Journeys to War:

Experiences of Australian Recruits in the Great War

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I Bart Ziino declare that this thesis comprises only my original work, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used. This thesis does not exceed 30,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies, footnotes and appendices.

[Signature]

3 September 1999
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Abstract

Debates over 'the' experience of Australians in the Great War have attempted to characterise the way that Australians approached and experienced this war. This thesis is concerned with the experiences of recruits for the Australian Imperial Force from the point of enlistment, to their first experiences of battle. Those Australians who enlisted between 1914 and 1918 imagined their war before they experienced it. Recruits expected to pass through certain defining moments on their way to the front, moments by which they could chart and later recount their war. Recruits anticipated a quick passage through these stages, but the reality was a consistent rising and falling of expectations as they encountered extended periods of inactivity that did not accord with their imagined narrative of war. With battle essential to any war experience, recruits pictured themselves at the height of battle, perhaps in the midst of the old world in Europe, but more importantly, their vision was only made complete by imagining their homecoming. Under the illusions of previous wars, early recruits envisaged returning after a short conflict to a welcoming society. This vision suffered under the realities of a protracted war, and a growing awareness of the real conditions at the front. As this knowledge found its way back to Australia, recruits found themselves between two worlds of war, one constructed through newspapers and propaganda, the other becoming more apparent in attitudes gleaned from returned men and letters from those at the front. Both claimed to know the war, yet recruits knew neither world to be entirely true. Increasingly, recruits came to a closer understanding of the war, the corollary of which was that their vision of home changed in its emphasis. Men continued to be drawn by the war, but by 1917 and 1918, sought to return to homes they came to regard as a haven. They no longer anticipated that the war would enhance their social status after they returned. What they retained was a desire to reach the war and see battle, in order that they might earn the right to return home.
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Mum always tells me she is proud, and Dad has unwavering faith, and they both reassure me that I am going in the right direction. This means a lot.

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Finally, who could deny the Coven?
Note on sources:

The majority of manuscripts, official records and newspaper material consulted for this thesis relate to Victoria and Victorian recruits. I have used these sources more extensively than others for reasons of access. I also qualify their use by asserting that the scale of recruiting and social diversity of the men, as well as the greater proliferation of camps in Victoria, allow these records to provide an encompassing picture of the life of a recruit for the Australian Imperial Force.
Introduction

Defining 'the' experience of Australians in the Great War is an enduring pursuit among historians intent on characterising the way Australian soldiers approached going to war and facing battle.¹ This thesis concerns itself with experiences of recruits for the Australian Imperial Force from the moment they enlisted to their first experiences of battle. It is a thesis with two central elements: an analysis of the ways men lived this period of their lives, and an examination of the meaning of 'home'. The oscillations of life, upon reflection, generally assume a linear structure. Yet for the recruits of the AIF, these very oscillations were central to their war. The men approached war in particular and personal ways, with various hopes and ambitions for their war experience. These men imagined their war before they experienced it. It was essential for most to imagine their war even before enlisting. They saw themselves at the height of battle, pictured themselves at tourist sites and cultural landmarks of the old world, and more particularly, they imagined themselves arriving back home in Australia, as heroes, to a triumphant reception. Their war experience, they hoped, would also guarantee them continued social respectability. Recruits expected to pass through several key moments on their way to the front, moments by which they could chart and later—importantly—recount their war. Yet it was the very deviancy from the trajectories that men set themselves that characterised how they lived their vision. Most men managed to reach battle, yet the doubts and diminishing motivation they so often felt before reaching the front resulted from the disparity between the path men expected to take, and how they actually made their way to war, and back home.

Australia's official histories, both C.E.W. Bean's study of the AIF and Ernest Scott's volume on Australia during the war, prefer to identify the period between enlistment and battle as almost incidental in the consolidation of the AIF. 'The training of the men', Bean wrote, 'was never the main difficulty in the Australian Imperial Force. The bush still sets the standard of personal efficiency even in the Australian cities. ... [T]he Australian boy ... learns something of half the arts of a soldier by the time he is

¹The most recent of these, David Kent's From Trench and Troopship: The Experience of the Australian Imperial Force 1914-1919, Alexandria, Hale and Iromonger, 1999, came to attention as this thesis was being completed.
ten years old. Likewise, Scott felt that men who were 'physically such excellent material for soldiering' could be made 'fine troops' by only 'a very little handling by experienced sergeants-major'. Australian soldiers retained the civilian standards that had already made Australians unique, and imbued the AIF with them. So far as Bean was concerned, rather than imbibing traditional military knowledge, the only socialisation process men required was that which made them aware that they were part of a national army. Bean's central narrative really only commenced when a truly national force could be identified in Egypt, and it terminated with the supposed discovery of Australian military manhood at Gallipoli. Thus Bean insisted that national character was the agent that determined the way men experienced and reacted to the war. The opposite viewpoint is represented by arguments which assert the military's absolute induction of the individual. In March 1946, contributors to a special issue of The American Journal of Sociology, 'Human Behavior in Military Society', worked from the premise that a 'central phenomenon of wartime [was] the transformation of the civilian into the fighting man'. The military, they argued, was a self-contained institution: 'The essential fact about induction, reception-center, and basic-training experience is the knifing-off of past experience.' Thus the 'military man forgets he is a citizen and becomes a soldier'. Both the Australians, Bean and Scott, and the American sociologists, deny the agency, in turn, of the military system and the recruit in influencing the way that men approached war. This thesis suggests that somewhere between these two extremes lies a means of understanding how Australian soldiers prepared for and experienced the Great War.

Ken Inglis' seminal article 'The Anzac Tradition' (1965) was perhaps first to draw serious attention to Bean's history as a work requiring critical assessment. Inglis rendered Bean's conventions of explanation more open to analysis, allowing debate over the nature of the AIF to develop. In 1970, Robson's The First A.I.F. took Inglis' cue,
exploring the 'cause, course and effects of the recruitment of the Australian Imperial Force.' Far from being an expression of national will, Robson showed recruiting for the AIF to be a divisive and destructive force on Australian society, as the failure of voluntarism, conscription debates and internal strife changed the apparently unanimous society of 1914 to a paranoid and divided one by 1918. Such critical challenges to Bean's arguments did not discredit them. Bill Gammage, in *The Broken Years* (1974), reaffirmed Bean's argument that the English military system was incompatible with Australian citizen soldiers. Gammage claimed that Australians remained 'incorrigibly civilian, for they were not and did not wish to become regular soldiers'. Like Bean, Gammage endorsed a view of the AIF that defined its character in terms of the men's collective traits. Experiences before battle became simple preliminaries to the exhibition of national character on the battlefield.

From the mid-1970s, there was a growing investigation of assumptions about the nature of the first AIF. Some years after publication of *The First A.I.F.*, Robson, with J. N. I. Dawes, published *Citizen to Soldier* (1977). Much of the suggestion of the book is implicit in the arrangement of personal accounts, revealing the diversity of origins and situations of members of the AIF. In some ways the work serves as a social supplement to the statistical evidence gathered by Robson, and published in 1973. Revealing the diversity of men and their motives problematised Bean's assertion that national character determined the nature and experience of the AIF. Robson's findings encouraged historians to look to formative experiences after enlistment. A progressive trend along these lines was evident by the mid-1980s. In 1987, David Kent analysed some of the journals produced on troopships bound for Egypt and England. Kent asserted a very definite change in attitude after enlistment, arguing that troopship journals were an 'important instrument in the conditioning process which turned citizens into soldiers'.

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fostered by the Anzac tradition', Peter Pederson suggested in 1988, 'is the belief that the Australian is a natural soldier. Give him a uniform and a rifle and he becomes more than a match for any opponent'. Pederson tempered arguments of natural ability with militarily imbued skills, arguing that 'by mid-1918 [the AIF] had been fighting—and learning—for over three years so that the appellation of “amateur” ... was hardly fair'. Kent and Pederson are indicative of a trend that encouraged investigation into extrinsic forces acting on the men of the AIF as they prepared for battle.

Though more recent scholarship has challenged Bean on issues of national character and natural soldiering ability, historians have continued to employ teleological models to explain what Australian soldiers went through between 1914 and 1918. That is, they draw direct lines between enlistment and a goal with which the troops were supposed to have broadly identified. For Bean this goal was manifested in allegiance to the AIF. Gammage suggested: 'Every influence men felt between their enlistment and their first entry into the firing line, then, urged them to battle.' In 1987 Richard White proposed a model where Australian soldiers conformed to an established tourist tradition, an echo that 'had a direct impact on the way the troops reacted to the face of battle'. Offering up one possibility, however, invited comparison with other travel experiences and counter claims based on traditional military analogies. The most pointed has been James Wieland's rebuttal: 'To isolate these [tourist] experiences to the exclusion of the martial dimension ... is to distort, rather than reveal the experience of the AIF.' Wieland contested White's framework with military analogies that suggested as many influences 'accentuated their warrior status' as induced them to act as tourists. Both White and Wieland relied on showing that circumstances after joining the AIF directed recruits towards a specific way of understanding their war. White suggested that 'for most men, the chance of a Grand Tour of Europe was part of their motivation and for a significant number it was the primary drive', maintaining that...

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14 Ibid., p.186.
15 Gammage, *The Broken Years*, p.44.
18 Ibid., p.49.
they ‘naturally’ assumed the tourist ethos.\textsuperscript{19} Wieland, retorting that White’s thesis ‘sublimates their primary [military] function’, argued that these men were ‘Anzacs or diggers abroad, not innocents, and, far from being disinterested travellers, they [were] committed to war’.\textsuperscript{20} Both White and Wieland, favouring a formative experience after enlistment, offered prescriptive linear narratives dependent on the proffered guiding principle: tourism or military induction.

Nominating the apex of the Australian soldier’s experience allowed White and Wieland to propose their conflicting, linear models. White suggested that in an Australian society where ‘first-hand knowledge of Europe remained particularly exclusive’, Australians sought to travel to authenticate knowledge of Europe as ‘the old world, a place that had long been familiar’.\textsuperscript{21} Wieland however, argued that troops moved towards a ‘revelation’ in discovering the ‘other world of battle’ which defined their experience. He reasserted battle as the ultimate experience, claiming that ‘in a heightened sense of unreality ... [battle was] quite as compelling and more realistic than the notion of the soldier-as-tourist’.\textsuperscript{22} The experience of battle is a crucial moment in the debate over characterisation of the AIF. White’s soldier-as-tourist thesis invokes the distance between observer and observed as a shield against the horror of battle for Australians. By maintaining this detachment, battle becomes a site to be visited by, not upon the Australian soldier-tourist. By suggesting that the prime motivating force—tourism—was being bled, not supplanted, by battle, White could persist with his linear argument. It is significant that nearly all of Wieland’s sources are memoirs. Wieland’s trajectory relies on an appreciation of the effects of battle, and a retrospective realigning of personal experience. For White, anticipation of Europe still precedes that of battle, while Wieland’s apex—battle—reflects upon the experience after the fact, deciding then what has been relevant, and what has not. Thus the narratives of White and Wieland are drawn inversely, though both are charted in straight lines.

The structuring of one’s own lived experience is crucial to the subjects of this study, and Andrew Hassam’s comments on the experience of nineteenth century British

\textsuperscript{20} Wieland, pp.49, 50.
\textsuperscript{21} White, ‘Europe and the Six-Bob-a-Day Tourist’, p.123.
\textsuperscript{22} Wieland, p.49.
emigrants are instructive. The sense of transition on the voyage to Australia, he suggests,

needed to be contained if it was not to get out of hand, and one way of doing this was to write it down in a book ... it was not a matter of “capturing” what already existed, it was more a question of transforming the experience of the voyage into a narrative.\(^\text{23}\)

White discovers in the genre of travel writing a model for Australian troops beginning to write home after embarkation. This model, he suggests, was important for ‘making sense of and giving a shape to their war as it unfolded’.\(^\text{24}\) I would like to suggest here that recruits composed a narrative of their war before they enlisted. They defined their narratives in terms of key moments, from the moment of enlistment to their arrival home. Just as emigrants (and, indeed, tourists) identified departure as a seminal event, so did soldiers identify enlistment as the origin of this chapter of their lives. The men identified events that agreed with their own narrative of war, which was generally not unlike recruiting posters that entreated them to ‘Join together, train together, embark together, fight together.’\(^\text{25}\) Fighting, however, did not signal the end of the narrative. Almost all the soldiers’ narratives were dependent on returning home in order to conclude them. Only returning could imbue what they had gone through with meaning, and though the volunteers of 1914 invariably expected this meaning to be positive, later recruits approached ambivalence on the issue.

Notions of ‘home’ have been characterised in terms of a ‘discovery’ of the troops’ depth of feeling for Australia, through exposure to England and the war. This is, curiously, at variance with the Official History. In *The Story of Anzac* (1924), Bean argued that men who originally envisaged returning to Australia after winning the war had their outlook transformed shortly before the August offensives at Gallipoli. ‘The fond dream of the return home’, he wrote, ‘had been silently surrendered by many without a word or a sign in their letters, such as might afford a hint of it to their


\(^{24}\) White, ‘Soldier as Tourist’, p.69.

families.\textsuperscript{26} This dream was not to be recaptured, and barely entertained, by men who, though retaining a ‘passionate love of home’, now transferred their ambitions to their unit and the AIF.\textsuperscript{27} Fifty years later, Bill Gammage returned to the issue. ‘Home’, however, only became an issue for Gammage when he linked it with the perceived rejection of England by Australians. Gammage began with the near-literal presumption that England was, ‘to many Australians, Home’.\textsuperscript{28} Though this was true of a significant percentage of the AIF, this presumption was meant to include those Australians who had been schooled in the glories of the Empire. Only after Australians had seen the reality of war on the Western Front, and concurrently found that England did not live up to their expectations, did Gammage permit the rediscovery of Australia as home, albeit in a heightened nationalist sense.

Michael McKernan, in \textit{The Great War and the Australian People} (1980), supported Gammage in privileging the period in Britain in shaping notions of home.\textsuperscript{29} McKernan asserted that Australians ‘discovered’ a truth about themselves: ‘They showed a special love and reverence for a land many of them regarded as ‘Home’. In travelling, they had discovered themselves and Australia.’\textsuperscript{30} McKernan was more explicit in pronouncing Australian rejection of the ‘English ways’, which ‘increased their own self-esteem and their love of their own country’.\textsuperscript{31} This causal argument about discovery focused only on the period after Australians had experienced England and France. McKernan claimed that the disjunction between Australians’ expectations and the reality of conditions in England ‘explain why many members of the AIF determined to preserve unchanged conditions they had known in Australia before they departed’.\textsuperscript{32} Both McKernan and Gammage, in tying the rejection of England to the ‘discovery’ of ‘home’ by Australians, essentially discounted the possibility that notions of home had much prior effect on men.

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\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p.429.
\textsuperscript{28} Gammage, \textit{The Broken Years}, p.205.
\textsuperscript{29} Michael McKernan, \textit{The Australian People and the Great War}, Melbourne, Nelson, 1980.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p.116.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.139.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p.11.
\end{flushright}
In 1985, Richard Lindstrom, in a study of the psychological impact of the war on Australian soldiers, reassessed the implications of 'home' in the soldiers' experience. Lindstrom challenged Gammage's assertion that Australians 'scarcely remembered their home and country', by suggesting that home was at the forefront of men's minds, through 'continuous correspondence, their increasing national pride, ... homesickness and the stresses of war'. Memories of home offered 'a source of sustenance', and provided 'one of the few “stable referents” in the lives of A.I.F. servicemen'. Lindstrom was innovative in proposing a broader application for memories of home during the war, while incorporating previous arguments that led causally to 'an idealised conception of home and increased national pride'. For Lindstrom 'home' remained an ongoing and relevant notion that did not necessitate 'discovery' on the scale invoked by Gammage and McKernan.

