the use of the little entrance room on the upper floor of the Victoria School, a 45 square metre space with a large window. Later, it became the 'accueil', the reception place, of the museum. At that time, after the interruption of the Second World War, Australians, mostly veterans, started coming back to Villers-Bretonneux to visit the battlefields and the Memorial. It had been damaged during the last war, but was still the place where their old comrades or men of their families were buried. Naturally they went to the Town Hall for information. This is how Monsieur Rinet met a group of old disabled Australians, so helpless after their long journey that he realised the necessity to create a structure to welcome such visitors. With his friend Marcel Pillon and the full support of the Mayor, Pierre Tranchard, he created in 1959 the 'Comité d'accueil Franco-Australien'. The Australian Ambassador was fully involved in this creation. They were on very friendly terms. The Embassy in Paris was far from being the important building and important post it has become nowadays. Léon Rinet and his wife Louisette would receive the Ambassador and his wife in their own home, as did the families Tranchard and Pillon. Official representatives of the Commonwealth would come from London and there were ceremonies and receptions. The most memorable of them was the Agent-General of Victoria, William Leggatt. He held his post in London from 1956 to 1964. He had personal memories of fighting in this part of Picardie during the First World War. He had taken part in the battles of Villers-Bretonneux and had survived. He was a great support to the Welcome Committee.

Some old inhabitants of Villers-Bretonneux remember that the Committee was felt to be a little too exclusive by the rest of the population. However, it achieved what was needed at the time: to arouse their curiosity about the Australian link with their village. The collection of war memorabilia in the attic of the boys' school was sorted out so that only the First World War items were presented and particularly the Australian ones. Gradually the attic was transformed and the informal collections were turned into a proper Museum. It was officially inaugurated in 1975 and named after Sir William Leggatt. This event was the occasion to refurbish the school in general, to paint a fresh 'DO NOT FORGET AUSTRALIA' on the *préau* of the playground in big yellow letters on a dark green background, and to place new inscriptions above the blackboards in the classrooms. They are in French

and say: 'N'oublions jamais l'Australie'. The original inscriptions on wood panels were put up in 1927 at the creation of the school. They had to be taken down and hidden away thirteen years later under German rule. One of them has been preserved and can be seen in the hall of the Victoria School.

As always, some personalities can make a difference to how things evolve. Those who were instrumental in renewing the interest of the inhabitants for their Australian link after the tragic gap due to the Second World War had been Léon Rinet, Marcel Pillon, Pierre Tranchard and a few others in the 1950s. Then came Jean-Pierre Thierry in 1975, [see http://theatrum-belli.org/la-somme-90-ans-apres-la-grande-bataille/] the President with whom I worked for a while before his death in 2007, and Hubert Lelieur, the mayor. Those were the leaders for innovations like the *jumelage* between Villers-Bretonneux and Robinvale in Victoria. They were declared 'twin towns' in 1984 and their *jumelage* has continued ever since, with ups and downs and a few inconsistencies in the long term, due to conflicts of personalities. This aspect of things is not specific to a particular place. I have seen it happen everywhere, village, town, big or small, any country, any time, for any reason. As for the life of associations, I have come across situations of conflict and clash of personalities everywhere. Villers-Bretonneux is no different.

Sometimes it has positive effects, like the creation by the Municipality of the *semaine australienne*, the Australian Week, which includes the 25th of April and the ANZAC ceremonies, a very good initiative, but causing some competition with the *Comité de jumelage* that was not included at first. However, after a few years, a sensible agreement prevailed, and more activities were organised in that week, including a reception for the visitors from Robinvale: lectures, concerts, parades, battlefield visits, on foot or by road or by small planes from the nearby small airfield of Glisy near Amiens, and also an Australian (AFL) football match in the fields. A few shopkeepers make an effort to put up an Australian décor in their shop-windows. Since the first 'Dawn service' in 2008 (there had always been official ceremonies with the Australian Ambassador and other personalities on 25th of April but not at dawn) the number of Australian and British visitors has considerably increased and the villagers can hardly ignore that something important is happening. Many respond positively to the appeal of the *Comité de jumelage* to offer hospitality to the Australian visitors as there is no hotel or guest-house in Villers-Bretonneux since I closed my unofficial one in 2009.

My observation about the importance of individuals in making things happen and live on also applies to the school and its teachers. There are no specific instructions to them concerning the unique status of the Victoria School and its historic link with Australia. It is up to the personal interest and initiative of individual teachers. Many are appointed to that school knowing nothing of First World War events in Villers-Bretonneux and they will not try to find out. Some can see that it is a great way of teaching history and geography to their pupils, and also important values such as gratitude, fidelity, respect and honour. Some will start teaching English to them, making a connection with schoolchildren in Australia, and starting a correspondence. Much depends too on the headmaster or headmistress. He or she might facilitate the teachers' initiatives, or make it difficult for them for all sorts of reasons, sometimes just not to be involved in more than the basic school curriculum. In the few years that I was involved in the Museum inside the school, I was happy to witness some excellent work done by several teachers: Chantal Macret, who taught for many years at the Victoria School, was particularly dedicated. She had personal friends in Australia and transmitted her love of that country to her pupils. The rare times when Australian visitors heard *Waltzing Matilda* in a classroom were in hers. This was the start of a legend that all the school children of Villers-Bretonneux could sing *Waltzing Matilda*! But Chantal Macret retired in June 2009 and as far as I know, no one really took over from her, at least for a few years. The new headmistress had to apply strict instructions from the Education Department to keep visitors out. It is no longer possible to wander into the playground and have a photograph taken under the famous sign 'Do not forget Australia', except with special permission.

Pupils leaving the primary school do their secondary education at the Collège Jacques Brel in Villers-Bretonneux, from age 11 or 12 to 14 or 15, and then on to the lycée mostly in Amiens. Again, depending on the personality and interest of the college principal and some of the teachers, the culture of celebrating the Franco-Australian relationship is continued or not. During my years in Villers-Bretonneux, I witnessed and supported the excellent work of one of the English teachers, Madame Petitjean, also member of the Franco-Australian Association. She had succeeded in involving a few colleagues in cultivating interest in the Australian link and passing it on to their pupils. Those pupils who had been taught by Chantal Macret in primary school were already well informed, as were their parents who had to

approve and accept that their children be involved in various events during the *Semaine australienne* and for some other occasional events organised in the village or by the College. A lot of initiative and hard work and donations make it possible for Madame Petitjean to organise school trips every two years to Australia itself: a fantastic journey, always very well prepared and pedagogically exploited on their return, with high quality reporting presented to the public in the Victoria School assembly hall by the pupils themselves. She and her class, in the name of the College, received the Sadlier-Stokes Prize in 2008.[3]

The Collège Jacques Brel responded well to the fund-raising appeal made by the Franco-Australian Association to help the rebuilding of an Australian school (in Strathewen) destroyed by fire in the dramatic 'black Saturday' bush fires of 2009 in the State of Victoria. Pupils and teachers did their share of collecting money, as did the primary schools and all other institutions in the village. 'They helped us in our time of need; it now is our turn to help them'.

That touching story moved the heart and mind of an Australian artist, Andrew Plant, when he heard of it and he decided to make it known to Australian children by means of an illustrated book.[4] I was no longer involved officially in the Franco-Australian Association then, except as an ordinary member, but I was asked by Lorraine and Mélanie, hostesses and secretaries of the Museum who received his email, to give him information and support. Contacts were made, and in September 2011 I had the pleasure of gathering in my house in Villers-Bretonneux some representatives of the various entities involved in the continuation of the pledge of remembrance with Australia. Invited by Madame Petitjean, we also went to the College where we were welcomed by an enthusiastic Principal, for whom the Australian link was so important that he was trying to obtain a change of name for his College. There are many schools in France called 'Jacques Brel'. For Villers-Bretonneux, he wanted a name specifically related to Australia and the First World War. He

[3] Sergeant Stokes and Lieutenant Clifford Sadlier VC received awards for their bravery and leadership during the battle to liberate Villers-Bretonneux in 1918—a battle that was instrumental in turning the tide of the war. Sergeant Stokes was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and Lieutenant Sadlier the Victoria Cross. On his return to Australia Stokes named his farm 'Villers'.