Richard White, in advancing his soldier-as-tourist thesis, offered a new insight into how 'home' might have been viewed by Australian soldiers. At odds with Gammage and McKernan, White insisted that the soldiers' desire to return home should not be read 'as a rejection of Europe and an expression of a new-found nationalism ... The war did not lead to a rejection of Europe in the way that it led to a rejection of Egypt'. England was less 'home' than the 'old world' from which White's 'tourists' would return. The implications of White's suggestions are crucial, not so much for showing the soldier to indeed have been primarily a tourist, but for invoking the ongoing relevance of Australia as the 'home' with which most Australian soldiers identified. It is from here that I take my cue, and so it is of some pertinence that Eric Andrews should reassert older models of explanation in his *The Anzac Illusion* (1993). Having reaffirmed the rejection of England, Andrews argued that Australians 'turned their eyes back to Australia ... which they saw with new eyes'. Just how 'new' these eyes were is critical to understanding Australian perceptions of home. I will suggest that rather than 'discovering' the relevance of home only in the second half of the war, the home to which Australians imagined they would return—whether triumphantly or simply

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34 Ibid., pp.18, 196-97.
securely—was preconceived and always crucial to the way men approached their war. I do not contest that rejection of England intensified and idealised extant (positive) notions of home, but argue that the ‘discovery’ of what home meant after 1916 is too narrow a context for understanding the meaning of ‘home’ for Australians going to war between 1914 and 1918.

The men of the First AIF sought to live their war experience as a discrete chapter of their lives. I want to suggest that while battle was the apex of the war experience, it was not meant to supplant the ideal of returning home. For both the tourist and the soldier, and any other analogy one prefers to make, the men who went to war did not envisage their (imagined) narrative as complete until they returned from battle. Thus it was that wounded men could and did return to Australia during the war, with a sense of fulfilment, though many found that they returned to a society that they had not imagined when they enlisted. I also want to propose a non-linear appreciation of the experience of recruits going to war. I suggest this, not with the intention of scooping as many varied experiences into the one net, but to show that Australian troops, most likely the same as those of other nations, encountered a series of peaks and troughs in their soldiering life. The peaks represented moments of change and excitement (enlistment, parades, embarkation, ports of call, arrival in Egypt and England, and approaching the battlefields) punctuated by the troughs (extended periods of extreme boredom—marching, training, confinement on ship, waiting for something to happen). This wave-like model does not prescribe a particular experience, but invites the integration of several analogies, perhaps of emigrant voyages, or even of convict transportation. Throughout the war, anticipation of battle remained constant, though motivation shifted as it progressed. After Australians first saw action, a new avenue for learning about war opened up. Contact with the wounded as well as those still fighting began to supplant military training and the media as a conduit for understanding the war. The aim of many Australian soldiers after the Gallipoli campaign was simply to see the front and get out, though honourably, preferably by wounding. This fulfilled the criteria of ‘having done one’s bit’ in a war increasingly seen as interminable.

This thesis follows a periodic structure, in which Chapter One examines the attitudes of the first volunteers in Australia, primarily in Victoria. Recruits had only a
limited ability to imagine war, yet they constructed models of their anticipated experience. The first troops' expectations of military life, their experiences, and the identifiers of military progression reveal the peaks and troughs that typified the way their war would unfold. This chapter also considers the ways in which the failure of military life to conform to expectation influenced the behaviour of soldiers inside and outside the camps.

Chapter Two investigates the troopship voyage and how it affected the outlook of Australian soldiers. The voyage was a discrete stage in the lives of Australian soldiers, and it represented a sustained lull that caused boredom and disappointment. Troopship life offered men no encouragement to identify the voyage with their personal vision of how the war would unfold, and only proximity to the front spurred a new peak of expectation.

Chapter Three shows that the time spent in Egypt was instrumental in changing the expectations of recruits. The Gallipoli landing gave a focus to imagining battle, and while this produced an initial excitement, contact with returning wounded men began to change the way that recruits learnt about the front. The evacuation of the peninsula initiated a key moment in the war, as recruits and experienced soldiers came into large-scale contact. As the war progressed, the disillusionment begun in Egypt could only increase, though disillusionment never supplanted Australian volunteers' determination to see the front.

The focus returns to Australia in Chapter Four, which examines the differing expectations of recruits as they became more aware of the war's realities in the period 1915-1918. Volunteers increasingly saw themselves as a distinct group in Australia, particularly during and after the conscription referenda. There was also a growing disparity between the public image of the war and the ways men were coming to imagine the front. Though disillusionment increased in Australia, men continued to be drawn to the A.I.F by the increasing urgency of the war.

The final chapter follows the A.I.F's transition to England and France. Disillusionment reached its height here, though men continued to anticipate the front.
Home assumed a much more concrete place for men going to the Western Front, and wounding allowed soldiers to escape alive and return home with their honour intact. The chapter investigates the attitudes of men still anxious to see the front, and the persistence of peaks and troughs as they waited to test their expectations against reality.

This thesis contributes to a continuing debate about the experience of the First AIF, examining the ways in which recruits first imagined and then lived their military life. War, like any other life experience, was not lived in a linear fashion, but was characterised by fluctuating periods of meaningful activity and absolute monotony. An increasing ability to more accurately imagine battle as the war progressed caught recruits between the two worlds of battle and home, no longer assured of how the one would deal with them and the other would receive them. Men continued to go to war as they felt necessary, and though the peaks and troughs of expectation were constant, the emphases of men’s visions shifted. Home, though always the apex of the journey, changed in significance as the war continued and men sought to return to its sanctuary rather than to a changed society.
1914: The First Contingents

"Who wouldn't be a soldier for 5/- a day?"

*John McGlade, letter 1 January 1915*

The conditions under which recruits enlisted and the attitudes they brought with them in the first months of the war offer a base from which to chart change during the rest of the war. While the men of the first contingents could barely imagine the war, they nevertheless did so according to inherited and imbibed notions of warfare. Their notions were derived from popular war and adventure stories, and they imagined themselves in the heat of (victorious) battle, in unfamiliar, and intensely familiar, landscapes. Edgar Morrow later reflected that 'strangeness and romance were claiming us in those early days. All we had read of soldiers and battles was about to come true, and there was no inclination to lift the veil of romance to see the reality beneath.'¹ Men also imagined themselves triumphantly home after victory, with stories to tell like their Boer War predecessors. Enhanced esteem at home was as appreciable as any other vision of war that men could conjure. Battle, of course, was the essential precondition of any war experience. Anticipating battle, volunteers expected to be swiftly transformed from trainee to soldier, and transferred from camp to the front in a linear manner, without (apparently) superfluous deviations. Yet the experience of these men reveals a series of peaks and troughs, as they waited for their expectations to be realised, and as the boredom of camp compromised the simple linear trajectory from camp to the front.

Recruits' motives for enlisting, and the way they imagined their war unfolding, were closely linked. Richard White dismissed the listing of various motives as a sufficient analysis of why men joined, though he concluded that motives might never be

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fully understood, and perhaps never were so by those who enlisted.\(^2\) Eric Mulvey, being prompted by a sense of duty and spirit of adventure, enlisted a few weeks after the declaration of war.\(^3\) He knew 'no more than that I have sworn "to obey the King's commands and fight his enemies wherever I am required"'.\(^4\) Abstractions like 'duty' and a 'spirit of adventure' had good currency, and facilitated easy public identification with the troops and their task. The public face of enlistment, however, often disguised a struggle between domestic responsibility and patriotic duty. William Henderson, thirty-three years old on embarking for the front, wrote to his wife: 'a soldier has a[n] unsatisfactory time [caught between] two inclinations. To follow one to stay at home with his wife and family and the other to do his duty to his King and Country.'\(^5\)

Clearly, idealistic notions often defeated the more prosaic, though in tandem with the pressure of other social forces. Fear of social isolation from those who had enlisted was common. Ernest Old, a veteran of the Boer War, told his wife, 'I could never look men in the face again if I could not say I was there. ... [N]o reparation could ever be made.'\(^6\)

Old assumed a mission rather than an adventure, promising to 'simply do my best and not take unnecessary risks'.\(^7\) This promise, made to Old's wife early in the war, was the eventual mantle adopted by most Australian soldiers. As knowledge of the battlefield found its way back home, the war aims of individual soldiers contracted to much the same as those expressed by Old. Once in the force, recruits had to reconcile their new position with their expectations of the future. The men set their own trajectories, which terminated in any number of situations; some in battle, some at tourist sites, and most imagining their return to Australia after the war.

Presenting themselves at Victoria Barracks in St. Kilda Road, recruits were subjected to a rigorous physical examination. Men were apprehensive about their chances of acceptance, and many left the doctor disappointed. Recruits who passed the doctors filled out an attestation paper, before being 'sworn in'. Swearing in was the first


\(^3\) Eric Mulvey, *Australian War Memorial Private Records* [Hereafter AWM PR], 2DRL/0233, letter 23 August 1914.

\(^4\) Mulvey, AWM PR, letter 23 August 1914.


\(^6\) Ernest Old, Privately held papers, letter 20 January 1915.

\(^7\) Ernest Old, Privately held papers, letter 9 May 1915.
real objectification of what was expected of volunteers. They were asked to sign their name to an oath, asserting that they would

well and truly serve our Sovereign Lord the King in the Australian Imperial Force ... until the end of the War, and a further period of four months thereafter unless sooner lawfully discharged, dismissed, or removed therefrom; and that I will resist His Majesty's enemies and cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and maintained and that I will in all matters appertaining to my service, faithfully discharge my duty according to law.

SO HELP ME, GOD.

The process was conducted in groups to alleviate the press of men waiting to be sworn. Fifteen or twenty men at a time were ushered into rooms where they handed over their attestation papers and repeated the oath in chorus. Upon completion, Charles Moore and his group were declared 'Soldiers of the King'. 'Must say we did not look like it', Moore observed. 'Afraid none of us realized the full meaning of those words, or of the oath we had taken.' Recruits did not yet perceive themselves as conforming to conventional ideals of soldiery, and the gulf between citizen and soldier presented for both the recruit and the public a vacuum of hopeful expectation to be filled in the coming weeks. Recruits' anticipation now began to peak, and they freely imagined their war inexorably approaching. The 'military machine', referred to in both positive and negative terms, however, was intended to take over and produce conformity and identification with military values. The disjunction between how the 'machine' functioned and what recruits hoped for, disrupted the steady, linear journey the men anticipated.

The expectations that men brought to military life were as varied as their motives for enlistment. Many early recruits had some experience of pre-war compulsory training, though it had not entered their minds that soldiering might be a full-time occupation. Sent to the Point Nepean Forts upon the outbreak of hostilities, Alf Adams felt himself warming to the task: 'The more I see of soldiering the better I

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*Charles Moore, AWM PR, PR82/142, diary 19 August 1915.
like it’, he wrote to his mother. By this time he had already volunteered for active service overseas. On the other hand, Sydney Campbell, Medical Officer to the 8th Light Horse, entered camp in October 1914 ‘knowing nothing of Military work’. For later recruits, camp was the apex of long waits to be accepted, and enlistment gave way to expectations that included few, if any, thoughts of training. For William Shaw Clayton, being accepted after ‘Ten or twelve weeks of mental worry’, meant that ‘I am at last going to take my place in the fighting line’. Clayton seemed not to envisage camp training as a relevant precursor to setting off for Europe. In a revealing letter, Edward Dengate explained what the recruit’s anticipated experience entailed:

But his sadness will wear off before very long, he will see life, every day some new thing will confront him, and keep him from being sad and gloomy, picture him on the boat, amongst all his fellows laughing, joking, and playing whilst they plough their way across the sea, in the lead, perhaps in the rear, of a long line of transports, laden with hundreds in the same position as he.

Like Dengate, most soldiers seemed to expect the excitement to last much longer than the brief moment experienced upon enlistment. Each day would surely bring some new and interesting experience. But each day did not. Recruits did not abandon their ambition to get to the front, though progress seemed to lapse at times. The popular cry ‘Are we down-hearted?’, could almost always bring a resounding ‘No!’ from comrades who were provoked to remember why they were there. The consistency with which this question was asked and reported to family and friends, perhaps shows how often the men felt the need to reaffirm that they were indeed going to get to the war.

In Victoria, Broadmeadows camp was initially laid out on 13 August on Mr R. G. Wilson’s Mornington Park Estate. By 24 August, almost 200 acres of tents, training grounds and facilities, including hospital, post office, canteen and other utilities had been erected. Recruits began marching out to Broadmeadows on 19 August. James Gibb recalled the experience: ‘thousands of people were out to see us off and in fact all

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9 Alfred Adams, AWM PR, 1DRL/0022, letter 13 August 1914.
90 Sydney James Campbell, AWM PR, PR88/102, letter, 8 May 1915.
11 William Shaw Clayton, La Trobe, MS 10434, letter 17 March 1915.
12 Edward C. Dengate, AWM PR, 3DRL/7678, letter c.1916.
the way people crammed round us'.¹³ The Presbyterian Chaplain Adolphus Tolhurst 'saw them come, those streams of men in civilian dress, each man carrying his swag, either a roll of blankets or a leather bag, or both, marching four abreast, with uniformed N.C.Os. before them and behind ... For months this daily influx of men went on.'¹⁴ An immediate superiority was assumed by those soldiers already training at Broadmeadows over those arriving. Walter Hackett, arriving at Broadmeadows, wrote: 'Everybody in the camp lined up on each side of the road and we marched between them for about half a mile. We got some shucking I can tell you.'¹⁵ Godfrey McLean was greeted with 'cries of "You'll be sorry" [""]How do you like your eggs done[?]" ... from the old lads who were sent out a couple of days before'.¹⁶ The Age interpreted this as humour, though it reported a patronising Army Service Corps man telling a spirited squad of new recruits to 'Sing away, but by George, you'll be broken before long you will.'¹⁷ 'Broken', perhaps more than referring to physical hardship, implied the boredom and deferring of meaningful activity that the men in camp had already experienced.

Upon entering camp, recruits were issued with blankets and were allotted tents. Initially housing ten men, the tent was the key social unit within the camp. Recruits regularly discovered that there were others in camp whom they knew from civilian life, whether from school, workplace, suburb or district. Curiously, these relationships tended not to persist once in camp if the recruits did not share the same training unit. This was perhaps due to the concentration of men in tents, from where the next grouping was the company. The relationship with tent mates was much more intense than an ordinary social relationship, with men constantly in each other's company. Social relations were concentrated, and they were not necessarily amicable. While Walter Hackett observed that his mates 'are all good fellows and we want to stick together if we can', this comment was not entirely representative.¹⁸ Tom Richards noted that there were 'some really terrible fellows amongst the troops and reports that the Germans have

¹³ James Mair Gibb, La Trobe, MS 12632, diary, prologue.
¹⁴ Chaplain Adolphus Henry Tolhurst, War Reminiscences of an Australian Padre, AWM PR, MSS1342, memoir.
¹⁵ Walter Hackett, La Trobe, MS 10177, letter, 2 February 1915.
¹⁶ Godfrey James McLean, La Trobe, MS 9933, diary 10 February 1916.
¹⁷ Age, 16 September 1914, p.9.
¹⁸ Hackett, La Trobe, letter, 19 February 1915.
been looting and murdering will not be any worse than what these wretches are capable of.¹⁹ Chaplain Tolhurst considered:

It would be difficult to imagine a more mixed multitude of men, good, bad, and indifferent. Perhaps it should not have been the surprise it was. Indeed it was more than a surprise, it was a shock. Men do belong to different classes. There are the excellent, the not so excellent, and the bad, varying in degree to utterly bad, and then there are the rich and the not so rich, and even in Australia, the poor; and in [Broadmeadows] camp they were thoroughly mixed and the mixture well stirred.²⁰

So varied was the social mix, that for many it was impossible to carry on relationships as they knew them in civil life, let alone with those they knew in civil life. For these men, notions of the military environment had to be redrawn and adjusted, especially as recruits realised they did not know how long any given (social or military) situation would persist in their new life.

Army life was always going to be something different for the recruits. Once the men were within the gates of the camp, the army set about explaining to them why they were there. A booklet issued to the men in 1914—*Notes on the Laws and Customs of War*—seemed to assume that the ordinary recruit was under the mistaken impression that his task was to kill as many Germans (soldiers, men, women, children) as he could find in Europe. The author, Ambrose Pratt, explained to the men that the ‘British Empire is making war against German soldiers, not against peaceful German citizens’.²¹ The fear that Australian soldiers would disgrace the Commonwealth before the world by virtue of their behaviour on and away from the battlefield, is particularly evident. The pamphlet enjoined recruits to understand the rules and parameters of the army’s military mission, so that ‘no [Australian] soldier should sin in ignorance’.²² Later, on the confines of the troopship, men were told in a sermon ‘why we joined the force’. Notions of discipline, skill in marching and shooting, cleanliness and physical fitness were primary in the military objectives outlined by General McCay upon the opening of

¹⁹ Tom Richards, AWM PR, 2DRL/0786, diary, 22 October 1914.
²⁰ Tolhurst, AWM PR, memoir.
²² Ibid., p.2.
the camp. McCay also recognised that 'there will be a large number of men new to active service conditions and comparatively new to camp life'. How complete this newness was to the men, was apparently not entirely clear to him. Laurence Stickley thought the change extremely challenging, entailing as it did 'Concentration and strain, change of diet and mode of living, the “newness” of the life, and the actual hardships endured, coupled with the necessity of learning a new profession from the ground up'. The routines of training distanced men from their ambitions, whether they were to see battle, tour Britain and foreign lands, or as was increasingly the case, simply to get on the troopships. Hopes that the stay in camp would be brief diminished, and men adopted more casual attitudes to a life that seemed ever more removed from romantic notions of going to war.

Camp life was commonly characterised as 'roughing it'. Understood by recruits, the military, and the public as one of the key traits of military life, 'roughing it' made the physical hardships of camp assume a more normative appearance. This environment was intended to assist recruits to attain the curiously undefined military goal of 'efficiency'—for the most part understood in terms of physical fitness. Alf Adams concurred, and told his mother 'I think roughing it has done me a world of good ... It makes a man as hard as nails.' Roy Rankin suggested that though they had had a fairly hard time, 'it is making men of us, and all the chaps, except two or three who broke down, are looking better for the training'. The correlation between 'efficiency' and 'fitness' in the military and public minds made it much easier to declare and believe that the men were undergoing a necessary experience, at the very least acquiescing to notions of 'the lot of the soldier'. The shortcomings of military life could be dismissed, likewise, as 'roughing it'. The recruits' displeasure at their treatment was consoled by the thought of departure and getting to the front. John McGlade thought things 'a bit ROUGH in the tucker line but one can't expect hotel fare out here'. Tolerance of food and living conditions decreased, and protests became common among disheartened troops when expectations that they would soon be leaving were dismissed. After a

24 Laurence Alfred Stickley, AWM PR, 2DRL/0570, memoir.
25 Adams, AWM PR, letter, 13 October 1914.
26 Roy Rankin, La Trobe, MS 9656, letter, 6 September 1914.
27 John Matthew McGlade, La Trobe, MS 11221, letter 3 October 1914.
fortnight, McGlade was complaining about the sameness of meals: 'it seems all right the first day or two but now after two weeks of it oh Lord!' 28 At Liverpool camp, Tom Richards thought the 'camp grub ... very poor—very much so when you think that we are in the midst of plenty. I would think it time enough to live hard when it is absolutely necessary only.' 29 That recruits could see no point in 'living hard' at this time was indicative of a growing awareness that it was not helping to bring them to the battlefields, and while this transition was near-suspended, the conventions of 'roughing it' would be questioned.

From early in the training experience of the first contingent, the men were told that they would be able to get away to the war according to how quickly they achieved 'efficiency'. Officials predicted only days after war was declared that the force could be on the water within weeks. Orders of 1 September at Broadmeadows told the men: 'The day of our going to the front depends upon ourselves, for we shall be sent the moment we are ready.' 30 Recruits were urged to train with this in mind, and to be aware that what they were doing in camp was all that they would be required to do in Europe. Indeed, understanding of the task at all levels seems to have been reduced to a very basic 'theory of numbers'. Alf Adams reported that his brigadier had read out an order to the effect that

the Allies were superior to the Germans in everything except numbers and that we had to get to the front as soon as possible to equalise matters up. I would not be surprised if we were away within ten days. As for being in England four months I do not know that we will ever reach there. We will go [to] the front from here. 31

Adams provides an extreme example of the linear narrative imagined by the men in camp. Adams' expectations, however, became obsolete as the theory of numbers lost relevance after only a few months. In November, when Opposition leader Joseph Cook suggested that equipping the men in Australia should not delay the sending of more men, he was quickly rebuked by the Minister of Defence, George F. Pearce, who now realised that to 'supply mobs of untrained men would be merely to embarrass Imperial

28 McGlade, La Trobe, letter 17 October 1914.
29 Richards, AWM PR, diary 8 October 1914.
30 Age, 2 September 1914, p.8.
31 Adams, AWM PR, letter, 1 September 1914.
authority'. The 'theory of numbers' that informed the thinking of early volunteers (including most who enlisted in 1914), collapsed, and ensured a stay in camp with no well-defined conclusion beyond 'efficiency'.

From early in the war, the routine of camp was recognised as a rather dull set of exercises. 'Drill—a rest—more drill—another rest, and then further drill,' was how the Age described the scene at Broadmeadows only days after it was established. The recruits, still dressed in civilian clothes, drilled without arms, though sometimes with saplings or broomsticks. New recruits were subsequently sent to the depot at Broadmeadows, where the very basics of soldiering were taught. Civilian norms might persist briefly here: upon inspection by the Governor of Victoria in December 1914, several recruits doffed their caps rather than saluting. If the training here was basic, then so too was the process of becoming a soldier, the myth persisting that at the depot recruits were 'marched to and fro and instructed until they are smart soldiers and ready to reinforce the fighting line'. The effect of drill was almost immediately evident to observers and the recruits themselves, with general improvement in marching and, of course, saluting, within days of entering camp. Yet while reporters pointed out the difference between older and newer recruits, the men themselves rapidly tired of the performance. Ernest Old felt he learned nothing at Broadmeadows he did not know before: 'It is rough on the public paying men to loaf about like this'. John McGlade didn't mind, finding work in the Light Horse 'real easy', while Tom Richards became more and more frustrated: 'This drill is damned monotonous particularly as the non-commissioned officers use the squads to practice on and some of them are very poor.' Training quickly grew stale, as did the ability to imagine progress towards the war.

Recruits felt much more like soldiers when two things happened: the issue of arms and the distribution of uniforms. After weeks of monotonous activities, the issuing of rifles relieved the 'drudgery of squad drill'. 'We have got into rifle drill now', Don Armstrong wrote home, 'and it is much more interesting than drill without arms'. A few weeks later, though, reports were noting the 'drudgery of company drill' that would

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32 Age, 13 November 1914, p.8.
33 Age, 21 August 1914, p.8.
34 Age, 1 April 1915, p.9.
35 Ernest Old, Privately held papers, letter 27 January 1915.
36 McGlade, La Trobe, letter 17 October 1914; Richards, AWM PR, diary 9 October 1914.
37 Donald Goldsmith Armstrong, AWM PR, 1DRL/0057, letter 13 July 1915.
soon be concluded in favour of battalion training, then to be followed by brigade-level training. Though the recruits were issued with their weapons and their exercises were diversified, hopes were only briefly rejuvenated, before being again subsumed beneath drudgery and the antagonism of prolonged training. More significant than being issued with rifles was to be issued with uniforms. Here was an identifier that marked the recruit in public as distinct from those around him. Most of the first contingent received their uniforms about two weeks after entering camp. Once uniformed, comparisons could begin. Inevitably these comparisons were initially drawn between the new recruits in their ‘shabby mufti’ and the ‘trimly clad troops of three weeks’ standing’.38 Though most men were eager to show off their soldier status in public, Tom Richards found that ‘I certainly felt uncomfortable. I did not know whether to raise my hat to the number of friends I met or not.’39 The social status of the soldier had yet to be strongly asserted. Uniforms also served as much to encourage recruits to feel that they were ready to begin active service as to denote a volunteer in public. ‘Our uniforms are about complete now’, Richards wrote, ‘and there is no reason why we cannot sail at once as far as we are concerned personally.’40 Uniforms identified, for recruits and the public, a military transition, and raised common hopes of departure. Rifles and uniforms fulfilled a visual image of the soldier that implied readiness, and men of the first contingent had difficulty in reconciling their continued training in Australia with this perception.

Soldiers did begin to assert themselves as a socially distinct group a short time after getting their uniforms. Though Ernest Old found Broadmeadows ‘like living in a big town’, he and other recruits were well aware that ‘We can see big Melbourne from here.’41 Broadmeadows camp could not be entirely divorced from its surrounds, and recruits did not expect to be confined to its boundaries. Recruits on leave flocked to Melbourne’s entertainments, especially the theatres and pubs. By mid-September, it was acceptable to refer to Melbourne as a ‘garrison town’, and to imply all the traditional problems associated with military camps. Patrols of the city were instituted early to catch those breaking camp and overstaying leave, but it was the indulgence in ‘vice’ that gave authorities most concern. John Halpin wrote in his memoirs that while still twelve thousand miles from knowing the battlefield, ‘Home is near; leave is

38 *Age*, 15 September 1914, p.6.
39 Richards, AWM PR, diary, 5 September 1914.
40 Richards, AWM PR, diary, 13 September 1914.
41 Ernest Old, Privately held papers, letter 29 January 1915.
frequent; pay suffices; drink available; women abundant; and to them Active Service liquidates all liabilities.” The most significant expression of the soldiers’ social distinctiveness was a series of riots in Melbourne’s streets in late 1914. The first outbreak, on 10 October, was sparked by the publication in Truth of a ‘scandal’ at Broadmeadows camp, claiming that a girl had been raped by several soldiers. Further riots in December appeared out of proportion to the apparent causes. Police sent to quell trouble seemed only to encourage the soldiers, who brawled with constables and called them ‘dirty Government loafers’, to assert their new-found status. In court, a soldier admitted his view that the soldiers should be subject only to military police, and not civil. This attitude persisted among riotous soldiers. The arrival of police on the scene consistently caused rioters to shift their focus and intensify their violence against the constables. The behaviour of the troops signified a shift in the recruits’ self-perception, as they came to identify themselves as a more legitimate authority than the police.

One answer to the problem of soldiers’ activities outside camp was to keep them in camp. Both the military and the churches developed a recreational presence in camp, to contain the troops’ behaviour within acceptable bounds. The main military response was providing a stadium for boxing matches and performances by visiting artists. Boxing attracted large crowds, and not only to watch professionals. The ring was a regular place for men to sort out issues amongst themselves at the command of the Camp Commandant. Church institutes of various denominations also aimed to direct the men’s energies through acceptable channels. The declared intention of the churches was to keep recruits fit in body and mind, that is, to steer them away from ‘vice’, and towards God, by providing a space reminiscent of the comforts and controls of home. Church marquees offered spaces and materials to write letters, read, play board games, sing and stage concerts, as well as receiving religious ministrations. Of course the institutes could not compensate for home, but men were not completely dissociated from family and friends once they went into camp. Sunday was designated visiting day, and press reports recorded immense turnouts to see men in camp. Men anticipated visitors keenly, not least for the abundance of food inevitably brought with

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42 John Halpin, Blood in the Mists, Sydney, Macquarie Head, 1934, p.17
44 Age, 23 December 1914, p.10.
them. Home was far from abandoned by recruits, who realised that time with those dear to them was now limited. Many used evening leave to visit home. The very real pressures on family units were also evident. Donald Lechte had a difficult final leave from camp, as 'we all felt ... this was to be the first break in the family, especially my mother who was very keen on holding the family together. So I remember I was glad to go back to camp'.

Though in-camp facilities proved popular (particularly as winter approached) home could not be supplanted, particularly while it remained tangible to most recruits.

Ceremonial parades through capital cities, just before embarkation, provided a public opportunity to review the troops. These parades saw the men in 'full fighting trim' and (though nominally the case all along) 'under active service conditions'. In their uniforms and with their rifles, the men conformed to conventional images and ideals of soldiery. Articles described recruits who went into camp as a motley collection of disparate social types, and emerged into the public eye as uniform soldiers. The Age reported that 'the inhabitants of Melbourne will scarcely recognise in these brown-faced, healthy soldiers the same men who but a little while ago walked in plain clothes through the streets and out to Broadmeadows'. At the first ceremonial parade through Melbourne on 25 September 1914, troops were ordered not to wave or speak to friends and relatives they might notice along the route. This formality increased the distance between the public and the recruit. James Gibb noted: 'The troops compare very favourably with regular troops'. A bush stereotype of Australian soldiery, which already had currency in the Boer war soldier, was also invoked. Recruits displayed 'all that keenness and adaptability that mark the Australian bushman'. Their initiative and individuality, being 'thinking units instead of mere machines', was likewise asserted.

The appearance and bearing of the men temporarily alleviated any concerns about how these untried troops would respond to battle. Only after they had embarked did commentators remember that although the recruits had 'advanced wondrously since the early days of recruiting ... it takes time to make a soldier'. For recruit and public alike, the parade temporarily negated this reasoning. The soldierly appearance of the

51 Donald William Lechte, La Trobe, MS 10701, manuscript.
52 Age, 24 September 1914, p.7.
53 Gibb, La Trobe, diary, 25 September 1914.
54 Age, 28 August 1914, p.8.
55 Age, 1 February 1915, p.7.
56 Age, 5 December 1914, p.14.
men was enough to make them feel they were ‘ready’. Curiously, these parades anticipated and gave concrete form to the triumphant return that so many recruits imagined for themselves. These men, Bean thought, ‘imagined the majority ... returning, as they had done from South Africa, marching through the well-known streets and cheering crowds of their home city, and arriving back among their families with strange tales, interesting “souvenirs,” and thrilling experience’.\textsuperscript{51} It is not surprising that recruits should imagine their war in the same terms as their recent predecessors, and early ceremonial parades tended to confirm these terms of reference.

Fed on official and unofficial estimates as to how soon they would get away, recruits wearyed of camp within a few weeks. The sameness of environment, training and food, was having its effect. Tom Richards found that ‘camp life is perhaps not so hard as it is depressing’.\textsuperscript{52} The men tired, not of the discipline, but of the fact that events were not presenting themselves and changing so rapidly as they had hoped. By 16 September, a month after enlistment, James Gibb found that he and his fellows were all ‘very anxious to get away’, and Ernek Janssen wrote ‘I think we are here forever.’\textsuperscript{53} News that departure would be delayed (due to a lack of escorts for the convoy) came as a great disappointment, and by October Richards found the situation grim: ‘It is raining today and we have had no drill but plenty of quarrels. Dissatisfaction reigns supreme. I wish we were away and busy at work.’\textsuperscript{54} On finally getting official word that they would be away, the men’s relief was tangible. Richards recorded that ‘All the fellows are delighted at getting away but I am sure they have no idea of the seriousness of their mission and treat matters very lightly.’\textsuperscript{55} For most men, however, confirmation that they would be leaving reinvigorated the anticipation of change and excitement with which they had entered camp.