[4] See Andrew Plant's own testimony in this issue (Ed.).

wanted to have it renamed 'John Monash' after the great Australian general, who stated that 'There is no spot on the whole of the tortured soil of France which is more associated with Australian history and the triumph of Australian soldiers than Villers-Bretonneux.'[5]

But the Principal had to obtain permission from the education authorities as high up as the Ministry. So far, I have not heard that he has been successful. In fact, the name Monash might well be attributed to the new Visitors Centre planned at the Memorial long before the College can obtain it (see Editor's Notes at the end of this article). Andrew Plant made other visits to Villers-Bretonneux, trying to understand the complexities of this modest French village where the old inhabitants are still wary of strangers after so many war tragedies throughout the centuries, and the new ones are hardly aware of that history. His charming book *The Poppy* was published in 2014. It might well play a role in transmitting the story of the Australians at Villers-Bretonneux to the younger generations, in Australia and in France, together with more and more children's publications on the subject.[6]

Significant changes have now started at the Memorial and at the Museum. When related by the media, the Australian public may have the impression that this is all new. It is not new, of course. Over the years the people of Villers-Bretonneux became *blasés* if not sarcastic or highly amused whenever big plans for the Memorial were discussed between Embassy, municipal and local authorities and the Franco-Australian Association. I must point out here that they have become so used to having visits from very important officials from Australia, the last one being the then Prime Minister himself, on ANZAC Day 2014, that they have ceased to marvel and even to pay much attention. This very down to earth population takes it all in its stride and goes on minding its own business while 'Ché z'Australiens' (a Picard way of saying 'les Australiens') go about theirs. After all, the Memorial belongs to

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[5] Cited in Allan Blankfield and Robin S. Corfield, *Never forget Australia, n'oublions jamais l'Australie—Australia and Villers-Bretonneux (1918–1993*), Melbourne, The Villers-Bretonneux 75th Anniversary Pilgrimage Project Committee, 1993, p. 97.

[6] For example, Derek Guille's bi-lingual *The Promise: the town that never forgets/ N'oublions jamais l'Australie*, Illustrated by Kaff-eine, translated by Anne-Sophie Biguet, Melbourne, One Day Hill, 2013.

the Australians. It is 'a corner of Australia in France' as is written on the road sign at the entrance of the village by the Amiens road.

When I became involved with the Museum and the Association in 2004, there had already been many projects and programmes, with budgets approved in the preceding years; more projects and studies were done during the following years, only to be put aside at every change of the Australian government. This time, with the approach of the various centenaries of the major events of the First World War, there is an urgency in finalising the chosen project. This time, it may well happen. Already work has started both on the site of the Memorial and at the Museum in the Victoria School. I would like to point out that, as distinct from other participants, the members of the Franco-Australian Association who were asked to take part in the preparatory meetings gave their time and their work free of charge. They were doing it as the Museum and the Association have always been run, on a volunteer basis, with a sense of duty and sincere gratitude to those young men who gave their lives on the soil of Picardie so long ago.

With the growing numbers of visitors and the pressure of increased mail since the arrival of the internet, the volunteers could no longer respond to the demand. Therefore, one and then two posts had to be created for the day-to-day running of the Museum (in 1999 and 2008 respectively), welcoming the visitors and selling the entrance tickets, the only independent source of revenue for the Association, which has to pay the staff from its own resources. As for me, I have made only a passing contribution of a few years, but in recent years I have witnessed with deep admiration men like Jean-Pierre Tranchard, son of the mayor of the 1950s, Pierre Tranchard, Yves Taté (also responsible for the *jumelage* and the 'Villers-Mémoire'[7] projects) and Étienne Denys giving much time and energy so that the Association and the Museum could continue to serve their purpose. I could name many others that I have known over my decade in Villers-Bretonneux—like Chantal Macret, Évelyne Petitjean, and Émile and Françoise Duquennoy who must be the oldest members of them all. I was particularly impressed by the regularity of Étienne Denys's presence at the Museum and by his efficiency in solving all the practical problems of the upkeep of the place, as well as his knowledge

[7] This association, presided by Yves Taté, groups researchers, collectors and historians to preserve and transmit the memory of Villers-Bretonneux. See villersmemoire.monsite-orange.fr.

of the events of 1918 on the battlefield in Villers-Bretonneux. He was a good modest man who genuinely felt for the bravery and death of so many young soldiers from far away; when I listened to him, it was as if he had known them personally and that it all happened only yesterday. Together with his friend Bernard Vaquez, member of the Franco-Australian Association, he made the miniature model of the famous German tank Mephisto, the task demanding 750 hours' work from each of them. This skilfully crafted object is now part of the Museum collection. As president of the Franco-Australian Association, I formally recommended to David Ritchie, the Australian Ambassador, that M. Denys be awarded the Order of Australia. I heard some two years later that he had received the Order of Australia medal, a just reward for a good man totally dedicated to the Franco-Australian friendship.

Maybe someone, one day, will conduct proper research into how the Franco-Australian Association of Villers-Bretonneux came to exist, how it evolved, how it helped to keep the pledge of gratefulness alive. It had to face constant changes since the 1950s, with ups and downs due to local and Australian politics and personalities. Most of those members who had a link with the founders are dead or affected by the ills of old age. As far as I know, the old guard seems pleased that the Villers-Bretonneux sites have been given enough finance and support from Australia to keep the story alive. The Museum in the school attic will be renovated, made more secure and accessible, including provision of facilities for the disabled. But will visitors still come to the School and its Museum in the centre of the village? Will the tour operators not be content with taking their visitors to the enlarged *Mémorial* with its interpretation centre and will they skip the other aspect of the story to be seen in town? Huge transformations are going on at the Memorial and due recognition of the role of Australians on the Western Front is on the way. The story of so many victories won there by the AIF and the ANZACs may at last counterbalance the fascination for the defeat of the ANZACs at Gallipoli, which for many of us, in Villers, always seemed bizarre.

In all this huge interest and promotion for the Centenary of the First World War in their village, the old guard of the Franco-Australian Association have had to adjust to radical changes. From its modest beginnings it had been for them and their predecessors a non-commercial historic pledge and I was

proud to be part of it when living in Villers. We all understand the need for funds to make something big happen, yet we fear that by turning the sites into money-making tourist attractions something will be lost on the way.

But maybe not! My hope is well illustrated by one of the sculptures on the façade of Amiens Cathedral: above the central portal, in the centre of the representation of the Last Judgement, Archangel Michael is holding the scales to weigh the good and evil of each soul. On one side the Devil is trying hard to make Evil weigh heavier, but, the Angel holding the scales with his left hand is pressing down on the other side with his right hand to make Good weigh more, so that the soul can enter Paradise. Good will prevail, in the end. That is the teaching of what Ruskin called 'the Bible of Amiens'. Amiens cathedral, the World Heritage 13th century cathedral and several times survivor of major wars, is well worth a visit. Australians will find inside on a pillar close to the portal of the Golden Virgin (la Vierge dorée) a plaque dedicated to the ANZACs for their great contribution in saving the cathedral, thanks to their brave fighting on the Western Front and notably at the battles of Amiens and Villers-Bretonneux.

*Montbazin, France*

## EDITOR'S NOTES:

**The Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux**
On 26th April 2015 former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott unveiled plans for the new Sir John Monash Centre, to be constructed at the Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux. When complete, the Sir John Monash Centre aims to educate a new audience about Australia's early role in international affairs, reshape patterns of visitation of the battlefields and, in so doing, provide a lasting legacy from the Centenary of Anzac. The Sir John Monash Centre is set to open to visitors by Anzac Day 2018.

**The Franco-Australian Museum, Villers-Bretonneux**
The Australian Government is contributing approximately A$ 2.1 million to a major refurbishment of the Franco-Australian Museum. The Museum closed in November 2014 and will reopen in April 2016. A temporary exhibition opened to the public in January 2015 for the duration of the closure. It is housed in the Victoria Hall at the Victoria School in Villers-Bretonneux.

**Jean-Pierre Thierry**
Jean-Pierre Thierry arrived in Villers-Bretonneux in 1975 and was for many years president of the Franco-Australian Association of that village. He guided many Australians through the Franco-Australian Museum and was awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) for his years of service in memory of Australian soldiers who died at Villers-Bretonneux and on the battlefields of the Western Front.