The first contingents were marked by an anxiety to get away, an anxiety that was registered in Australia as a constant rising and falling of hope and expectation. The few points of high expectation (enlistment, uniforms, rifles, parade, embarkation) were more than offset by the lulls of repetitive training, delays in receiving equipment, and the

\textsuperscript{52} Richards, AWM PR, diary 17 September 1914.
\textsuperscript{53} Gibb, La Trobe, 16 September 1914; Ernek Janssen, La Trobe, MS 9741, letter 13 September 1914.
\textsuperscript{54} Richards, AWM PR, diary 9 October 1914.
\textsuperscript{55} Richards, AWM PR, diary 17 October 1914.
boredom of food and camp routine. Recruits had plotted for themselves a trajectory that delivered them from the street to the seat of battle, the wonders of Europe, and triumphantly home. Military camp life subverted that vision. Only at points where expectation peaked was a correlation made and the vision revisited. At the troughs, recruits despaired that they would ever leave Australia. Tom Richards regarded the scene almost with incredulity as he finally embarked: ‘The whole business seems almost unbelievable. Thirty-five ships laden with men and weapons, some 30,000 in number, including some of the country’s very best men and most valuable assets. There is something wrong with the world.’

56 Richards, AWM PR, diary 1 November 1914.
1914-1918: Troopship Voyages

'This is a different life to being on land'
Richard Robinson, postcard c. September 1917

Embarkation represented a key break with home and the beginning of the most substantial period of travel in the Australian soldier’s experience. Most recruits saw embarkation as qualifying their ambition to begin ‘active service’, and so the moment of embarkation superseded and rendered experience in camp almost irrelevant. As the first contingent sailed in October 1914, Alf Adams wrote ‘I think this is only the beginning of a great experience for me.’ Adams certainly did not expect the same pattern of expectation and disappointment that accompanied camp life to persist on the ship. Embarkation, a key moment in men’s imagining of their war, made action appear inevitably closer. Yet the peaks and troughs continued to typify the recruits’ experience, and troopship voyages induced an apathy in men that sapped them of their will to war. This chapter suggests that troopship voyages varied little over the course of the war. The monotony of sea and ship continued the erosion of ambition that had characterised camp life in Australia. Contrary to recruits’ hopes and expectations, change was the exception to the rule, and the voyage diminished the ways in which recruits might gauge ‘progress’ by either their own, or imposed, soldierly ideals.

Embarkation was supposed to be as clandestine as possible, but invariably failed to work that way. Expecting to leave in the early hours of the morning, few men could see a reason to sleep. Many were simply intent on letting those who were remaining know all about their departure. Philip Nicholas found that celebrations started early: ‘Two bombs have gone off already and they are no toy ones, one not far from our tent. I could feel the concussion through the tent walls.’ Returning to

1 Adams, AWM PR, letter 21 October 1914.
2 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, MS 12068, letter 30 November 1916.
Broadmeadows from Melbourne only half an hour before roll call, Richard Robinson and his friend ‘threw stones on the huts and made all the row we could to wake them up but the biggest part of them were blind drunk’. Those who could often responded with missiles of their own. Great crowds always seemed to greet the men arriving at the wharves. In Adelaide in 1915 troops marched through the streets, where people were ‘yelling at you on either side. Then at one place all the school children were lined up and as we passed they sang something and waved flags and cheered.’ Names printed on sea kit bags allowed strangers to greet troops by name, much to the troops’ surprise. Some recruits, however, discerned a sombre undercurrent in the revelry. Alfred Gee thought that those about him preparing to leave were ‘Making out they are happy’. Charles Moore confided to his diary, ‘Beginning to get a little doubtful of the job now,’ though he added the self-reassurance: ‘Suppose I will come back safely’. Godfrey McLean was disconcerted as he approached his troopship: ‘When enlisting [I] thought [the] war would be over ere this.’ Others acted on their misgivings. John Allan relayed to his father a rumour that of 2400 men who left Liverpool camp to embark, 300 had deserted en route. Though these were rather fantastic numbers, other correspondents reported individuals bolting at train stations and deserting from camp. Not all of them got away. Writing home in 1918, Len Clarkson told of several recruits who were brought to the ship between fixed bayonets. Despite evidence of serious doubts, however, most recruits managed to hide them beneath positive anticipation of departure.

The moment of departure was one of mixed emotions. It was a point at which recruits looked both backward and (inevitably) forward. Men were given a rude awakening upon embarkation, as crowded and close conditions below decks took most recruits aback. Athol Lewis apprehensively noted ‘portholes just above the level of the water and terribly crowded and stuffy—don’t like the outlook at all’. Though their hammocks were comfortable, men would rush nightly for positions on deck to escape

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3 Richard Robinson, La Trobe, MS 12559, letter 23 September 1917.
4 Lindsay Ross, La Trobe, MS 12541, letter 6 June 1915.
5 Harry Alfred Gee, AWM PR, PR00378, diary 9 May 1917.
6 Moore, AWM PR, diary 28 January 1916.
7 McLean, La Trobe, diary 10 February 1916.
8 John Allan, AWM PR, 1DRL/002, letter 8 November 1915.
9 Leonard Clarkson, AWM PR, 3DRL/7133, letter 13 March 1918.
10 Athol Lewis, La Trobe, MS 10863, diary 14 February 1917.
the stifling conditions. Crowds massed on the pier before departure, and a variety of moods were evident, some celebratory, others extremely sad. Charles Moore observed 'people crying and looking as if the world were going to swallow us all'.¹¹ These moods were reflected on board. Godfrey McLean thought 'it would be the last time [I] would see dear old Aussie again. Howled for about 2 hours.'¹² Ellis Pooley noted some were 'a bit broken up at leaving', while he approached departure 'in no different way than I would a trip down the bay'. Pooley was not downcast at leaving Australia, but looked forward to 'new scenes and places [which] takes a lot of the sickness for home'.¹³ Sickness for home was at this time very much offset by sickness of camp. Departure marked, amongst all the uncertainty of the future, the certainty that they were finally 'on active service'. 'At last', Lindsay Ross wrote, 'what we have wished for and longed for has come true. We are at last on our way to the war'.¹⁴ George Hastings recorded that departure afforded 'a great relief to get away from Broadmeadows', and W. L. Hawkins wrote: 'On the water at last! All dead tired with loss of sleep!'¹⁵ In retrospect, the recruits' military experience assumed simplistic linear forms, leading inevitably from enlistment to embarkation. Minds shifted and refocused on the future, and with renewed vision, troops anticipated a steady and consistent progress towards their war. William Henderson wrote to his wife: 'If you were on the ship you would never think that we were off to fight for King and Country. [E]very one is so jolly and merry about it and anxious to get there.'¹⁶ John Halpin later wrote: 'All is lost to sight. The future alone matters now.'¹⁷ In fact it was the present that mattered, as men savoured the moment when just being on the troopship was a novelty. Expectation and experience temporarily converged, and earlier disappointments were dismissed from mind.

Censorship quickly brought the reality of the situation to the men. Within days of departure of the first contingent, orders were issued that 'strict censorship will be exercised on all correspondence emanating from members of the Australian Imperial

¹¹ Moore, AWM PR, diary 28 January 1916.
¹² McLean, La Trobe, diary 1 March 1916.
¹³ Frederick Ellis Pooley, La Trobe, MS 12497, letters 24 February 1918, November 1917.
¹⁴ Ross, La Trobe, letter 31 May 1915.
¹⁵ Arthur George Howard Hastings, La Trobe, MS 12303, diary 22 October 1914; W. L. Hawkins, La Trobe, MS 9609, diary 16 July 1917.
¹⁶ Henderson, La Trobe, letter 8 December 1915.
¹⁷ Halpin, Blood in the Mist, p.27.
Most men, like Ern Poppins, grudgingly accepted censorship as a corollary of soldiering: "We are now on active service abroad and we can write nothing that would give any ideas as to place, time and distance." Historian Richard White found censorship to be a supreme irony for soldiers experiencing the journey through an existing tourist discourse, yet perhaps the ultimate irony was that very often the men did not know where they were at all. Walter Hackett reported himself 'out on the ocean somewhere or other, but where we are going or where these letters are posted I have no idea—They tell us nothing'. Anyone with an inkling of geography was popular. Charles Moore recorded, 'Cheq. Hughes making an impression on the ignorant. Me included. His knowledge of Geography is rough, but we are in that mood, that we will stand anything.' On the Ananias the YMCA's atlas soon went missing. Primary among impositions placed on the men, censorship certainly did not correspond to any tourist ethos. Rather, it framed part of the troopship experience as a military mission—the men understood that censorship was necessary as part of 'active service'. Indeed, an indigniant poster protesting canteen prices on the 'Convict Ship Euripides' revealed that those who balked at imposition could find better analogy in the convict experience.

Most men had never travelled at sea, and rough waters, particularly in the Great Australian Bight, brought seasickness to the great majority within days of sailing. Two days into his voyage, J. W. Skinner estimated: 'About 80 per cent. of the boys are very seasick, and the mess everywhere along the decks is indescribable.' Gerald Douglas reported: 'Wandering about decks, lying down. Fellows spewing everywhere—fishes having a good time.' Below decks was worse, and within days of embarkation seasickness engulfed troopships in melancholy. Some found the strength to be philosophical, while for others illness reduced soldiering ambitions almost to nil. Allan Tongs complained bitterly to his diary:

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18 Orvieto Ship's Order No.9, 29 October 1914; National Archives MT 1384/1 'Orvieto October 1914'.
19 Ern Poppins, La Trobe, MS 11651, letter c. November 1916.
20 White, 'Soldier as Tourist', p.74.
21 Hackett, La Trobe, MS 10177, letter June 1915.
22 Moore, AWM PR, diary 20 January 1916.
23 Richards, AWM PR, diary 18 November 1914.
How shall I describe the first few days by travel on troopship A38.\[?] Patriotism sinks lower than the deepest depths of the ocean we are sailing on, the utter feeling of helplessness and despair the agony is there any known agony equals the torture ... the hours pass like days [and] in their lengthy stifling sulking torture faces are long drawn and thin and stomachs are longer drawn and thinner. Some are turned almost inside out some need a new one[].\[26\]

A contributor to the *Boonah Buzzer* insisted that seasickness ‘changes you from a cheerful, energetic soldier into a miserable unambitious thing. ... It makes you appreciate land with a hard, solid appreciation, and gives you a desire for everything you can’t have.’\[27\] What they desired in their seasick state, the author contended, was to be home. Yet the troops shared the experience of their predecessors in the Boer War, who found that ‘however devoutly one may desire to die from sea-sickness during the actual period of torture, one mostly survives’.\[28\] After several days the seas generally subsided and the men began to recover their health and resume their keen anticipation of the front. Tongs, emerging from a week of illness, now wrote: ‘All is changed. Never felt happier in my life looking down on God[‘]s great ocean when all is calm and a bright beautiful day who could help being happy in spite of the world[‘]s great strife.’\[29\] Seasickness dulled the sense of mission for a time, but the monotony of the sea now threatened to obliterate it completely.

The constraints of censorship aside, the further the troops travelled the less there was to tell those at home. Boredom and frustration developed quickly in those familiar with sea-travel. Within a day of sailing Tom Richards wished that ‘we were at the end of our destination. This ship life does not offer anything novel.’\[30\] Charles Moore took a week to find that ‘time is starting to drag. This is not quite so lively as I thought it would be. There is simply nothing happening.’\[31\] Every morning, Noel Nicholas wrote, ‘[you] get up ... and see the same amount of sea as the night before.

\[26\] Allan Tongs, La Trobe, MS 10561, diary 28 October 1915.
\[29\] Tongs, La Trobe, diary 2 November 1915.
\[30\] Richards, AWM PR, 2DRL/0786, diary 21 October 1914.
\[31\] Moore, AWM PR, diary 4 February 1916.
[Y]ou never seem to get out of the same bit of sea. The men's world was reduced, between ports, to the ship. Sighting another troopship gave Jack McLeod an opportunity to appreciate how his own ship must look: 'They are packed like herrings tier after tier—deck after deck is swarming with khaki dressed, and tanned faced humanity.' Len Clarkson noted that 'everywhere we looked were Men, Men, Men and Sea, Sea, Sea.' The sensation of being able to see only sea and sky curiously anticipated the effect of living in trenches, where only trench wall and sky would be visible. Unable to conceive of his destination, Jack Livingstone revealed the reference point of most of his fellows: 'I am a long way from home now.' After three weeks, Alf Leahy decided: 'Life on board a transport is not the game one would like to be very long at. One gets very tired of the general routine carried out every day and also the monotony of the whole thing.' Men found, however, that they were indeed too long at this life, and John Halpin wrote: 'Souls are seeking a re-adjustment of their sense of the value of things after five weeks of surfeited monotony aboard.' Even the behaviour of the men in their leisure time as they strove to temper their boredom became monotonous, as Malcolm Melvin expressed in verse:

We gaze and laze and loll about
And we argue sleep and play
Then loll and laze and sleep again
It's the same every blanky day.

Boredom bred a slackening of ambition, and anxiety about the war did not renew itself until near the completion of the voyage. It was this that made Alex Mackay suggest that 'a seatrip on a troopship is vastly different to one on a passenger boat.' The inevitable sameness of the voyage was debilitating, and the frustrating lulls experienced in camp were revisited as men came to recognise monotony as the defining principle for their voyage.

32 Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, MS 12068, letter 'Somewhere at Sea' [c. December 1915].
33 Jack McLeod, La Trobe, MS 10464, diary 27 May 1916.
34 Clarkson, AWM PR, letter 'Somewhere at Sea', 1917 [c. December 1917].
35 Jack Livingstone, La Trobe, MS 10482, letter 24 August 1915.
36 Alfred Leahy, AWM PR, PR00562, letter 11 July 1916.
38 Malcolm Melvin, 'A Month at Sea', Benalla Sun, 5 December 1916.
39 Alexander Mackay, AWM PR 1DRL/0441, letter 16 November 1916.
As troopships steamed forward, lack of news made them seem static to the men on board. Though anxious for news of home and of the war, the men resigned themselves to going without. Ernest Old found: ‘We don’t know anything about the progress of the war now and [are] quite lost without our newsvendors’ well known cry of “Age or Argus” which we used to hear every morning at good old Broadmeadows.’\textsuperscript{40} Noel Nicholas found that the war was almost lost to those on board for the time they were ‘Somewhere at Sea’: ‘We have heard no news of the war it might be all over for all we know, we have forgotten that there are such things as newspapers, some don’t recognise where we are going’.\textsuperscript{41} Troopship newspapers, generated internally, were intended to fill this void. The \textit{Ayrshire Furphy} offered ‘no excuse for its advent, being a natural outcome of the epidemic of mal-de-mer, which has inflicted itself on the ship during the past week’.\textsuperscript{42} Editors turned their attention to issues on board, and promoted the ship as a contained community, complementing the conditions in which men found themselves—surrounded by water and regularly without other vessels around. The \textit{Rising Sun} editorialised:

At this moment the ship is our only world. All that moves, lives and has its being on and between the three decks, to which we are cribbed, cabined and confined, is of paramount importance. And, whilst sailing between two continents we have no news from either.\textsuperscript{43}

Troopship journals provided news of a different kind to sustain the men on board, and though some were willing to editorialise on issues of soldiering and preparation, most dedicated themselves to issues arising on the vessel. As voyages neared conclusion, however, final editions reflected changes in the men’s attitudes, and began speculation on the future. Troopship papers reinforced the insular world of the troopship, the corollary of heavily regulated news, causing men to turn inwards, only to find a horrible sameness.

\textsuperscript{40} Ernest Old Papers, letter 11 May 1915.
\textsuperscript{41} Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter ‘Somewhere at Sea’ [c. November 1915].
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ayrshire Furphy}, AWM Troopship Serials, 10 July 1916
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Rising Sun}, AWM Troopship Serials, 9 August 1916.
As much as was practically possible, military authorities intended to carry on training, or at least physical exercise. The routines of ‘work’ were maintained, dismissing—at least while the men trained—notions of tourism or tourist voyages. Alf Leahy felt that this was especially so:

Life on board a troopship is not one of milk and honey and one would not grow to like it. The general routine of ordinary camp life is gone through as much as possible, the usual bugle calls are sounded as on camp and drill is gone through by section about 3 hours a day, roll is called on all parades and at meal times and if you are absent a fine of 2/6 is made.44

Physical exercise, it seems, was intended to maintain both a physical and mental attitude commensurate with military preparation. Shrapnel asked its readers to remember that exercise ‘is not done with the intention of filling in time, but to promote that healthy state of body and mind necessary for active service’.45 Though the difficulties inherent in exercising on a ship soon made themselves apparent, it seems that troops accepted this in the same spirit of ‘roughing it’ that had defined their earlier reactions to military life. Though James Wieland claimed that ‘the long sea voyage was an ideal environment for indoctrination, as the men were further divided from their civilian lives’, the reality was that time on the ship had no such effect.46 Once away from physical drill Alf Leahy was confused by the disjunction he felt. Watching his fellows at leisure, he wrote, ‘we look around see some writing, reading, playing games, others washing clothes, skipping, sleeping etc. It[’]s the life!’47 The cleavage between physical training and the idleness of life away from it could barely be reconciled, except by accepting the hazy duality of experience engendered by the confines of a troopship.

Complaints about food were again used to mediate and express the frustrations of the recruits. Philip Nicholas broke with convention when writing home: ‘This is not to be an “all well and happy” letter. We are far from it and all our days on the water

44 Leahy, AWM PR, letter 7 July 1916.
45 Shrapnel, AWM Troopship Serials, 29 May 1917.
46 Wieland, p.50.
47 Leahy, AWM PR, letter 7 July 1916.
have been far from it. Today things reached a climax.\textsuperscript{48} When the food was
considered beyond redemption, it was common for mock burial services to be held, the
offending victuals handled as a corpse. Jack McLeod described one such ceremony in
June 1916:

We get a pudding for tea. It is of the heavy order, and some of the lads seeing a
joke in it make a stretcher out of a tray, place the pudding covered with a tea-
towel on it, on either side of the tray are knives reversed, a mouth organ band
advances playing the “Dead March”. Pall bearers and other mourners do the
slow march on each side of the stretcher and carry knives reversed. This
mournful procession which has hundreds in its train slowly wends its way to the
cook house at the other end of the ship. The crew in the cook[’]s galley give this
a cold reception, and can see no joke in it. The procession slowly marches round
the other side of the ship past the officers[’] quarters, and then halts at the
ship[’]s side where the remains are solemnly committed to the waves receiving a
burial with full military honours.\textsuperscript{49}

The protest made, improvements were often forthcoming. Doctors did regularly
condemn food, but shipboard rituals, one suspects, provided a diversion for the men as
much as a serious protest against poor food. The crowds attracted to mock burials
testify to the strength of the ritual as a protest against boredom, though there was no
solution to the problem.

Recruits endeavoured to produce their own amusements. Though banned on the
transports from the outset, gambling was endemic. Captain Graeme Stobie noted that
‘Gambling is strongly in evidence ... Of course this form of amusement is barred but
goes on practically the same, as if no restrictions existed.’\textsuperscript{50} Orders identified
gambling as a confidence trick run by ‘unscrupulous rogues who rob troops of their
money’.\textsuperscript{51} They were roundly ignored by all. Officers also indulged, and Athol Lewis
could not understand how the men were expected to abstain when his Commanding

\textsuperscript{48} Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 25 December 1916.
\textsuperscript{49} McLeod, La Trobe, diary 8 June 1916.
\textsuperscript{50} Graeme Stobie, AWM PR, 2DRL/0196, diary 7 April 1916.
\textsuperscript{51} Themistocles, Routine Order No.7, 3 February 1916; National Archives MT 1384/1 ‘Themistocles
January 1916 to 27.2.1916’.  

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Officer and the Roman Catholic Chaplain were playing cards with the sergeants for high stakes on the Osterley.52 Boxing matches, sanctioned and unsanctioned, were incredibly popular. Men crowded around rings and mounted any vantage points available in order to secure a view. Fights could also be had unofficially between decks. The Wyreemian reported that 'You only have to raise a glove in the air, and men come streaming up from all parts of the ship.'53 The physicality of boxing allowed both those involved and those looking on to release some of their pent-up frustrations. Reading and writing were popular, and were promoted by limited access to deck space for more physical activity. Stocks of books were soon exhausted as they made their way through several hands. Noel Nicholas found that 'some read quicker than others and they pinch any book they see lying about'.54 The ship's crew and civilian passengers regularly involved themselves in concerts, and bands often evoked sing-songs from the men at night, as they had in camp. Though these traditional forms of entertainment found an eager audience, however, the scale of monotony meant that they could barely distract men from the dominant sense of motionlessness and lethargy that the voyage engendered.

Perhaps the only real counter to monotony was to reach port. Describing sarcastically his trip to date, Philip Nicholas wrote home that 'we saw a couple of whales some flying fish and the smoke of another steamer, a transport. All that excitement we had bundled into 16 days till we sighted land through the rain at 7.30am last Thursday.'55 Graeme Stobie found his boredom almost immediately relieved: 'It does not seem a month since we left Port Melbourne in spite of the lack of variety of the days.'56 Stobie here bridged the gulf between the peak of embarkation, and arrival at port, dismissing the monotony of the ship as others dismissed their time in camp. At his first stop, Nicholas considered that 'with the majority the place will always be thought well of for the first day's relief from the ship'.57 From the outset, there was a well-grounded fear that Australians would cause trouble in port. The authorities, however, found that it was much more difficult to control men on the ship than off it.

52 Lewis, La Trobe, diary 25 February 1917; 6 April 1917.
53 Wyreemian, AWM Troopship Serials, 7 November 1918.
54 Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 'Somewhere at Sea' [c. December 1915].
55 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 17 December 1916.
56 Stobie, AWM PR, letter 29 April 1916.
57 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 17 December 1916.
Some men had suspicions that they were not being allowed off for fear of desertion, and many vindicated this fear by temporarily breaking ship. On his way to Egypt, Cyril Lawrence watched troops refuse to go below deck at Colombo, howling down their officers and threatening violence. Given extended leave in one port, a large number of men of Lieutenant Hawkins’ ship returned drunk, including three officers, the ship’s adjutant and the chaplain. Hawkins felt ‘all our grip of the men vanishing quickly. … The men soon became a seething rabble and it is impossible to even think of them as soldiers.’ By March 1916 the favourable attitude towards Australian soldiers in Colombo had very much cooled, and likewise in Durban the behaviour of certain Australians left a bitter taste. Though the first Australians to visit Durban arrived in May 1916 en route to England, by December it was clear that ‘the people didn’t want us there’. In March 1917 a meeting of NCOs on the Osterley was informed that ‘Australians were unfavourably regarded there as being descendants of convicts’. The landing at Gallipoli had supposedly absolved Australians of their convict heritage. The landing at Durban almost reasserted it.

Though Australians succeeded in creating a bad name for themselves, most men abided by the standards expected of them, and enjoyed their leave. It was in port that some Australian troops could engage with the tourist ethos. Captain Sydney Campbell subscribed to the tourist ethos, living his experience in Colombo though Kipling’s Kim. Touring the apparently familiar, Campbell longed ‘to emulate Kipling’s characters who lived disguised amongst the people and absorbed their ways and feelings … and speech. One feels so out of it, so much that one is merely looking on the outside.’ Assuming the tourist’s sense of ‘otherness’, Campbell allowed his experiences to be guided by the expectations of the tourist. Many men evidenced this attitude, particularly as they constantly marvelled at the natives and their manner of living, almost completely alien to them. Some found leave at these ports partial fulfilment of their ambitions, while others had had all ambition sapped by the voyage to date. Philip Nicholas told his father: ‘A lot of us want to go home already so I guess

58 Cyril Lawrence, La Trobe, MS 10970, diary 7 May 1915.
59 Hawkins, La Trobe, diary 24 July 1917.
60 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, Postcard, 23 December 1916.
61 Lewis, La Trobe, diary 4 March 1917.
62 Campbell, AWM PR, diary 20 March 1915.
[we] will be pretty tired of it by the time we are finished. Nicholas wished to go no further on the troopship though, declaring that 'Life on a transport is simply hell'. Nicholas returned to his ship, but anticipation of further boredom made men loath to resume their voyage. Paradoxically, the progress inferred by arrival in port also reminded men of their mission, and re-kindled some anticipation of the front.

The second leg of the voyage induced a growing awareness of the approach of war. Crossing the equator represented a significant moment of change for recruits, that had begun upon leaving their home port. Varied comments had been made upon last sight of Australia. Charles Moore observed: 'Everyone [is] looking as if they had lost something.' Conversely, Athol Lewis thought that 'The men on board were strangely unmoved—about 30 men at the most were at the stern watching the coast disappear.' For many the final reminder that they had left Australia was to find themselves literally 'on the other side of the world'. The disappearance of the Southern Cross from the night sky, which many noted, was a significant index where so little else changed. Crossing the equator was marked with traditional ceremonies that involved 'Father Neptune' and his entourage coming aboard. The theatrics associated with the Neptune ritual gave form to the moment, as well as alleviating the boredom. The ceremony involved the dressing up of a series of characters as Neptune, his wife, policemen, a judge and barber. Those who had never crossed the equator were rounded up and brought before Neptune's court, and 'inducted into the mysteries of the deep' (i.e. shaved with oatmeal and dunked into a large canvas pool). Most significantly, none was immune from trial. High ranking officers, chaplains and others in authority were regularly submitted to the court and given the treatment. Some sense of grievance could be expressed through the ceremony, too. The censor on board was frequently targeted for particular criticism. William Henderson was charged with the most serious crime of 'open[ing] the letters of men which are written to their sweethearts and wives, and you make jokes over these letters a most serious offence and one which makes our hearts bleed'. These ceremonies also marked a moment of progression.

The troopship paper *Seang Bee Sea Breezes* observed:

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63 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 17 December 1916.
64 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 17 December 1916.
65 Moore, AWM PR, diary 2 February 1916.
66 Lewis, La Trobe, diary 21 February 1917.
67 Henderson, La Trobe, letter 8 December 1915.
To some it is no new experience, but to many it marks the most important event since birth. ... The imaginary line which separates the Northern Hemisphere from the Southern, so divides the Old World from the New. To Australians it conveys a meaning to-day that bears a greater significance than they before dreamt of.\textsuperscript{68}

This suggestion supports White’s argument that Australians were focused on reaching their cultural heritage in Europe, ‘a journey of the provincial to the metropolis, to the older civilization, to the intensely familiar rather than the exotic’.\textsuperscript{69} Yet it also intimates that the war provided a context for entry into the Old World quite apart from the tropes of tourism. Australians had come to defend the Old World, if for Australia’s sake, and disrupting this narrative would be difficult.

Celebrants of the AIF, charting a teleological ascent to some apex of mateship, saw on the troopship a cementing of ‘cordial relations and comradely spirit ... amongst the men. All were now, well acquainted with the qualities and shortcomings of his neighbour and a wonderful understanding resulted.’\textsuperscript{70} Chaplain Tolhurst, aboard the Themistocles in 1915, delighted that the ‘bulwarks of the ship held us fast, and it was impossible to get away. This was ... the best of all preparation for the still closer fellowship of the firing line.’\textsuperscript{71} These writers invoked the mateship that so characterised the public image of the Australian soldier. Those on the troopships, however, were not so sure of their neighbours at the time. Charles Moore, though pleased with friends he had made, wrote: ‘All good friends. I wonder how long it will last.’\textsuperscript{72} As the trip went on, men grew irritable with their surrounds and fellows. Fights, verbal and physical, were not uncommon. John Nicholson noted one that sent a man to hospital: ‘The game is no good but it makes fun for us all.’\textsuperscript{73} Approaching the end of his voyage, Graeme Stobie thought: ‘Everyone seems at a loose end—tempers

\textsuperscript{68} Seung Bee Sea Breezes. AWM Troopship Serials, 8 September 1916.
\textsuperscript{69} White, ‘Soldier as Tourist’, p.65.
\textsuperscript{70} Stickley, AWM PR, memoir.
\textsuperscript{71} Tolhurst, AWM PR, memoir.
\textsuperscript{72} Moore, AWM PR, diary 30 January 1916.
\textsuperscript{73} John Nicholson, La Trobe, MS 11980, diary 24 May 1917.
very irritable and quick and each one heartily sick of the sight of the other.\textsuperscript{74} The men themselves became objects of the boredom that characterised the greater part of the voyage. The troops could anticipate nothing but the same men and the same interminable sea. So familiar, and so restrictive of ambition, was the troopship, that the \textit{Benalla Sun} editorialised ‘if [this trip] lasts much longer we will get so used to it that we won’t feel like leaving the ship when we arrive at our destination’.\textsuperscript{75}

As the voyage approached its end, the men became more aware and excited about resuming their soldiering life. The troopship journal, \textit{The Innocents Abroad}, saw in the voyage ‘that transitory stage of all our military careers, when we merged from ordinary members of the Australian Imperial Force into full-fledged Anzacs’. The moment of transition would be reached, however, on the ‘other side’, rather than on the ship.\textsuperscript{76} The voyage represented a limbo, rather than transition, where the soldierly ideal could not be gauged by any traditional methods. The \textit{Maltameter} told its readers that as they approached the seat of the war, they were ‘commencing the “Are-Now” of a soldier’s life’.\textsuperscript{77} This meant a parity between expectation and reality was anticipated after landing, where the troopship offered only discrepancies. The task for which the men had volunteered was now perceptibly closer, and anticipation on board rose accordingly. In the Red Sea, Allan Tongs recorded: ‘[N]earing our journey[s] end and are well and anxious to get further on, none down hearted.’\textsuperscript{78} If they were not downhearted, then the men were at least more aware of their danger. \textit{Seang Bee See Breezes} thought that ‘The passing of the miles of seas we have so far crossed gave food for little more serious thought than how to pass the time pleasantly. From now on, each passing day will add to our appreciation of the risks we are taking’.\textsuperscript{79} As though awaking from hibernation, men began to express eagerness for land so near. None were reluctant to go ashore, though some expressed sentiment for their vessel. Ernke Janssen wrote ‘We had a good time on the boat, but we were not sorry to get off, as it

\textsuperscript{74} Stubie, AWM PR, diary 1 May 1916.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Benalla Sun}, AWM Troopship Serials, 13 December 1916.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{The Innocents Abroad}, AWM Troopship Serials, Nov-Dec 1916.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Maltameter}, AWM Troopship Serials, October-November 1918.
\textsuperscript{78} Tongs, La Trobe, diary 19 December 1915.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Seang Bee See Breezes}, AWM Troopship Serials, 8 September 1916.
was so monotonous' \textsuperscript{80} W. L. Hawkins anticipated that in only a few more days, 'a new life should start for us' \textsuperscript{81}

The importance of the voyage faded almost immediately when ships arrived at their destination. Philip Nicholas refused to write about the trip a second time after once describing it to his sister. 'In this game', he wrote, 'the sooner you forget the past the better.' \textsuperscript{82} Far from realising the hopes of recruits, the voyage assumed the same frustrating dimensions as time in camp, both in the way it was experienced and the way it would be remembered. Embarkation provided the original respite from camp, but the moment was soon lost to the men, as absolute monotony evoked lethargy in their anticipation of the front. The troops' objectives grew distant as their world was confined to the decks of the troopship. Only stops in ports revived anxiety to be further on their way, granting an interlude between their shipboard hiatus and the second, more interesting, leg of their journey. It was only in port that men could play the tourist, but only briefly before the war summoned them further on their journey. Only changes in the sky as the equator was crossed offered any notion of advancement. As they prepared to disembark, men dismissed the previous weeks from thought and proceeded to again envision the way to battle, and the way home.