# HELP FROM AFAR: THE ADOPTION OF DERNANCOURT BY ADELAIDE AFTER WORLD WAR I

JOHN DRURY

After World War I, the Great War, Northern France was a scene of utter desolation. Thirteen *départements* and about half of Belgium were reduced to a wilderness (*Register* 12.8.1920, 4e.) Battlefields in France covered an area of nearly 10,000,000 acres, 400 villages had been destroyed and 20,000 factories were in ruins. In important manufacturing areas hardly one stone had been left on another; machinery had been removed, factories dismantled and 75% of the coal-mines had been flooded; roads, railways, canals had suffered badly.[1] These are sobering statistics.

The Western Front stretched for 750 kilometres from the Belgian coast, through Northern France to the Swiss border. Over 330,000 Australians, mostly volunteers, served in this part of Europe and almost 60,000 died in the fighting. The majority of Australian deaths, around 45,000, occurred in the mud and slush of trenches on the Western Front where the battles were fought and neither side made much progress. Many soldiers were wounded, around 124,000, and a large number of these never regained their health, were disfigured or permanently incapacitated (*Australians on the Western Front*).

Australians who died in France and Belgium are now interred and remembered in over 500 cemeteries and memorials that stand in farmlands on the outskirts of the villages where they fought. There are about 11,000 unknown Australians buried in these cemeteries. One of these, named VC Corner Cemetery, contains the remains of 400 unidentified Australians who died in the Battle of Fromelles which was described as 'the worst 24 hours of Australia's entire history'. A total of 1299 names are etched on plaques set in the walls of the cemetery which is unique as only Australians are buried here (*Australians on the Western Front*).

The areas of land had been so churned up by artillery that half a million acres would not be able to be used for farming again, and about a million acres could only be used after great expense to reclaim them. An enormous number of acres of forest were completely annihilated and it was a

[1] Handbill published by the British League of Help to illustrate the scale of wartime devastation in France.

vast landscape of devastation. Cottages and buildings were destroyed, farms were ruined, only piles of stones showed where houses had been. The French displayed great fortitude during the war and that attitude now resurfaced as they started to rebuild their towns.

The signing of the Armistice after the surrender of the German Armies on 11 November 1918 ended the war, but this was just the start of the struggles people had on both sides of the Channel with personal grief and the loss of many thousands of young men. Many people in Britain believed the French should be grateful to the British for halting the Germans, but others believed the British owed a huge debt to France. The intense fighting on French battlefields and the ultimate defeat of the German armies meant that Britain was never invaded and subjected to German domination. The French Government had decided that if the advance of the Germans in 1918 could not be contained, they would make an enormous sacrifice and flood the entire Pas-de-Calais region and destroy the ports of Calais, Boulogne and Dunkerque to prevent them being used as submarine bases from which to launch an attack on England (White 2002).

A group of people in Britain who believed that a debt of gratitude was owed to France formed the British League of Help for the Devastated Areas of France (League of Help) in June 1920. The prime mover was Lady Bathurst who had inherited the *Morning Post* newspaper from her father and took a strong interest in it, working closely with the editor. The French correspondent for the *Morning Post*, Gordon Knox, had brought to Lady Bathurst's attention the situation in two villages in the Oise region, Passel and Ville, where she had been before the war. Money was raised, and with goods donated, was sent to the Union des Femmes de France for distribution.

Another important factor in the formation of the League of Help came from Marcel Braibant, Conseiller Général of the Ardennes. He made the suggestion that British towns should adopt French communities to give them aid and encouragement as a 'godparent would confer on a godchild'. Devastation in the Ardennes area had been further caused by the malice of the retreating German forces as well as the action of the war. The League had a committee of patrons including Winston Churchill MP, the Prime Minister Lloyd George, and the French Ambassador, Paul Cambon. The Central Committee set up a London office and local committees were formed in towns and villages that participated in the scheme. Late in 1920, the idea of adopting a village

spread to Australia and was embraced by a number of cities (White 2002): Sydney adopted Poilcourt, Melbourne Villers-Bretonneux, and Adelaide Dernancourt.

The Villers-Bretonneux story is now well known.[2] Those of Poilcourt (which changed its name to Poilcourt-Sydney in 1920[3]) and Dernancourt have received much less attention. This article will concentate on Dernancourt, drawing principally on archival materials and contemporary press reports to provide a detailed account of the adoption process and its practical outcomes. It is unlikely that the Adelaide-Dernancourt connection will ever have the impact of Villers-Bretonneux, which, with its grand Memorial and the promise of a new large-scale Information Centre, has become an emblem of Australia's Western Front war, but Dernancourt deserves a place in the Australian memory, and it is hoped this article will contribute to cementing that.

* * *

In August 1920 the Editor of the *South Australian Register* in Adelaide suggested that 'in view of the magnificent part played by Australian divisions on the Western Front, and the intimate ties which link the Commonwealth peoples to that region and its heroic populations, it is highly desirable that Australians should follow the lead of their kindred in the Motherland and render appreciable assistance to our heroic allies' (*Register* 12.8.1920, 4e).

A letter was sent to Marie Lion[4] on 9 October by the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, F. B. Moulden:

> I am in receipt of your favor [sic] of the 9th inst. with respect to the adoption of a French town by this City. I note that you have already seen Lady Weigall [wife of the Governor of South Australia, Sir Archibald Weigall], in reference to this matter, and that she suggests that you should arrange for a committee to take up the matter. Before I can do so I must write to Sydney (to the

[2] See for example Corfield and Blankfield 1994. Also the more recent Wade 2006.

[3] See the *Sunday Times* 29.8.1920, p. 13, for a colourful description of the 'Christening'.

[4] See Drury 2015.

> Consul-General) and get the details. I think that it will be found rather difficult to create a great interest in an object of this kind, and I prefer to be more fully informed on the subject before I could agree to take any part therein […][5]

A meeting of the Société d'Assistance Maternelle et Infantile[6] was held in the Adelaide Town Hall in October 1920, and a proposal was put forward that Adelaide should adopt one of the French towns which Australians had fought so hard to save. By adoption of a village, funds could be raised to provide the means for farmers to reclaim their land, and provide clothes, and money for furniture, farm animals and farm implements when the villagers returned. Two French women, Berthe Mouchette and Marie Lion (Drury 2015), were the prime movers and they accepted the task of starting the fundraising, with a strong hope that influential people within the community would become involved. It was proposed to form a provisional committee to start the work before the State became fully involved. The towns of Bapaume, Dernancourt and Moriancourt were suggested, with Hamel and Neuville added in case the others were already adopted.

The Lord Mayor (F. B. Moulden), who presided, urged that before putting the matter to the public, it would be wise to find out exactly what the responsibilities of such an adoption were. He advised the society to approach the French Government through the Consul-General in Sydney, and find out what 'adoption' really meant, and, having done so, to ask for a certain town, and then start the procedure. During the year the Société d'Assistance had forwarded about £600 and 18 boxes of garments to France for charitable work.

The names of the proposed towns were sent to General Pau, formerly commander of the French army in Alsace. He had toured Australia in September 1918 with a French Trade Mission (*Register* 15.10.1920, 6f).[7]

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[5] Letter from Lord Mayor of Adelaide to Madame M. Lion, 9 October 1920, Adelaide City Council Archives.

[6] This French society, led in Paris by Mme la Générale Michel, wife of the Chancellor of the Legion of Honour, was represented in Australia by Charlotte Crivelli, an old friend of Marie Lion and Berthe Mouchette from their Melbourne days. See Nettelbeck 2015.

[7] See also Jacqueline Dwyer's article on the 1918 French Economic Mission in the

Berthe Mouchette had founded the Alliance Française in Melbourne, the first in Australia. The inaugural meeting was held on 6 June 1890,[8] at her school Oberwyl in St Kilda, which she operated with her sister Marie Lion. The sisters came to Australia from France in 1881 with Berthe's husband, Nicolas Emile Mouchette, who became Chancellor at the French Consulate. Berthe Mouchette opened a studio in Collins Street and taught painting to the young ladies of Melbourne. Her husband died in 1884, and Berthe purchased Oberwyl School the following year. In 1892 Victoria was in deep depression, with the result that she had to sell the school and the sisters moved to Adelaide.

After the outbreak of the war, Berthe Mouchette and Marie Lion sailed to Paris in 1915 to nurse wounded French soldiers in hospitals there. Unfortunately Marie became ill and they had to return to Adelaide where they helped with the war effort. Berthe Mouchette taught basic French to soldiers preparing to travel overseas to fight in France, to help them better communicate with the French people (Drury 2015).