\textsuperscript{80} Ernec Janssen, La Trobe, 19 December 1914.
\textsuperscript{81} Hawkins, La Trobe, diary 9 September 1917.
\textsuperscript{82} Philip Nicholas, La Trebe, letter 1 February 1917.
1914–1916: Egypt

'We didn't leave our jobs to be chocolate soldiers'
Roy Rankin, letter 20 July 1915

The time Australians spent in Egypt 1914–1916 was the hinge of their war experience. The earliest recruits, with their romantic notions of warfare, looked expectantly forward; later recruits displayed a growing awareness of the true nature of battle. The meaning of 'home', by implication, also began to change. The waves of peaks and troughs continued after disembarkation, and though this did not change significantly, what was important for the men—and helped to reassure them that they were not back where they started—was that they were indeed closer to the front. George Cocks summed up Egypt, its promise and its trials: 'This place is a bit different from the other camps, this is nearer active Service but it is very heavy going, nothing else but loose drifting sand, and fairly big sand hills.'¹ In Egypt, Australian soldiers could approach part of their experience with a tourist's mentality. I will suggest, however, that this was never a priority for Australians in Egypt. For those who came after the Gallipoli landing, Egypt represented a new way of learning about war. Preparation for battle was now being channelled through returning soldiers, rather than inducted through military training, or media accounts.

Reactions varied when the men of the first contingent discovered that their journey would stop short of England. Relief that the sea voyage would conclude sooner than they had expected was the dominant sentiment. Men were aware that Britain had declared war on Turkey, and Ernek Janssen thought that 'we might get some fighting sooner than if we went to England'.² The Turks were never the 'real enemy' that the Germans were, nor were they part of the 'real war' that would be fought in Europe.

¹ George Cocks, Privately held papers, letter c. Jan-Feb 1916.
² Ernek Janssen, La Trobe, letter 29 November 1914.
Indeed, the Turks were barely expected to be more than an adjunct to the Australians' training. Alf Adams wrote home that 'We are to land in Egypt ... and fight the Turks and also finish our training.' Likewise, Frank Burton thought that 'if we do [fight the Turks] it will do away with all the nervousness and have us in good form for the Germans'. Though English-born members of the AIF were concerned that they would not be back in England for Christmas, the remainder were excited to feel that battle had come perceptibly closer. Most troops camped at Mena, below the pyramids, and on the edge of the desert. All around, little could be seen but camp and sand. Ernek Janssen was disappointed: 'We thought Broadmeadows was bad, and then we groused at the boat, but the Sands of the Desert of Egypt beats it all. We were near our friends at the meadows.'

In Egypt Australians still could not be sure of where or when they might go into action, and though Carl Janssen hoped to 'go to the front about March', he conceded 'Heaven knows what they will do with us'. Belief in the virtue of 'roughing it', particularly marching through sand up to the ankles, remained current, and even the sandstorms were considered part and parcel of becoming a soldier. Conssett Riddell didn't know how much sand he had swallowed while marching—'it must be a lot'—but still thought 'it must be fine training anyhow'. Carl Janssen also accepted the hardships as a matter of course: 'I am not grousing because we are soldiering now'. Accepting that 'roughing it' was 'something like a soldier[']s life', also brought men to understand that they were leaving their civilian characteristics behind. Reg Mills believed that 'I have fallen into all the ways of military life as rough as it is, I just feel as though I have been at it all my life.' George Telfer wondered how he would go back to farming after the war, though he had not seen action: 'I will miss the military life terribly. It seems to have become part of me now.' Though many believed they were receiving relevant training, they also felt they were barely nearer their objective. Leo Gwyther thought that 'drill and bivouac and route marches [give] the men a great idea of

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3 Adams, AWM PR, letter 28 November 1914.
4 Francis James Burton, AWM PR, 1DRL/0168, letter 15 January 1915.
5 Ernek Janssen, La Trobe, letter 11 December 1914.
6 Carl Janssen, La Trobe, MS 9741, letter 25 December 1914.
7 Conssett Riddell, La Trobe, MS 10766, letter 5 January 1915.
8 Carl Janssen, La Trobe, letter 30 January 1915.
9 Moore, AWM PR, diary 18 April 1916.
10 Reg Mills, in Letters to Cameron family 1915-1918, La Trobe, MS 9605/74, letter 8 August 1915.
11 George Stanley Telfer, La Trobe, MS 9604, diary e. Jan.-Feb. 1915.
what they will have to do in real war time', but added: 'This is not service yet I don’t think.' Few Australians did not find their training frustrating in terms of its failure to live up to expectations of excitement and change. Men began to understand the process of becoming soldiers in terms of boredom and hardship, and did not enjoy it. Carl Janssen now complained: 'The Brigadier told us that if we could not stand the training we would not be able to stand active service but our training was considerably more severe than any active service ever will be.' Kenneth Mackay told his mother: 'When a number of decent men vow that they will never again join the Aust army there is something wrong.' Ideals of soldiering did not match the reality, and now experience merged with lowering expectations to consolidate the men's increasingly passive approach to going to war.

It is fortunate for those proponents of the soldier-as-tourist thesis that the Australians should have landed in Egypt. Richard White proposed that with an existing tradition of tourism in Egypt, 'it was natural that the Australian troops fitted themselves into it.' Australian soldiers did recognise that they had an opportunity otherwise unavailable to them. George Telfer recorded that 'We have had a splendid time since we arrived in Egypt. We are able under present conditions to see what the wealthy tourists pay hundreds of pounds to see during the tourist season.' Walter Hackett also acknowledged the uniqueness of the situation: 'It is very interesting to see all these historic places. I never thought I would ever get the chance to see them.' It is legitimate to suppose that some imagined that they would experience the war as a tourist. Inevitably, however, this was compromised by the implications of wearing the uniform. Carl Janssen thought that 'Of most places I think Egypt is one of those I wished principally to see', yet he was well aware of his soldier status: 'one is always a soldier, and the mind is never really free. One is forced by the very life one leads to live and think as a soldier.' This duality of soldier and tourist proved problematic, as the men's soldier status both precluded them from elements of the tourist experience and

12 Leo Tennyson Gwyther, La Trobe, MS 11300, diary 31 January 1915.
13 Carl Janssen, La Trobe, letter 25 February 1915. Janssen was mortally wounded in his boat before landing at Gallipoli.
14 Kenneth Mackay, AWM PR, IDRL/0443, letter 25 February 1915.
17 Hackett, La Trobe, letter, 4 August 1915.
18 Carl Janssen, La Trobe, letter 7 March 1915.
induced others. Janssen thought: 'To see Cairo as an ordinary tourist is impossible. In fact I do not think that I should care to do as a civilian what I have done as a soldier.'\(^{19}\) By October, Australians arriving in Egypt were not anticipating the pyramids or the Sphinx, but the 'filth' of Cairo. Arthur Armstrong expected to 'see something pretty bad but the real thing exceeded all my expectations. It is absolutely the filthiest place that one could imagine.'\(^{20}\) For those in the ranks unimpressed with the brothel districts, there was the frustration of what Halpin called the 'blighting curse of military caste to the volunteer ... [to be] restricted by rank on every side “Out of Bounds to Troops” confronting him at the entrance of almost every decent hostelry.'\(^{21}\) Despite being the highest paid soldiers in Cairo, it was an inescapable fact that tourism in Egypt remained restricted to the rich. Joseph Hall thought that 'these sights are not as much appreciated as they might be were we out for sight seeing and spending a few hundred £ in our quest'.\(^{22}\) The men found the tourist analogy suited part of their experience, and understood that experience through it, just as those who invoked the convict analogy on the troopship had done. The appellation 'six-bob-a-day tourists', both directed against, and adopted by, Australian soldiers is telling. The title tends to have been applied only when the men could see no particular engagement with their military quest, and does not imply any direct engagement with a tourist tradition. With very little to do on his troopship, Roy Smith noted that 'They call us the Fighting Tourists'.\(^{23}\) Walter Hackett and his friends, left behind in Egypt while others went to the Peninsula, 'all got beds and armchairs left behind by the officers, we call ourselves “Kitchener’s seven bob a day tourists.”'\(^{24}\) This did not deny Hackett's boredom and his anxiety to get to the front, but rather shows that the tourist analogy was employed when experience did not coincide with the linear progression implied by military service. These men were far from a leisured class, and 'Six-bob-a-day tourist', perhaps, was simply a by-word for comfortable lethargy, not to be taken too literally.

The anticipation and arrival of mail from Australia consistently captured men's attention from any urge to tour or to fight. Tourism could be interesting so long as there were sights to be seen, and the soldiers had money (which they regularly did not). The

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20 Arthur Armstrong, AWM PR, 1DRL/0055, letter 31 October 1915.
22 Joseph Rex Hall, La Trobe, MS 10139, diary 25 March 1915.
24 Hackett, La Trobe, letter, 9 September 1915.
lack of news from home, and of the war, induced the same sense of lethargy that had been endemic on the troopship. Noel Nicholas noted: ‘We don’t get much news here, there might be a war, to see us here you would not think that there was one.’ Bored with their stay in Egypt, men became more anxious for news from home than they were to write of their own adventures. Thoughts of home began to dominate as men waited to go to the front. John Halpin wrote:

Hope, fear anxiety. A maelstrom of emotion, plumbing the depths of human consciousness; submerging every present interest; the exclusion of all else, but ties with blood, home and loved ones, strengthened by prolonged absence, and the uncertainties of future life.

“Fall in for Mail!”

The arrival of mail punctuated the boredom and brought visions of home directly to mind. Soldiers writing home constantly expressed their desire for mail and the relief of receiving letters from home. Reg Mills wrote:

When the mail arrives there is a “Hooray” rush for it, it is impossible to hear the sergeant yelling out the names for the row the lads make; they get that excited, and the looks of disappointment on some of their faces when their names have not been called out is pitiful.

Eric Chinner noticed that as the men began reading ‘All gaiety leaves us, and a look of intense longing creeps into our eyes as we think of our loved ones. After a while one reads a humorous passage to another, and then the spell is broken. ... All care is forgotten, everybody goes around with a bright look.’ That is those who received mail. Charles Moore found that without the distraction of mail, he had to face the reality of his boredom in Egypt: ‘Everyone reading letters except me. I am going for a stroll. Life is a bore after all.’ Moore was still anxious the following day, and found only in sleep a respite from ‘this horrible lonely feeling’.

25 Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 14 March 1916.
26 Halpin, Blood in the Mists, p.45.
27 Reg Mills, La Trobe, letter 8 August 1915.
28 Eric Chinner, La Trobe, MS 10191, letter c. March 1916.
29 Moore, AWM PR, diary 13 March 1916.
30 Moore, AWM PR, diary 14 March 1916.
eventually consume men who had tired of Egypt, and thought little of the future. Walter Hackett, having spent just over a month in Egypt, where ‘it is just the same thing every day’, wrote home: ‘I have not had any mail yet I suppose there is some on the way. I hope we stop here till it comes, I don[‘]t care what they do with us then.’ 31 Home remained as significant as ever, even as the front drew nearer.

For the men of the first contingent, boredom became pronounced towards the end of February 1915. Kenneth Mackay wrote ‘We are all getting a bit tired of this. It was a novelty at first but the sand and hard work gets monotonous. After one has seen Cairo several times it becomes a dead place’. 32 On hearing a rumour of departure, Eric Mulvey considered ‘it will be none too soon for any of us as the dust and heat are getting very bad and the work rather monotonous as we have practically arrived at the end of our training now and the day’s work is a repetition of the previous one’. 33 Australians became puzzled and frustrated with their inactivity. Joseph Hall, noting that he had been in Egypt almost fifteen weeks, recognised that the ‘chaps are naturally getting very tired of the prolonged holiday trip; but although we have been expecting orders daily for the past three weeks to take our departure, the welcome day must come within the next fortnight at the longest’. 34 Ernek Janssen recorded dolefully at this time that ‘most of us expected to be well into it by this instead of marking our time here in the Desert’. 35 The resumption of the journey early in April was again greeted with relief. As they neared the Gallipoli Peninsula, men reached the apex of anticipation. Gamage paints a picture of men prepared to die, conscious of the personal glory that action would bring them. 36 It is not strange that home should have been be so near their thoughts in the moments before battle. As he approached the peninsula in August, D. V. Mulholland had ‘impressed upon my mind our return to Australia, covered with glory and this vision I can’t get away from’. 37 It was not a new vision, but one that had constructed even before they had left Australia. Men could barely envision battle now any more than they could when they enlisted, but notions of returning home victorious remained as concrete as they had been when men entered camp.

31 Hackett, La Trobe letter, 13 August 1915.
32 Kenneth Mackay, AWM PR, letter 25 February 1915.
33 Mulvey, AWM PR, letter 7 March 1915.
34 Hall, La Trobe, diary 25 March 1915.
35 Ernek Janssen, La Trobe, letter 21 March 1915.
36 Gamage, The Broken Years, pp.44-51.
37 Captain D.V. Mulholland, letter 8 August 1915, quoted by Gamage, The Broken Years, p.49.
Almost as soon as these men went ashore, those romantic visions of the front, accurate or not, were confirmed in the minds of those yet to go. In the Light Horse, the 'great topic of discussion is—when are we going to the Front?' George Telfer thought 'It will break our hearts if we are kept back much longer'. After receiving his orders, Telfer was jubilant, feeling that finally the war had produced its relevant stage for him: 'Perhaps greater than at anytime in my life was the feeling that at last I was to be in something big. A worthy citizen of my country.' Stories of the landing made their way back to infantry units training and arriving in Egypt. Laurence Stickley felt 'animated by an urgent desire to take our place alongside the glorious 1st Australian and A & N.Z. Divisions'. Likewise, Cyril Lawrence thought that 'going to the real FRONT at last ... is a great thing', though he had been in Egypt less than a fortnight. The men at the front, however, had their preconceptions shattered immediately. Two days after the landing Alfred Love noted that they were 'having a very bad time of it so far ... [men] getting hit and killed all around me but escaped so far'. This was his last entry, and in its margin he wrote 'Thinking a lot of wife and child.' The realities of action brought a new understanding of the war and its implications to the individual soldier.

The return of the first wounded to Egypt opened up a new and decisive channel for the transmission of understandings of the war. Some notion of the realities of war could begin to be communicated. Stickley noted in his memoirs that from pictures and 'numerous romantic war novels, we had conjured up vague pictures of the glories of battle. How different was the real thing!'. Sydney Campbell's first experience at a hospital only days after the landing was 'a sudden plunge into the realisation of the terrors and absurdity of war'. Yet illusions persisted for months after the landing, as relatively few had contact with the wounded, and those who could get out of bed revealed only good faith in ultimate victory. Roy Rankin found that the wounded

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38 Campbell, AWM PR, letter, 8 May 1915.
39 Telfer, La Trobe, diary c. May 1915.
40 Telfer, La Trobe, diary 16 May 1915.
41 Stickley, AWM PR, memoir.
42 Lawrence, La Trobe, diary 1 June 1915.
43 Alfred A. Love, La Trobe, MS 9603, diary 27 April 1915.
44 Stickley, AWM PR, memoir.
45 Campbell, AWM PR, diary 29 April 1915.
soldiers he encountered were ‘all very cheerful about it, and want to go back’. By August, however, his suspicions had grown, and he thought that stories of the Turks’ fear of Australian bayonets ‘may be mostly “blow”’. By the time Rankin arrived at the front in November, he discovered that there was not much happening, ‘[b]ut when a chap gets back and there is no one to contradict him there will be some bayonet charges and desperate fighting done’. The return of more and more men to Egypt, especially after the horrific August offensives, brought a more reasoned transmission of experience to those in training, a new mentality that C.E.W. Bean perceptively identified:

They felt themselves penned between two long blank walls reaching perpetually ahead of them, from which there was no turning and no escape, save that of death or of such wounds as would render them useless for further service.