The provisional committee was formed in Adelaide and a private meeting was organised with the Lord Mayor on 12 November to discuss further the idea of adoption.[9] At the meeting the Lord Mayor asked the committee to provide about 200 names of people who would be invited to a meeting he would convene to discuss the matter.[10] The names were supplied and a circular letter was sent out by the Lord Mayor, inviting people to attend a meeting on Friday 10 December to discuss the proposition that Adelaide, following the precedent set up by the City of Melbourne and English centres of population, should adopt a French village in the area of the late war.[11]

Apologies were received from some of the notable residents of Adelaide.[12] A very strong letter was sent from Laidlaw & C$^{o}$, Stock and

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current issue.

[8] Copies of the minutes of the inaugural meeting are in the author's possession.

[9] Letter from Mrs Roubel d'Arenberg to the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, 9 November 1920, Adelaide City Council Archives.

[10] Memo initialled ASD reporting of the meeting of the provisional committee with the Lord Mayor, 12 November 1920, Adelaide City Council Archives.

[11] Circular letter from Lord Mayor of Adelaide, 2 December 1920, Adelaide City Council Archives.

[12] Letter from Mary L. Hawker to the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, 8 December 1920,

Sharebrokers, in which L. H. Laidlaw expressed the opinion that, having travelled to France recently, and with his knowledge of the conditions existing there, the proposal was 'simply arrant rubbish'. He stated that, individually the French were well off financially and he found 'a very bitter feeling towards Great Britain. Instead of gratitude there is a feeling of distrust and dislike'[13]. This letter was at odds with the feelings of many people in Adelaide, and certainly many of the Australian soldiers who had fought in France and been tenderly cared for by residents of towns where they were located. The Adelaide *Advertiser* reported the initial meeting:

> About 150 invitations had been issued and the gathering, which was held in the Lord Mayor's parlour on Friday afternoon, was attended by about 30 people. The Lord Mayor said he had written to the French Consul-General for information and had received a reply stating that in a number of instances towns or villages had been adopted. [...] Miss McDonald who had recently returned from France stated the distress in many of the villages was appalling, and any funds raised could well be devoted to helping the children and old people with clothing, in providing much needed household utensils, mattresses and bedding, articles of furniture, and implements for the peasants. It is not expected that they should attempt to give assistance in rebuilding the ruined houses or buying stock. Madame Mouchette said they could specify what they wanted done, and the money could be sent to some controlling authority or society which would see that it was used in the manner directed […]. (*Advertiser* 11.12.1920, 11e)

Unfortunately Marie Lion could not attend the meeting as she was seriously ill, with no hope of a cure, and her doctor had forbidden her to leave the house.[14] A committee was formed, and Mrs F. A. d'Arenberg was appointed convenor in her absence. The Lord Mayor stated that he would leave the

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Adelaide City Council Archives.

[13] Letter from L. H. Laidlaw of Laidlaw & C$^{o}$ Stock and Share Brokers, to the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, 8 December 1920, Adelaide City Council Archives.

[14] Letter from Marie Lion to Frank Moulden, Lord Mayor of Adelaide, 9 December 1920, Adelaide City Council Archives.

matter in her hands.[15] A letter was sent by the Lord Mayor, who was also the Consular Agent for France in Adelaide, to C. R. Campana, Consul-General for France in Sydney in February 1921, outlining the history of the formation of the Committee for adoption of a French village. He stated that 'as a result of a communication received by Mme Mouchette from General Pau, the village towards which assistance is to be rendered is Dernancourt, and this village has been designated the 'godchild' of South Australia'.[16]

The Adelaide committee proposed to collect funds and send the money to the Mayor of Dernancourt, Fernand Bélison, who would distribute it among needy villagers. In a letter to the committee, the Mayor praised the courage and morale of Australian troops. In thanks, the municipal council, when planning the reconstruction of the ruined village, gave the name of Rue d'Australie to the street formerly called Rue La Fontaine, 'a simple but sincere expression of our gratitude, expressive to the Australians of our sentiments of admiration for their heroism'.

Dernancourt, with only a little over 330 inhabitants, was six kilometres behind the lines and had become a rest haven for the Australian troops during the war. The Australian soldiers offered their assistance to the farmers, who had very few men to help as they were away fighting. Soldiers, previously in the trenches, could now be seen helping with the work in the fields, sowing, planting, reaping and carting with enjoyment, almost as though they were working on their own properties (*Register* 4.3.1921, 8).

However, the disastrous events of March and April 1918 were yet to come. The German army shelled the village, and forced the residents to flee. If they could break through the allied front line, they could reach the vital railway centre at Amiens. The German forces occupied the village and dug into the railway embankment on its eastern side just outside the town. On 5 April the Germans attacked and the Australians had to withdraw. The Australian forces launched a counter attack which was described by C. E. W. Bean, the official Australian war historian, as 'one of the finest ever carried out by Australian troops' (Bean 1937, 404). The battle ended in a bayonet charge and hand-to-hand fighting, and by 18.30 the Germans were in full

[15] Letter from Lord Mayor to Mrs D'Arenberg, 13 December 1920, Adelaide City Council Archives.

[16] Letter from Lord Mayor to C. R. Campana, Consul-General of France in Sydney, 2 February 1921, Adelaide City Council Archives.

retreat. The Australians suffered 1,233 casualties and were awarded the Battle Honour, 'Ancre 1918' (Walsh 2008). Dernancourt was in ruins: of the 110 houses in the town, only three were left standing, and it was not until May 1919 that some of the inhabitants came back. By 1921 more of the residents had returned and were living in huts made from material scavenged from ruins and the trenches.

Australian soldiers building a haystack near Corbie (AWM EO 3928)

* * *

Fundraising in Adelaide took many forms:

> For the purpose of obtaining additional funds for South Australia's 'godchild' in France, Dernancourt, a ball was given at the Osborne Hall, Gouger Street, on Monday evening. A large and fashionable gathering was present […]. (*Register* 10.5.1921, 6d)

By June 1921 the sum of £200 and a donation of clothing had been forwarded to Dernancourt and the fundraising continued. Towards the end of 1921 there was some concern about the whereabouts of a box of Christmas presents dispatched to Dernancourt which had been confiscated by French customs authorities, subject to payment of duty. However, due to the efforts of the Mayor of Dernancourt, protests by the press and the Minister of Reconstruction, the gifts were finally forwarded without any payment. The Mayor, Fernand Bélison, wrote to Mme Mouchette:

> After many vicissitudes we received on 3 January the box and basket containing the presents collected by you, Mrs A. J. McLachlan, Mrs Gaynor and many other benefactresses of Adelaide. The distribution was made yesterday to our 63 children, including 16 girls, by the Municipal Council and the ladies of the school committee, it was a great success.

The Mayor also spoke of a forthcoming fete where, in the morning a solemn commemoration service would be held in honour of the Australian soldiers. 'In the afternoon every Dernancourt family will go in a procession, and will bring flowers and wreaths to be placed on the graves of the soldiers from the antipodes' (*Register* 18.2.1922, 6). In the war cemetery on the outskirts of the town are 2,162 graves beautifully maintained by the villagers. Of these, 177 are graves of unknown Australians (Walsh 2008).

Some country towns out of Adelaide helped in the fundraising and in March 1922 a letter was received by Mrs E. W. Hawker of 'Calcania', Clare, from the Mayor of Dernancourt:

> Clare is very far from us; too far for our liking, but not far enough, however, to prevent coming to us on the wings of the wind and the waves of the briny ocean, the echo of the splendid fete organised at Clare […] and where the generosity of the people poured out copiously.
>
> How can I express to you effectively and completely our gratitude […] We owe to Australia an immense sacred debt for the blood that she shed in coming to our help, and you have increased, still further, the debt in aiding us towards the restoration of our ruins […]. (*Register* 22.3.1922, 6)

Samuel Lunn, a prolific fundraiser during the Great War, visited the Mayor in Dernancourt in August 1921 to review progress of the rebuilding of the town (*Advertiser* 19.1.1922, 8d).

In June 1922 Mme Mouchette reported to the local newspapers on Adelaide's adopted village:

> During 1921 as the results of efforts in the city, £192 was forwarded to the communal authorities and a bazaar and fete at Clare produced £103. In a letter received the Dernancourt authorities said what was now needed was a threshing machine to enable the villagers to harvest their crop. They have been able to cultivate and sow about 1,600 acres but have no implements to take off the crop. As the harvest occurs around the middle of August we have no time to lose if we are to assist them. This need for haste precludes the idea of raising money by the usual methods of sales, fetes, amusements etc., so it is decided to make a direct appeal. Most of the inhabitants of Dernancourt are living in huts made from materials scavenged from the trenches. As the population is entirely agricultural they depend on their crops for their livelihood. The desired sum for the equipment is between £150 and £200.

The Editor of the Adelaide *Register* lent his support to the appeal and urged former members of battalions that had fought in France, and sympathisers, to raise money by small contributions which could be cabled to Dernancourt in time to purchase the 'needy equipment before the harvest is ready' (*Register* 10.6.1922, 8).

A copy of a French newspaper, *La Gazette de Péronne,* was sent to Berthe Mouchette giving a report of a fete held on 16 June 1922:

> Dernancourt, the little village in the valley of the Ancre, which was completely razed to the ground in 1918, but which has already begun to rise from the ruins, organized on 16 June, a manifestation of gratitude in honour of its Australian godmother, Adelaide. Favoured with beautiful weather, the fete attracted visitors from miles around who were both pleased and astonished at the successful efforts of the inhabitants to conceal ruins with foliage and flowers, every building, broken or whole, was gay with colour,

> the French and Australian flags everywhere floated in the breeze, and all helped to render Dernancourt worthy of the occasion.

On 3 May 1922 Marie Lion succumbed to the infection she had contracted in Paris when she was nursing during the war and died of bronchopneumonia. In September of that year, Berthe Mouchette, now aged 76, decided to return to France and embarked on the ship RMS *Narkunda* (*Register* 9.9.1922, 19). The ship docked in Bombay en route and Mme Mouchette wrote to a friend in Adelaide:

> During the stay at Bombay I took advantage of the embarkation there of Dame Nellie Melba at the end of her Indian tour, by enlisting her practical sympathy in the organisation of a concert for the benefit of Dernancourt. Nothing could have been more auspicious than the presence of the diva, and most willingly and graciously she entered whole-heartedly into the arrangements for an entertainment which produced a surprisingly good result for Dernancourt.
>
> The concert was ably presented by the manager of Mr Charles Workman's Australian D'Oyley Carte Opera Company and a most attractive programme arranged. Dame Melba who had kindly consented to collect funds, was so pleased with the amount raised, that to stimulate still greater contribution, graciously sang four songs —'Chanson Triste' (Duparc), 'Papillons' (Chausson), 'Adieu' (from *La Bohème*) and 'Home Sweet Home'. The marvellous vocalisation of Melba was a revelation to some who had not heard her before. Dame Melba took up the collection, plate in hand, and she was most ably seconded by the chief officer. They were able to hand one hundred pounds to me, a sum to help increase the amount still wanted for Dernancourt's new tractor. (*Register* 4.11.1922, 8)

This fortuitous French-Australian encounter in India is a piquant example of the good feeling and good will shared between the two peoples during those early post-war years. It is not yet known whether the tractor was eventually purchased.

Villagers in Dernancourt celebrate at a fete held on 16 June 1922, to honour the village's Australian 'Godmother,' the City of Adelaide.

From this time, nothing further appeared in the newspapers, and it must be assumed that Berthe Mouchette's return to France was a finale to the 'adoption' of Dernancourt. As we have seen, other towns had been adopted by Australian cities. In May 1922 a letter was sent from the Town Clerk of the City of Brisbane to the Town Clerk of the City of Adelaide seeking advice about the process of adoption of a town in France. They had received a communication from the Department of the Prime Minister, Melbourne, suggesting that the village of Pozières in France might be adopted by the City of Brisbane.[17] The Town Clerk replied from Adelaide with details of what had transpired to date in that city regarding the adoption of Dernancourt.[18]

[17] Letter Town Clerk, City of Brisbane to Town Clerk, City of Adelaide, 31 May 1922, Adelaide City Council Archives.

[18] Letter Town Clerk, City of Adelaide to Town Clerk, City of Brisbane, 7 June 1922, Adelaide City Council Archives.

For reasons that still need to be researched, Brisbane did not proceed on the adoption path.[19]

Berthe Mouchette arrived back in Paris after spending over forty years in Australia. She later moved to a retirement home in Breteuil-sur-Iton in Normandy and died there on 20 June 1928 at the age of 82. She had been very active in Australia, through the Alliance Française, through her salons and school, and through her art. The French Government had awarded her the *Palmes Académiques* in Melbourne in 1889 for her work in education both in France and in Australia (Drury 2015). Her final contribution to the development of French-Australian relations—in working so diligently and effectively for the adoption of Dernancourt by Adelaide, and in providing so much to help the residents of Dernancourt restore their town and their lives—was typical of her spirit.

In 1923 a suburb was created by Richard Arthur Hobby in Adelaide, on his own land, named Dernancourt in recognition of their adopted French village. Today it thrives, a village in its own right, 10 km north-east of central Adelaide. In 2009 the Mayor of Dernancourt, Lionel Lamotte, visited Adelaide and spoke at the Lord Mayoral reception. Here is the *Advertiser*'s report:

> The Mayor wept as he thanked Adelaide for its human sacrifice in World War I. Dernancourt—where the Royal South Australian Regiment was stationed for the Western Front—was flattened by the German army on April 4, 1918, and 450 of our South Australian fighting Men were killed.
>
> Struggling to hold in his emotions and with limited English skills, Mr Lamotte picked words carefully to describe how grateful his French community was to the women of Adelaide whose post-war fundraising had raised enough money to rebuild their village.
>
> Mr Lamotte had sought permission from the Australian Ambassador to France to visit Adelaide to thank our city and pay respects to our fallen soldiers on Anzac Day.
>
> On Monday night, he told a civic reception at the Adelaide Town Hall that his village has never forgotten our soldier's ultimate sacrifice—and that the school bears the name Pavillion Adelaide

[19] See Jane Gilmour's article in the current issue.

> […]. One of the five winners of the 2008 Premier's ANZAC Spirit Prize was Immanuel College student, Richard Hayman, who
> visited Dernancourt, and said how awed he was at Pavillion Adelaide. 'On the top of every blackboard, in every classroom, is written in French, 'N'oublions pas les Australiens'—'Never forget the Australians' […][20]
>
> Minister for the City of Adelaide Jane Lomax-Smith is hosting the Mayor of Dernancourt's Adelaide visit and she recalls how '*Les grande* [sic] *dames d'Adelaide*' led by Frenchwoman Madame Mouchette and the Queen Adelaide Club had raised 'several hundred pounds' to rebuild Dernancourt […]. (*Advertiser* 22.4.2009, 21).

The sons of Australia who died defending and liberating the villages in France were adopted by France and their graves are tenderly cared for by local residents. It is only right that some Australian cities, in return, adopted these villages where so many of our men lie. The memory of the Australian soldiers is perpetuated by the villagers today. Perhaps it is fitting to close this commemorative chronicle with a poem that appeared in the Adelaide press in 1921:

**The Children of Dernancourt**
**From 'One of the Crowd'**

The little gardens bright with flowers,
We played in thro' the sunny hours,
Are gone! Poor Dernancourt! They say,
How it was pretty and so gay—
Before They Came!

[20] We can note how close this is to the motto of the École Victoria in Villers-Bretonneux: 'Never Forget Australia'.

They came—they shelled our little town,
And all the houses tumbled down—
Our little homes, they were not there;
And we could only stand and stare,
At Dernancourt!
But now they say (our mothers say),
That in a land that's far away,
Kind people think of us, and send
Money, to help us try to mrnd
Our broken Dernancourt!

Our father's gone! Our brothers too—
They died for France! What else to do?—
But France lives! France! What joy to give
To that dear land. And we shall live
Again in Dernancourt.

(*Register* 17.5.1921, 6)

*Melbourne*

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# A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE RELATING TO WORLD WAR I

ELAINE LEWIS

Charles Bean thought the Australian War Memorial should 'limit itself to providing sources for the official histories and future historians'.[1] 'Novels etc. with a war flavour [...] would simply be collected to be stacked in cellars and eaten by silverfish.'[2] Happily this advice was ignored and World War I novels are included along with other valuable resources at the Canberra Memorial.

Some first editions of the early novels are still available here and there for purchase as 'rare books' but many others have now been re-published or digitised and are available as e-books or may be read free of charge on websites such as Project Gutenberg and the Internet Archive.[3]

The selection below includes novels written during and after World War I, through to the present day. Most are about the Western Front and many explore Australian-French relations; some important novels about Gallipoli and the war in general have been included. Many of the earlier novels are based on personal experiences, perhaps recorded in diaries, as the authors remember and, through their creative imagination, recreate the lives and emotions of those involved in these soul-shattering events in far-away countries. Stories of travel, stories of lives destroyed, of friendships forged, and about the often difficult struggle to survive after the Armistice, are all here in these novels, helping us to go on remembering and imagining the Great War and its aftermath.