This was the attitude that would be propagated more and more within the ranks of men who had not seen action, reaching its zenith on the Western Front. Its roots, however, are to be found in the camps of Egypt, as Gallipoli began to lose its lustre.

For those arriving in Egypt after the landing at Gallipoli, boredom was felt much earlier, presumably as battle was a more immediate proposition with a time and place to fix upon. Walter Hackett, after six weeks in Egypt was wishing ‘they would send us somewhere out of this. I am just about full up of Egypt’. The same attitudes governing training persisted, and men continued to negotiate their training experience with the mentality of ‘roughing it’. Lindsay Ross wrote, ‘It is a terribly long day and we don’t seem to get much time to write. But don’t think I’m grumbling—I’m not for it[.]s all in a soldier’s life.’ Mid-way through the campaign, training began to be conducted by men with battle experience. These men communicated an appreciation of the front as much as military knowledge. Arthur Armstrong was under a Staff Sergeant-Major who ‘had a five weeks spell at Gallipoli and he said that anyone wanting another five weeks like it was a glutton. He was in charge of the eighth Light Horse and his description of

46 Rankin, La Trobe, letter 11 June 1915
47 Rankin, La Trobe, letter 22 August 1915.
48 Rankin, La Trobe, letter 7 November 1915.
50 Hackett, La Trobe, letter, 13 August 1915.
51 Ross, La Trobe, letter 21 July 1915.
it is Hell multiplied by ten.\textsuperscript{52} Those who went to the hospitals were even more awake to the realities. The confused attitudes of the wounded could only cause further problems for the uninitiated. In hospital in September, John McGlade wrote:

When over on the peninsula we were all wishing we could get away. Swore at ourselves for ever coming to the war and now when we are over here getting the best of care and attention, we growl at having to stop here and want to be back on the peninsula with the boys. Do you think we could ever be satisfied? I wish they had sent me to England instead of here I wish I were back on the peninsula, I wish the war was over, I wish I was back in Combienbar [Victoria]. In fact I don't think I know what I want. I must be suffering from the "willies".\textsuperscript{53}

Walter Hackett now noted that 'a lot do their best to get out of it when it comes to the point. It is just the same over here some chaps get all sorts of things wrong with them or make out they have so as to get back to Australia.'\textsuperscript{54} Returned men had begun to effectively impart a new appreciation of the front at the expense of traditional myths of war that had been so potent in 1914.

As Australians withdrew from Gallipoli in December, most recruits in Egypt had gathered impressions of fighting that had been negotiated by contact with the returning troops. Charles Moore spoke to some 'Gallipoli chaps' and discovered that 'They do not seem to think too much of the business. Guess they should have a fair idea whether it is the game it is cracked up to be or not.'\textsuperscript{55} William Henderson spoke to one man who told him that 'he felt frightened many a time and any man who said that he was not frightened was a b---y liar'.\textsuperscript{56} New men in Egypt were first to tap this new appreciation of battle, and though it did not significantly challenge their determination to engage in the war, it initiated a questioning of the sources that had fostered their previous notions. Following the withdrawal from Gallipoli, experience in Egypt resumed some of the dimensions it had had early in 1915, where men trained without any firm knowledge of their future movements. Training seems to have intensified with the return of the troops.

\textsuperscript{52} Arthur Armstrong, AWM PR, letter 15 November 1915.
\textsuperscript{53} McGlade, La Trobe, letter 4 September 1915.
\textsuperscript{54} Hackett, La Trobe, letter, 13 August 1915.
\textsuperscript{55} Moore, AWM PR, diary 6 April 1916.
\textsuperscript{56} Henderson, La Trobe, letter c. Jan. 1916.
to Egypt. Arriving at Heliopolis in March, Charles Moore discovered that ‘They apparently do not go to sleep here. I feel like crying. Guess they have worked us to a standstill.’\textsuperscript{57} Allan Tongs grew bitter at his treatment, claiming that the private soldier ‘is ever distrusted always misjudged, thank god they are not our rulers and judges for eternity and the war will not last for ever’.\textsuperscript{58} The inversion of the popular cry ‘Are we downhearted?’ became more widespread. George Cocks recorded the legend in a letter home, pronouncing beneath the conventional emphatic ‘NO’, his own, personal, ‘yes’.\textsuperscript{59} Arthur Armstrong would have been just as happy to go home:

I have no very keen desire to stop over this side of the world any longer than absolutely necessary. I think that my wild oats will have been well and fully sown by the time I get back and I will be only too glad to settle down to work and quiet life. This life is too monotonous so far for me though I suppose we will soon find it lively enough.\textsuperscript{60}

Monotony again became the byword for Egypt. Eric Chinner thought it seemed ‘wonderful that I should be six months in Egypt without a fight, but that is so’, while Captain G. Stobie noted that ‘the attitude of this camp towards the main purposes of its existence is extraordinary and incomprehensible. A stranger, having no knowledge of any war, would never dream this was a camp of preparation for stern reality’.\textsuperscript{61} Though conditions were conducive to lethargy and erosion of ambition, constant camp shifting brought some hope. Leo Gwyther, though hating the task, asked, ‘are we downhearted? No. We are getting nearer the front.’\textsuperscript{62} Yet as they drew closer to the front, home reasserted itself equally. Chinner at this time articulated that vision that had been current in 1914, but had only grown stronger as the war progressed: ‘I am glad to be a soldier but I shall welcome the day that brings with it the return home. Victory gained; duty done; welcome home.’\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{57} Moore, AWM PR, diary 1 March 1916.  
\textsuperscript{58} Tongs, La Trobe, diary 2 April 1916.  
\textsuperscript{59} Cocks, Privately held papers, letter 26 December 1915.  
\textsuperscript{60} Arthur Armstrong, AWM PR, letter 4 December 1915.  
\textsuperscript{61} Chinner, La Trobe, letter 13 May 1916; Stobie, AWM PR, diary 10 May 1916.  
\textsuperscript{62} Gwyther, La Trobe, diary 18 July 1916.  
\textsuperscript{63} Chinner, La Trobe, letter 1 April 1916.
Few contemplated the return home without experiencing active service, and conditions in Egypt in early 1916 were less accommodating of other attitudes than they had ever been. The presence of returned men drew the attention of recruits ever more to the fact that they themselves had not yet seen active service. Brigadier-General Edwin Tivey’s 8th Brigade in particular attracted comment. Eric Chinner noted that they were called ‘Tivey’s War Babies’ or ‘The Hard Thinkers’. 64 Noel Nicholas commented that the 8th Brigade ‘have not a good name here, they have several here, such as Tivey’s pampered pets, chocolate soldiers, Tivey’s Tourists’. 65 Returned men were also more liable to ‘blow’, and Eric Chinner’s heart beat ‘with pride and envy’ as he shook the hands of two ‘heroes from Gaba Tepe’ who were busy telling of their exploits. 66 Returned men were well aware of their elevated status, and their expression of it showed how the familiar divide at home between those who had and had not gone was reflected in Egypt. Roy Rankin noted two men in his hut who were always arguing the point over ... politics, unions, taxes, trade, land and cost of living, etc. But when it comes to an argument about soldiers who have been to the front versus those who have not, these two join forces against the other three of us, because they have never seen the peninsula and we have. When I said that those who had only joined within the last few months had cold feet and only came because they were not game to stop home they nearly jumped down my throat. 67

It was not so much that Rankin had a point in his comment that incited the men, but that the gulf of experience had shifted from those who had and had not enlisted, to those who had and had not seen active service. More than at any other time in the war, the allure of battle had the power to attract Australians willingly to it. Paradoxically, at the same time, the experience of battle was creating a new hardening towards the rhetoric of war. From this time on, growing disillusionment began to challenge the urge to battle. It would not overtake the urge, however, but merely alter its emphasis.

Egypt provided a ‘semi active service’ in guarding the Suez Canal from possible Turkish attack. This led many to believe they had suffered all the hardships that

64 Chinner, La Trobe, letter 2 April 1916.
65 Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 22 May 1916.
66 Chinner, La Trobe, letter c. March 1916.
67 Rankin, La Trobe, letter 15 February 1916.
soldiering could offer them. In the trenches at Serapeum, Noel Nicholas thought that ‘we are proper soldiers now, and in a place called hell, we just dying to get at the Turks ... we want something to break the monotony, something to talk about’. Likewise, Chinner also thought he was in ‘HELL’ with the heat, dust, sweat, diarrhoea and dysentery. ‘I’m full up of Egypt and so is everyone else’, he complained to a friend. Charles Moore wanted to get out, but wished that he were back in camp in Bendigo rather than further toward the enemy. A month later, as conditions grew more intense, he confided to his diary: ‘Still digging trenches. I am thinking of committing suicide. This is blessed agony. I would only think it might be a little warmer in the other place than here.’ The experience on the canal, though generally considered an interim, diminished the recruits’ expectations, and they again turned inward. The main topic of their conversation explicitly became home, and mail their main preoccupation. Though it represented some form of active service, the disappointment of further monotony and the extreme discomfort meant that time on the canal did nothing to sustain or fulfil the men’s expectations. Home was invoked now, not in any triumphal sense, but as a personal buffer against hardship.

Rumours of departure from Egypt were endemic. After the first and second divisions left for France, these rumours were even more pronounced. Noel Nicholas dismissed Egypt as a site for any meaningful experience, writing: ‘We are longing for “the day” when we are ready to get on a good old transport to go to the war, we hope to be out before the new month begins, we would give our wages to get out, it must be soon we have our new rifles.’ Jack McLeod noted that though they had little idea of what would happen, ‘the boys are looking forward expectantly to a trip to either France or England and the only fear is that some of us will be left behind’. Anticipating the Western Front, men recorded what impressions of France they could glean from letters and press reports. Charles Serjeant betrayed a realignment of his expectations in writing to his mother:

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68 Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 8 May 1916.  
69 Chinner, La Trobe, letter 15 May 1916.  
70 Moore, AWM PR, diary 13 April 1916.  
71 Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 22 May 1916.  
72 McLeod, La Trobe, diary 26 May 1916.
This War is lasting a long while isn't it? When I left Aust I thought I should have been home by next July anyway, but now do not expect to be home again for at least another year, but I am not worrying about it. I got a letter from France and [the] writer says the general opinion over there is it will last another 5 years, but personally I do not think it will go as long as that.  

Serjeant also thought that 'it seems to be a holiday in the trenches there compared to Gallipoli'. Others were not so optimistic. For Charles Moore the connotations of the Western Front were decidedly negative: 'Heard we are to go to France. [C]ould have learnt a few prayers to say or have said some if Church had been on.' For most soldiers, however, France was to be a convergence of expectation and reality. Eric Chinner made Biblical references: 'We are going to a better land. I can quite imagine the children of Israel clamouring to see the Promised Land. We are just like that at present—all fed up with the desert, and a promised land is before our eyes. No wonder we are all eager to see it.' France would be their escape into the civilised world, the heart of the war, and the scene of victory on the battlefield before ultimate victory in the return home.

The men left Egypt with few regrets. Some took their revenge as they left, burning and otherwise destroying Egyptian establishments. Charles Moore wrote that 'the most horrible time I have ever had has been there. The misery and torment that a man was called upon to undergo will not be forgotten, and I think that if we are going into anything the same, it would be better if a submarine did sink us'. Moore was more jaded by Egypt than most of his fellows, registering a resentment of the war that would only become fully apparent among recruits on the Western Front. Though the model of peaks and troughs continued to typify the recruits' experience in Egypt, its emphases had begun to subtly shift. Gallipoli had given the men a time and a place on which to focus their approach to battle, but it also signalled the induction of Australians into the rites of this war. The transfer of knowledge begun after the landing altered the way that recruits would approach the war and initiated a slow but insistent shift of

74 Serjeant, AWM PR, letter 4 July 1916.
75 Moore, AWM PR, diary 21 April 1916.
76 Chinner, La Trobe, letter 4 June 1916.
77 Moore, AWM PR, diary 18 June 1916.
attitudes away from the tropes of adventure and patriotism to pessimism. The urge to the front would rarely be denied, however, as battle remained integral to the imagined narrative of war. ‘Anyhow let the future hold what it will,’ Moore wrote as his ship bore him away to France, ‘I intend to come out of it, if I am spared, as honourable and clean as I am leaving this place. It can not be any worse.’\footnote{Moore, AWM PR, diary 18 June 1916.}
1915-1918: Recruits in Australia

'It is the Army way, ever to keep one in a state of flux'
Walt Newton, The Soul of the Camp

Though the men who enlisted after 1914 expressed similar ideals to those held by earlier recruits, the disillusionment begun in Egypt soon began to have an impact in Australia. After Gallipoli, what recruits had imagined was altered by the reality of casualty figures and what they learned from Australians who had experienced the front. A more realistic appreciation of the front gradually began to inform the notions with which men enlisted and trained in Australia. A widening disjunction between popular representation of the war and what recruits came to anticipate became apparent. Recruits began to realise that they were between two worlds, two ways of knowing war, neither of which they knew to be authentic. Men continued to envisage their war unfolding in linear fashion, but their ability to more accurately imagine the front differentiated the way they anticipated their war from the recruits of 1914. Notions of ‘home’ were changing and visions of a triumphant homecoming were giving way to hopes of a safe return. Volunteers, particularly during and after the conscription referenda, became more aware of themselves as a distinct social group claiming legitimacy (rightly or wrongly) in Australian society. In this chapter I will first examine the changing conditions recruits encountered on entering the military between 1915 and 1918, and then make a closer analysis of the attitudes and visions that they brought with them.

By March 1915 it was becoming clear that the war would be protracted. As winter approached, camps became more permanent, with wooden huts erected at Broadmeadows. Yet as camps assumed a permanent status, their populations became more fluid. More men moved more rapidly through the system of camps that opened across Victoria in mid-1915, as the war demanded greater numbers of men. Winter
brought terrible conditions to Broadmeadows. As early as December 1914, men had noted the muddy conditions prevailing there after rain. ‘Can’t move outside the tent without getting mud up to the eyes’ John McGlade wrote. ‘She’s a rotten game in wet weather.’ In May, reports of unsanitary conditions and rumours of deaths gained currency inside and outside Parliament. There was some truth to these rumours. Jack Livingstone recorded:

The sickness here is awful the water comes underneath our tents, and we are lying on damp ground ... there are about a dozen men every morning taken away on stretchers it is awful to see them, you wonder wether [sic] you are going to be next or not.

At the beginning of June the camp was removed to Seymour while authorities determined the future of Broadmeadows. Recruits apparently opposed the move, and discontent was evident early at Seymour, as men complained that Melbourne’s entertainments were too far distant. Seymour residents were less than pleased with the soldiers’ arrival. Within days, a ‘vigilance committee’ was formed ‘to mitigate certain evils which ... would result from the establishment of the camp’. Recruits took offence at the committee, but before too long the rowdy behaviour that often characterised the soldiers in Melbourne was repeated in Seymour.