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[1] Spittel, Christina, 'Remembering the War: Australian Novelists in the Interwar Years', https://www.academia.edu/4970350/Remembering_the_War_Australian_novelists_in_the_interwar_years, accessed November 2015.

[2] Charles Bean to John Treloar, 31 January 1920, Bean Papers AWM 38, 3DRL6673/667a.

[3] Project Gutenberg offers over 50,000 free books: https://www.gutenberg.org/ See also https://www.archive.org/) and https://archive.org/details/googlebooks.

# Novels

**Aujard, Edouard A., *The Devil's First*,** London, Philip Allan, 1935, 256 p.
*Aujard's short story,* Sunny-side or Suicide, *was included in a list of the 12 best short-story writers in the world in 1929.*

**Allen John T., *Forgive us Our Trespasses***, Sydney, N.S.W. Bookstall, 1933, 266 p.
*Described as a sensational story of the First World War and its aftermath, set in Europe and Australia.*

**Bridges, Royal (Roy), *The Immortal Dawn***, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1917, 279 p.
*Based on the diaries of two Australian soldiers.*

**Brookes, Mabel Balcombe, *Broken Idols***, Melbourne, Melville & Mullen, 1917, 271 p.
*With 16 pages of plates.*

**Brookes, Mabel Balcombe, *On the Knees of the Gods***, Melbourne, Melville & Mullen, 1918, 333 p.
*With four three-color pictures and eight full-page line illustrations by Penleigh Boyd.*

**Brookes, Mabel Balcombe, *Old Desires***, Melbourne, Australasia Authors' Agency, 1922, 306 p.
*As this book is now out of copyright, there are a number of reprints available.*

**Burge, Linda, *Wings Above the Storm***, Melbourne, National Press, 1944, 227 p., ISBN 978-8-20006-849-5.

**Charalambous, John, *Silent Parts***, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, July 2006, 324 p., ISBN 978-0-70223-562-7.
*Explores a family's private myths about a WWI soldier who didn't come home.* Silent Parts *was long-listed for the Miles Franklin Award in 2007. The novel was republished in 2013 as* An Accidental Tourist *to tie in with the film of that name.*

**Cooper, John Butler, *Coo-oo-ee! A Tale of Bushmen from Australia to Anzac,***
London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1916, 312 p.
*Historical reprints are available.*

**Crew, Gary, and Shaun Tan, *Memorial*,** Port Melbourne, Thomas C. Lothian, 1999, 32 p., ISBN 0-85091-983-5.
*Children's book illustrated by Shaun Tan; reprinted many times and in 2015 was republished by Hachette Australia.*

**Crocker, Arthur, *Australia Hops In***, Sydney, Shakespeare Head, 1935, 266 p.

**Daisley, Stephen, *Traitor***, Melbourne, Text Publishing, May 2011, 304 p., ISBN 978-1-92175-837-9.
*E-book available. Winner, Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction, 2011.*

**Dando-Collins Stephen, *Tank Boys***, Sydney, Random House Australia, February 2014, 304 p., ISBN 978-0-85798-130-1.
*E-book available. A gripping story that brings to life one of Australia's World War I military victories. For teens and young adults.*

**Davis, Arthur Hoey ('Steele Rudd'), *Memoirs of Corporal Keeley***, Sydney, NSW, Bookstall Company Limited, 1918, 413 p.
*A collection of short stories based on the war, with drawings by Lionel Lindsay. Extremely popular in its day, some 40,000 copies were published between 1918 and 1926.*

**Davidson, Frank Dalby, *The Wells of Beersheba: A Light Horse Legend***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1933, 78 p.
*Decorative borders to the pages of text. This book is more fictionalised reportage than novella; it reflects the co-dependency of horse and rider and the shock of battle. Commissioned by Angus & Robertson for Christmas 1933, the book's illustrations are by Will Mahoney.*

**Dinan, Jacqueline & John Dinan, *A Woman's War: A Mother's Home Front Battle***, Melbourne, Sid Harta Publishers, October 2009, 276 p., ISBN 978-1-92164-204-3.
*This novel refers to the battle of Pozières, where the Australian army suffered its worst casualty rate in any battle to date—23,000 over 5–6 weeks. Also of interest because there was little written about women at home during the Great War.*

**Ewart, Ernest Andrew ('Boyd Cable'),** ***Grapes of Wrath***, London, Elder & Smith, 1917, 185 p.
*Recreates the first battle of the Somme.*
*Other WW1 books by Ewart include* Action Front (*London, Elder & Smith, 1916); Between the Lines (Elder & Smith, 1915) and Front Lines (London, Murray, 1919).*

**Fourdrinier, Florence Francesca,** ***Pro Patria: Australian Love Stories***, Sydney, William Brooks & Co, 1917, 28 p.
*Now available online http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1722488*

**Hague, Graeme,** ***And in the Morning***, East Roseville, NSW, Simon & Schuster, 2003, 598 p., ISBN 0-73181-110-0.
*Previously published in 2002.*

**Keneally, Thomas,** ***The Daughters of Mars***, Sydney, Random House Australia, Vintage Imprint, June 2013, 608 p., ISBN 978-1-86471-226-1.
*E-book available. Inspired by the journals of Australian nurses who gave their all to the Great War effort and the men they nursed.*

**Lee, Christopher,** ***Seasons of War***, Melbourne, Penguin Australia, Viking Imprint, February 2015, 144 p., ISBN 978-0-67007-883-7.
A *fictional first-hand account of the Allied invasion of Gallipoli. The author scripted the recent TV mini-series* Gallipoli.

**London, Joan,** ***Gilgamesh,*** Sydney, Random House Australia (Vintage Imprint), March 2010, 272 p., ISBN 978-1-74166-921-3.
*E-book available. A reworking of the old epic and a love story at the end of World War I.*

**McDonald, Roger,** ***1915 A Novel of Gallipoli***, St Lucia, Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 1979, 426 p., ISBN 978-0-70221-375-5.
*E-book, audio and braille versions available. McDonald's first novel,* 1915 *won the Age Book of the Year award and the Government Biennial Literature Prize (SA); it was made into a highly successful eight-part ABC-TV mini-series (now on DVD). Published to great critical acclaim in 1979, this novel has sold over 100,000 copies.*

**McKinney J. P., *Crucible***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1935, 272 p.
*About a young Australian soldier in France during W W I written by a returned AIF soldier.*
*E-book now available.*

**Mann, Leonard, *Flesh in Armour,*** Melbourne, Phaedrus, Periodicals, 1932, 366 p.
*Republished several times and most recently in 2008 by the University of South Carolina Press (The Joseph M. Bruccoli Great War series) with a new introduction by Janette Turner Hospital, ISBN 978-1-57003-770-2.* Flesh in Armour *has been called Australia's best-known and finest novel about the Great War.*

**Malouf, David, *Fly Away Peter***, London, Chatto & Windus, 1982, 134 p., ISBN 978-0-70112-625-4.
*Malouf's novella,* Fly Away Peter, *has often been republished and has been translated into many languages. It won* The Age *Book of the Year fiction prize in 1982. An opera,* Fly Away Peter, *adapted from Malouf's book, was part of the 2015 Melbourne Festival.*

**Manning, Frederic ('Private 19022'), *The Middle Parts of Fortune: Somme and Ancre***, 2 vols, London, Piazza Press (Peter Davies), 1929.
*Republished as* Her Privates We *(unexpurgated) by Peter Davies in 1930.*
*The most recent reprint is by Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2000, with a new introduction by Simon Caterson.*
*Free e-book online (Project Gutenberg).*

**Mitchell, G. D. (George Dean), *Backs to the Wall: A Larrikin on the Western Front***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1937, 281 p.
*E-book and audio book available. A new edition was published by Allen & Unwin in 2007, with a commentary by Robert Macklin, author of* Jacka VC.

**Osmond, Robert William, *The Glory and the Dream***, 2 vols, New York, Vantage Press, 1957, 245 p.

**Partridge, Eric Honeywood ('Corrie Denison'), *A Mere Private***, (short story) in *Glimpses*, London, Scholartis Press, 1928.
*He eventually himself published* Frank Honeywood, Private, *as part of* Three Personal Records of the War *(London, 1929), which ranks as 'a minor classic of war literature' (Geoffrey Serle,* Australian Dictionary of Biography*). The Australian Academy of the Humanities elected him an honorary fellow in the 1970s.*

**Scanlon, Herbert ('Pte H. Scanlon'),** ***A Returned Soldier: Being memories of the brighter side of life in the AIF***, Ballarat, Victoria, Baxter & Stubbs, 1919, 28 p.
*Introduction: 'The contents of this little book have been written from the many incidents that fall to a soldier's lot in camp and on the field. The writer has tried to show some at least of the brighter lights that shine in the life of a soldier, even 'midst the din of battle, as well as round the camp-fire.''Sint ut sunt, aut non sint''. (They may or may not be.) Scanlon published at least thirteen more books.*

**Skinner, Mary Louisa 'Molly' ('R. E. Leake'),** ***The Letters of a V.A.D.***, London, A. Melrose, 1918, 332 p.
*'As a writer Skinner could recreate occurrences without subterfuge' (AUSTLIT). D. H. Lawrence described her as 'a queer magical bird of imagination, always deceiving itself'. Meeting D. H. Lawrence in 1922, she collaborated with him in the writing of* The Boy in the Bush *(1924), made into a television miniseries in 1984.*
*V.A.D.: Voluntary Aid Detachments were established during World War I by members of the Australian Red Cross and the Order of St John.*

**Steggall, Susan,** ***Forget Me Not***, Henley Beach, South Australia, Seaview Press, August 2006, 241 p., ISBN 978-1-74008-397-3.
*E-book available.*

**Tennant, Kylie**, ***Foveaux***, London, Gollancz, 1939, 448 p.
*Starting in 1912 and progressing deep into the 1930s* Foveaux *tells the story of people struggling against poverty and unemployment in Sydney's inner suburbs. Republished many times, most recently in the USA, April 2014.*

**Thirkell, Angela (Leslie Parker),** ***Trooper to the Southern Cross***, London, Faber, 1934, 293 p.
*Entirely concerned with Australian soldiers' passage home. Re-published 1985 by Virago Modern Classics.*

**'Thomas, Vernon' possibly John O'Brien,** ***The Meteren Road***, London, Ward, Lock, 1930, 316 p.
*A novel of the First World War, featuring an Australian officer of mixed French and German parentage. Reviewed in the* Times Literary Supplement*, 21st August 1930, p. 670 and in the* Returned Soldier*, 16th October 1930, pp. 7–8.*

**Tilton, May, *The Grey Battalion: The Story of a Nursing Sister***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1933, 310 p.
*Autobiographical. May Tilton composed this book using her War Diaries.*

**Walker Brenda, *The Wing of Night***, Melbourne, Penguin Australia, Viking Imprint, September 2005, 288 p., ISBN 978-0-67089-323-2.
*Nita B. Kibble Literary Award (2006). Shortlisted for the 2006 Miles Franklin award.*
*E-book available. A novel about the strength and failure of faith and memory.*

**Wheen, Arthur Wesley, *Two Masters***, London, Faber, 1929, 32 p.
*Wheen's translations include three novels by Erich Maria Remarque including* All Quiet on the Western Front, *an outstanding success. He was awarded the Military Medal and two Bars at Petillon in July 1916, at Beaulencourt in March 1917 and at Villers-Bretonneux on 25 April 1918.*

**Womersley, Chris, *Bereft***, Melbourne, Scribe Publications, March 2011, 272 p., ISBN 978-1-92184-402-7.
*E-book available. Set in Australia in 1919 at the end of the Great War,* Bereft *has won many awards and has been translated into many languages. The novel 'opens up the wounds of war, laying bare the events that pre-date the conflict and reach forward into the collective memory ...' Jennifer Levasseur,* The Age.

**Yeldham, Peter, *Barbed Wire and Roses***, Melbourne, Penguin, September 2010, 396 p., ISBN 978-0-14300-791-3.
*First published in 2007, this novel is based on true events. E-book available.*

## Poetry and Verse

Following is a selection from the hundreds of poems written during and after World War I when soldier-poets and poet-soldiers, as well as poets who stayed at home, wrote about their experiences. Many World War I Australian poetry publications are still available as 'rare' books but much of the war-time poetry can now be read online on sites such as the Australian Poetry Library website. Also included is a selection of twentieth and twenty-first century Australian poets, some writing specifically about the Great War and others reflecting upon war in general.

The selected poetry below reflects changing attitudes towards the First World War: the idea of glorious sacrifice soon gives way to more realistic descriptions of the horrors endured, especially by those poets fighting on the Front Line, and finally we see how the view of death in war, and war in general, has changed.[4]

Further research is required, to include not only French World War I poets, but to promote Australian war poets, especially women poets, who do not seem to be as well known as the English World War I poets often chosen for Australian remembrance ceremonies. As poet and critic Michael Sharkey writes, 'What is striking about Australian women's war poetry written during or soon after World War I is the range of subject matter, variety of moods, and extent of experimentation within and beyond received form. The poetry also reflects a wide range of domestic, professional and other backgrounds of the 'ordinary people' who chose to record their reactions to the war in verse'.[5]

**Beaver, Bruce, *Charmed Lives (RMR War 1916)***, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1988, 131 p., ISBN 978-0-70222-141-4.
*Beaver's poem* R.M.R. War 1916 *is part of* R.M.R. : A Verse Biography of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) (for Dorothy Featherstone Porter), *1988*.

**Brennan, Christopher, *A Chant of Doom and Other Verses***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1918, 48 p.
*May be read online at the Australian Poetry Library website and other websites such as Sydney University's SETIS project: http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/*

**Brereton, John Le Gay, *The Burning Marl*,** Melbourne, Fellowship, 362 Little Collins Street, 1919, 29 p.
*Poems from* The Burning Marl *may be read on the Poetry Library website: http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/brereton-john-le-gay/ or on the State Library of Victoria's Digital website.*

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[4] George L. Moss, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*.

[5] See Sharkey, Michael, 'But Who Considers Woman Day by Day?' Australian Women Poets and World War I (online), *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 23, nº 1, May 2007 pp. 63–78, http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=113226287359112;res=IELLCC> ISSN: 0004-9697, accessed 15 December 2015.

**Buckley, Vincent, *Last Poems***, Ringwood (Victoria), McPhee Gribble, 1991, 191 p., ISBN 08-6914-240-2.
*Buckley's war poems are classified as 'Soft War Poems' on the Australian Poetry Library website.*

**Bull, John James & William Austin Bevan, (foreword by Colonel H. Crowther), *Poppy Fields of France, and Other Verses,*** Melbourne, Hilton Press, 1919, 102 p.
*May be read on-line on the State Library of Victoria's website.*

**Cross, Zora, *Elegy on an Australian Schoolboy***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1921, 26 p.
*'undercuts the mythology of "Mother England" and rails against the sacrifice of her loved one…' (AWM Jacqueline Manuel)*

**Dennis, C. J., *The Moods of Ginger Mick***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1916, 143 p.
*Illustrations are by Hal Gye; pocket editions were published for the trenches. Has been re-published many times and may now be read online at http://purl.library.usyd.edu.au/setis/id/denmood, a digital text, sponsored by Australian Literature Gateway.*

**Dennis, C. J., *Digger Smith***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1918, 112 p.
*Illustrations by Hal Gye.*

**Dennis, C. J., *Backblock Ballads and Later Verses***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1918, 150 p.
*Illustrations by Hal Gye.*

**Fitzpatrick, Brian, *Songs and Poems: With an Introductory Essay on Poetry in Australia***, Melbourne, Wilke, 1931, 36 p.
*Illustrated by Alex McCrae. Limited edition of 400 numbered copies.*

**Gellert, Leon, *Songs of a Campaign***, Adelaide, Hassell, 1917, 68 p.
*In the same year (1917) Hassell published a second edition and Angus & Robertson published a new edition illustrated by Norman Lindsay.*

**Gerard, Edwin, ('Trooper Gerardy'),** ***The Road to Palestine: and other Verses (Written on Active Service)***, Melbourne, Australasian Authors' Agency, 1918, 45 p.
*Gerard published two volumes of poetry about the war. This publication may be read on the State Library of Victoria website, digital.slv.vic.gov.au/dtl_publish/pdf/marc/26/2684951.html.*

**Gilmore, Mary,** ***The Passionate Heart***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1918, 172 p.
*The National Library's Palmer collection (PAL) copy of this book is signed and inscribed in ink by the author: 'The royalties on this book I gave to the blind of the war: because in this book I had written in the community of pain. Mary Gilmore Sydney 18.10.38.' (AustLit).*

**Hope, A. D.,** ***Antechinus: Poems 1975-1980 (Inscription for a War)***, London, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1981, 110 p., ISBN 0-207-14481-8.

**Lawson, Henry,** ***My Army, O, My Army! and Other Songs***, Sydney, Tyrrell's Limited, 1915, 58 p.
*Originally published as a limited edition of 250 copies this book has now been re-published and may be read on-line or downloaded. (Project Gutenberg and other websites.)*

**MacKellar, Dorothea,** ***The War in Verse and Prose,*** ed. W. D. Eaton, Chicago, T. S. Denison, 1918.

**Manning, Frederick,** ***Eidola***, London, Murray, 1917, 108 p.
*May be read online or downloaded.*

**Page, Geoff,** ***Selected Poems***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1991, 110 p., ISBN **2-071-6926-8.**
A number of Page's poems deal with violence and loss incurred through wars.

**Palmer, Janet Gertrude ('Nettie'),** ***South Wind***, London, John G Wilson, 1914, 58 p.
*Both Vance and Nettie were opponents of censorship and conscription, and Nettie had a regular column in* The Argus.

**Palmer, Janet Gertrude ('Nettie'),** ***Shadowy Paths***, London, Euston Press, 1915, 56 p.

**Palmer, Vance,** ***The Camp (The Farmer Remembers the Somme)***, Melbourne, Sydney, J. Endacott, Galleon Press, 1920, 27 p.
*Many other publications followed, including* The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*. Freely available on websites such as http://digital.slv.vic.gov.au.*

**Paterson, Andrew Barton ('Banjo'),** ***Song of the Pen (complete works 1901–41)*****,** R. Campbell & P. Harvie (eds), Sydney, Lansdowne, 1983, 569 p.
*Available on-line. Many publications include such ballads as* On the Trek, There's Another Blessed Horse Fell Down and Song of the Australians in Action.
*At the outbreak of World War I Paterson travelled to Europe to cover the conflict but was unable to get to the front in France. Frustrated by this he returned to Australia and joined the Remount Service which supplied horses for the Australian cavalry in the Middle East. He was ideally suited to his duties and, promoted major, commanded the Australian Remount Squadron from October until he returned to Australia in mid-1919.*

**Quinn, Roderic,** ***Poems (The Twenty-fifth of April)***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1920, 194 p.
*Freely available on-line.*

**Seager, Alexandra,** ***Men: A Collection of Verses Written During the War***, Adelaide, A. Seager, 1919, 68 p.

**Scott, Elizabeth,** ***Songs of Hope, with War Poems and Fireside Verses***, Hobart, Monotone Art Printers, 1920, 84 p.

**Shapcott, Thomas W.,** ***Selected Poems 1956–1988***, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1978, 123 p., ISBN 0-70222-243-7.
*Wrote about his father's experiences as a soldier in World War I.*

**Soley, Agnes Rose ('Rose de Boheme'),** ***The Call of the Blood and Other War Verses***, Sydney, Lyceum Club, 1914, 15 p.

**Stewart, Douglas**, ***Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1941, p 29.
*The frontispiece of this book is by Norman Lindsay. Over 400 of Stewart's poems are available to read on the Australian Poetry Library website.*

**Wallace-Crabbe, Chris, *Where the Wind Came***, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1971, 69 p., ISBN 978-0-20712-296-5.
*Chris Wallace-Crabbe's poem* Other People *wonders who went to war, as he describes the deaths of four of his uncles during World War I.*

**Wilmot, Frank, ('Furnley Maurice'), *To God: from the Weary Nations***, Melbourne, Australasian Authors' Agency, 1917, 16 p.
*Framed as a prayer to God, this is a passionate meditation on war and the moral culpability of societies who prosecute war, and a plea for peace.…* (AustLit)
*Published separately in 1917 by Australasian Authors' Agency and then in the collection* Eyes of Vigilance: Divine and Moral Songs *(Melbourne, Endacott, 1920) with the variant title '*To God: From the Warring Nations'.

**Wright, Judith, *A Human Pattern: Selected Poems***, North Ryde, NSW, Collins/Angus & Robertson, 1990, 242 p., ISBN 978-0-20716-484-2.
*Born during the First World War in 1915 and dying at the turn of the twentieth century, Judith Wright lived through the Second World War, the Vietnam conflict and the Cold War with its nuclear threat; her poetry is shaped by all of these events.*

## Note

The editors would have liked to expand this bibliography to include French literature as well as some of the Australian plays, songs and other literary forms influenced by the Great War, but such a large project would require more time and resources than are presently available. Plays such as ***The Touch of Silk*** (Betty Roland, 1928) and the more recent ***Black Diggers*** (Tom Wright, in collaboration with Wesley Enoch, 2015), deserve our attention, as well as the many ongoing World War I Centenary Projects concerned with Australian soldiers and the ways in which their lives were changed by being part of life in the trenches of the Western Front and in the host villages of Belgium and France.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ANNE BRASSART
Following her childhood in Villers-Bretonneux, Anne graduated in English and French, and worked as a College Principal in France and abroad. From 2007 to 2009, she served as President of the Franco-Australian Association, Villers-Bretonneux. Publications include the ethnographic novel *Au pays des Berbères* (L'Harmattan, 2005) and a translation of *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* by D. T. McLellan (Payot, 1971).

JOHN DRURY
Retired product designer, co-founder and manager of the La Trobe Society, Melbourne. He is currently researching the colonial history of Victoria and writing biographies of Berthe Mouchette (artist and founding president of the Alliance Française in Australia) and her sister Marie Lion.

JILLIAN DURANCE
Former French teacher, lives in South Gippsland. She writes community history, with a focus on the Great War period. *Still Going Strong* won the Victorian Community History Prize in 2007. She is currently researching the role of battalion bands, based on her grandfather's experiences in France during World War I.

JACQUELINE DWYER
Née Playoust, she is the author of *Flanders in Australia: A Personal History of Wool and War,* published in 1998 by Kangaroo Press. In 2015 she completed an MPhil at Australian National University with a case study on two branches of the Playoust family.

JANE GILMOUR
Completed her D.U.P in Paris in 1972. Her professional career was in the arts and environment sectors. Since retiring she has pursued a portfolio career as a non-executive director, consultant, researcher and writer. She is the author of *Colette's France: her lives, her loves* (Hardie Grant, 2013).

PAULINE GEORGELIN
Did her undergraduate degree in French in the 1980's. She works as a teacher of English as a Second Language to adult migrants. A keen amateur historian, she is currently enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in French at the University of Melbourne.

ELAINE LEWIS
Former French and Music teacher, co-editor of *The French Australian Review*, Elaine Lewis founded the Australian Bookshop in Paris 1996. Publications include translations of French poetry (published annually in *La Traductière*, 2002–2013), educational material, articles and book chapters, *Let's Celebrate Music,* 2 vols, (Educational Supplies, 1988) and *Left Bank Waltz: the Australian Bookshop in Paris* (Random House, 2006).

COLIN NETTELBECK
Emeritus Professor of French at the University of Melbourne. Author of numerous books, book chapters and articles on modern and contemporary French cultural history, he is President of the Institute for the Study of French-Australian Relations (ISFAR), and co-founder (1985) of *Explorations* (now *The French Australian Review*).

ANDREW PLANT
Andrew Plant is an author/illustrator specialising in children's books and is also a natural history illustrator, mural painter and set designer. His latest children's picture book *The Poppy* (Ford Street Publishing, 2014) focusses on Australia's relationship with Villers-Bretonneux, introducing the subject of the First World War to a primary school audience.

LEAH RICHES
Leah Riches is a PhD candidate at Monash University in Melbourne. Her PhD thesis examines the commemoration of Anzac Day between 1955 and 1985 and is part of a larger Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project on the history of Anzac Day, headed by Professor Bruce Scates. In 2011 she won the Australian Army History Unit's CEW Bean Medal for Military History for her honours thesis *Remembering Fromelles*. She is a recipient of the Australian War Memorial Summer Scholarship and the Australian Bicentennial Scholarship at the Menzies Centre at Kings College in London.

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