Conditions at Seymour quickly degenerated, and illness became the key issue in camp. The influx of recruits in July saw the camp population swell to around twenty thousand men and hundreds were forced to sleep in the church marquees. By August rumours of a return to Broadmeadows were current. Arthur Armstrong hoped they were true ‘as this infernal mud is just about getting on my nerves. It’s enough to make a man Cold footed.’ Jack Livingstone wrote that it had rained every day for more than a week, and ‘if we did not have the wooden floors [in tents] we would be all dead’. Camp authorities initially seemed to ascribe illness to ‘roughing it’, along the lines the

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1 McGlade, La Trobe, MS 11221, letter 14 December 1914.
2 Livingstone, La Trobe, letter May 1915.
3 Age, 7 June 1915, p.10.
4 Arthur Armstrong, AWM PR, letter 9 August 1915.
5 Livingstone, La Trobe, letter 9 August 1915.
Age propounded in May: 'The unfit must be eliminated, and it is only the fortune of war if some of the weaker vessels actually succumb.'6 'One has to be half dead before they think he is sick', Samuel Bellingham told his sister. 'Soldiering is the rottenest [sic] life on earth when one is sick.'7 In August an outbreak of cerebro-spinal meningitis raised serious health concerns for recruits, and isolation hospitals were established. Eric Chinner wrote home: 'It is a very worried boy that is writing to you today. An awful disease has broken out in part of the Camp ... It is meningitis.'8 Meningitis had a devastating impact. Arthur Armstrong found the presence of the disease painfully obvious: 'Sometimes a line of tents would have six or seven gaps in the line showing where the dread disease had taken one chap and all the tent party was instantly removed to the isolation hospital.'9 'Are we down Hearted?' Allan Tongs asked his diary. 'We're getting a little bit that way.'10 A few days later he worried that he would ever see his home again 'amongst all this cock pit of sickness and Disease'.11 The epidemic made recruits wonder if they would ever leave Australia.

The meningitis outbreak followed a tremendous response to the Victorian recruiting campaign in July. The new acting Commandant of the Third Military District (Victoria), Brigadier-General Robert E. Williams, was met with the dual challenge of alleviating the press of men and controlling the epidemic. A camp had been established at the Flemington showgrounds in mid-July to meet the recruiting boom, and in August Williams announced that new camps would be opened at Castlemaine, Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Warrnambool, and close to the city at Royal Park. So hasty were the plans that recruits arrived to be quartered in Town Halls, market places, cattle pens, exhibit sheds, and on racecourses. Arriving at Castlemaine, Noel Nicholas found

hardly any preparations made for us, the people here did not know we were coming till the morning we left so there was not much time. ... a kiddies band

6 Age, 4 May 1915, p.7.
8 Chinner, La Trobe, letter c. August 1915.
9 Arthur Armstrong, AWM PR, letter 14 August 1915.
10 Tongs, La Trobe, diary 30 August 1915.
11 Tongs, La Trobe, diary 4 September 1915.
[escorted] us to the Town Hall, from there we adjourned to the Drill Hall, so you see we are in the centre of the town.[12]

By mid-September, twenty-six thousand recruits for the AIF were training at thirteen sites around Victoria. Broadmeadows had been reoccupied in August, and Seymour continued to hold large numbers. By the end of the war, as recruiting slackened, it would be difficult to keep even the largest training centres open.

Motives for joining up shifted as the war dragged on. Before the Gallipoli landing, motives seem not to have changed significantly from those expressed by the men of 1914. Yet in May 1915, a new attitude supplanted that of the ‘adventurers’ of 1914. News of the Dardanelles fighting was pivotal. English-born Willie Clayton wrote to his brother, ‘now that the colonial boys have got into the fight [we] are anxious to join them as soon as possible’.13 Don Armstrong told his father that ‘I have got several reasons for going, first that I think I ought to go, they want all they can get and I think it is up to those who are medically fit to do their part’. Armstrong also retained a more traditional stance by adding: ‘Another reason is that I think it is the greatest opportunity for a chap to make a man of himself, those that come back from this war will be men of the right sort that anybody would be proud of.’14 Men now came forward who had previously either not known the war to be serious enough to warrant their enlistment, or had not believed the Australians would see action. News of Gallipoli and its associated casualty lists confirmed for them the seriousness of the war. By the end of June, Jack Gibbons found the situation grim:

Things are now looking so serious, and the Russians and Allies are getting so many knock backs, that after a long talk with the manager, I have decided to join the reinforcements for the Dardanelles, and leave the firm Tuesday week. ... I have thought the matter out very seriously before doing it, but I think now the time has come for every able bodied man without ties to go and help.15

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12 Noël Nicholas, La Trobe, letter c. August 1915.
13 Clayton, La Trobe, letter 6 May 1915.
14 Donald Armstrong, AWM PR, letter 18 May 1915.
15 Frederick (Jack) Gibbons, AWM PR, 1DRL/0312, letter 30 June 1915.
Like Gibbons, those who came forward in mid-1915 often had interests that they had to give up in order to go. Some of these men also expressed understanding for those who did not enlist. George Cocks wrote of one such man: ‘I do not think any less of him for it, and I think it would be very hard for him to give up all he has been reckoning on all these years.’

As the war drew on, men often rued the interests they had given up in civil life. In 1917 Philip Nicholas sincerely regretted giving up the promise of that tidy and interesting little job at Heffernan Lane. For me it meant a lot. I didn’t know then as much as I know now and did really believe that I would get some benefit out of the army.

Graeme Stobie likewise felt that ‘I have been set back years in my profession’, but balanced his regret with the thought that ‘in spite of many disappointments and worries my time as a soldier has been happily spent and of course under the present circumstances I would not have spent it as a civilian for anything’. Stobie assumed that his reasons for enlisting were obvious, perhaps referring to that imperative to enlist that the war demanded more and more strongly.

Towards the end of the war, more introspective accounts of motives began to surface, though they too could barely explain recruits’ actions. The correspondent and later official historian of the Light Horse, Henry Gullett, himself a recruit for the Artillery, found in the men he trained with in 1916 and 1917 a different attitude to the men of 1914. ‘In the men now coming forward’, he wrote, ‘there is lacking in some measure, perhaps, that eager spirit of adventure, that exultant patriotism which distinguished the men who first answered the call.’ The new men, Gullett observed, ‘come up soberly and thoughtfully with a full sense of the grim fighting ahead and with most of them the delay has been due not to any slacking, but to responsibilities which could not be sooner put aside.’ By 1918, it was difficult for men to understand why

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16 Cocks, Privately held papers, letter 26 December 1915.
17 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 17 August 1917.
18 Stobie, AWM PR, diary 23 June 1916.
indeed they had enlisted at all. An editorial in *The Persique* offered an insight into the mind of the Australian recruit in the latter stages of the war:

We strive to analyse our patriotism, our higher motives, the appeal of the five bob or a heroic outlook. We gaze upon our bosom cobber taking the sun in a singlet he would not give his dog to chew at home, and we straightway forget heroics. We think of our civilian prosperity and we curse the five bob. We meditate upon those set in authority over us and the men we so cordially dislike at mess and we realize we are devoid of higher motives. We find our Australian money quoted below par in a foreign country and we deny patriotism. Therefore and wherefore, Why? Where introspection has failed us, neither psychology nor religion can help us. ... The remembrance of the interests of Friday last may suggest that the lure of the wanderlust has, in part, called us. But for the most part, we can only answer in the all-explaining words of Ginger Mick and of the thousands before us who went ‘becos’ they damn well ‘ad to go.’ Which being a full and complete answer, is yet no answer at all.20

The demands of the war appear to have become such that men simply gave themselves up to a conflict that had no foreseeable end. The corollary of this was that the way men imagined their war had to change. Most men ceased to imagine a triumphant homecoming after the war. At best, they began to imagine any kind of homecoming where they could claim to have ‘done one’s bit’.

The men who enlisted later in the war were increasingly aware of the disparity between the public face of the volunteer, and their own motives. Edward Dengate provides a clear picture of the popular notions associated with the volunteer:

Brave men who left all that was nearest their hearts, to face a merciless foe, Men with hearts as lions, the courage of Bulldogs, but as kind as anyone could wish, Men who would lay down their lives rather than have it said that they funkied it, while at home the shirkers go about spruiking about their patriotism, cheering and

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shouting for those who are going to fight for them, while they stay at home and enjoy themselves.\textsuperscript{21}

The popular image did not reflect the reality, but most recruits seemed happy to embrace its positive aspects. A contributor to the troopship serial \textit{Shrapnel}, however, was more cynical: ‘Pushing your way through you mingle with the elite of Australia. That’s what they’re called on promising to enlist.’\textsuperscript{22} Lauding of the volunteers’ virtues reached its height in the aftermath of the Gallipoli landing. As men with new attitudes came forward, however, the public language did not reflect the change. Though it was essentially exhausted, this language continued to be used at recruiting rallies and during the conscription referenda, and though they noticed the disparity, recruits accepted the patriotic language, perhaps finding comfort in a simple public explanation which masked their myriad motives for enlistment.

As the offers of 1914 became the demands of the remainder of the war, the military began dealing with recruits less as men than as numbers. Yet men remained generally excited at going to camp, beginning as it did their journey towards the front. Camp also marked the recruit’s initial distinction from civilians, and Charles Moore was particularly disappointed to be confined to camp on his first night, as ‘most had visions of being in town that evening or with our friends (admiring)’.\textsuperscript{23} Others saw the transition in less positive terms. ‘Here I am’, wrote Jack Gibbons, ‘no longer a citizen but just a private soldier of the King.’\textsuperscript{24} In January 1916, recruits were issued with the booklet \textit{Hints for Soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force}, which once again presumed to tell the men why they were in the force. The booklet told them that discipline, ‘the keystone of any fighting force’, meant, among other things, the ‘sinking of self for the good of the whole’.\textsuperscript{25} Hugh Knyvett reflected that for a man who ‘has never previously had military training, the first few weeks in camp is the most humiliating and trying experience that could be inflicted on him. I am quite sure that were it a prison and a

\textsuperscript{21} Dengate, AWM PR, letter c.1916.
\textsuperscript{22} ‘Evening on Troopdeck’, \textit{Shrapnel}, AWM Troopship Serials, 10 July 1917.
\textsuperscript{23} Moore, AWM PR, diary 19 August 1915.
\textsuperscript{24} Gibbons, AWM PR, letter 22 July 1915.
treadmill he could not hate it more. The prison analogy found popular expression as men began their training. Given his regimental number, Moore recorded that ‘From now on I am known as 4539. Feel like a convict.’ After the first contingent, recruits were issued with blue dungaree training suits, and instructed to ‘Pack up your civilian clothes and send them home.’ Alf Leahy thought that in his ‘blueys’ and standard white calico hat, he looked ‘like a convict or reformatory boy.’ Recruits were not served with their uniforms until they had spent a month in camp, and so tried to avoid the humiliation they imagined their ‘blueys’ brought on them in public. Knyvett wrote that ‘No self-respecting man would allow a lady friend to see him in this rig-out. ... So we compromised by strolling the city streets with our ... army greatcoats seeking to hide the blue hideousness of our dungarees.’ Some purchased old uniforms from men about to embark, while others tried to retrieve their civilian clothes from home. Will Cam asked his mother to ‘send my trousers down as I cannot go out in blues again to Geelong.’ Though welcomed, the distribution of uniforms only represented the further divorcing of the recruits’ world from that which they had known, particularly as they got closer to the front. John Halpin had one of his characters muse on the significance of the uniform: ‘[I]t strikes me that khaki makes mental heroes of some, moral cowards of most, and damn fools of all.’

The tent remained the basic social unit of camp. Recruits’ attempts to identify with their tent mates were in part a response to the loss of identity they felt when they entered camp. Edgar Morrow described his uncertain emotions: ‘We went to our allotted tents feeling for the first time in our lives the depressing weight of the loss of liberty. ... All the other occupants, I now know, were feeling like myself. I had never before camped or lived with strangers.’ Many recruits christened their tents to encourage fellowship with their tent mates—the ‘Abode of Love’, the ‘Kaiser’s Harem’, ‘The Bulldog Breed’, the ‘Kelly Gang’, or perhaps more realistically, ‘The House of

26 Captain R. Hugh Knyvett, ‘Over There’ With the Australians, London, Hodder and Stoughton, April 1918, p.35.
27 Moore, AWM PR, diary 14 January 1916.
28 Hints for Soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force, p.6.
29 Leahy, AWM PR, letter 15 March 1916
30 Knyvett, ‘Over There’ With the Australians, p.45.
31 William Cam, AWM PR, IDRL/0181, letter 21 September 1915.
33 Morrow, Iron in the Fire, Sydney, p.3.

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Misery’. Despite the homogeneity implied by tent-names, most tents had their outsiders. Les Chandler described ‘Snow’ Atkin, ‘a sort of neer-do-well … the Collingwood or South Melbourne type of larrikin. … He seems as though he hasn’t a friend in the world’.\textsuperscript{34} Frederick Knight noted that ‘Newcomers were looked upon with suspicion, particularly if they looked dirty’.\textsuperscript{35} Men could be driven to extremes by their initial experiences in camp. Arthur Armstrong recorded: ‘A rather sad affair happened in our lines the other night. One poor chap cut his throat. He seemed very despondent over something ever since he came in.’\textsuperscript{36} If the transition into military life could not be mediated by the fellowship of other men, the consequences for the recruit could be disastrous.

Training retained its focus on physical fitness and repetitive drill after the first contingent left, and the legacy of boredom remained. In May 1915, Lady Helen Ferguson told a crowd at Broadmeadows that everyone ‘realised that the period of training … was a period of drudgery, unrelieved by the excitement of meeting a German or a Turk round the corner’.\textsuperscript{37} Even after the Gallipoli experience, Australian authorities continued to insist that the aims of military training were to:

1. Get you fit to endure hardship and fatigue.
2. Teach you to shoot, bayonet, dig, and bomb.
3. Quicken your eyesight, hearing and intelligence from a military point of view.
4. Develop the true soldierly spirit.\textsuperscript{38}

The priorities of military administrators revealed a continued faith in the value of ‘roughing it’ that had not been dispelled by several severe tests, at the front and at home. An inquiry into conditions at Liverpool Camp, NSW, in July 1915 reported that the ‘Spartan-like method of exposing soft recruits to unnecessary privations and hardships

\textsuperscript{36} Arthur Armstrong, AWM PR, letter c. July-August 1915.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Age}, 5 May 1915, p.10.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Hints for Soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force}, p.9.
is not only cruel, but calculated to endanger their lives'. \(^\text{39}\) Williams recognised the problem in Victoria, and insisted that measures be taken to make camps more habitable, 'much to the indignation', he later said, 'of those good people who laboured under the silly impression that hardship, privation, and suffering were part of the necessary training for a soldier's life'. \(^\text{40}\) Training was adapted to incorporate trench warfare, though it never approached a comprehensive appreciation of new methods practised at the front. Men still felt that they were engaged 'in employment that forbade our using the smallest atom [of intelligence]'. \(^\text{41}\) Training remained repetitive and difficult for the men to reconcile with their expectations, and, later, with their experience.

The rowdy behaviour of the troops did not improve as the war became more serious, but rather continued to increase as men became aware of their elevated status among large sections of the community. Riotous incidents continued in and around Melbourne as they had in 1914. At Liverpool however, troops staged a series of large-scale riots in the camp, surrounding areas, and eventually in Sydney. In November 1915, about one thousand soldiers engaged in a 'violent conflict' with military police, eventually setting fire to about fifty tents. \(^\text{42}\) John Allan believed the riots resulted from treatment meted out by Military Police: 'There were men in that riot who were as law-abiding as any in the land but even a worm will turn at injustice sometime or another.' \(^\text{43}\) Late in December, Commanding Officers gave their thoughts on the problem, their explanations ranging from not enough training to the larrikin element. Major Murray pointed to the 'larrikins who think that the wearing of [the] uniform entitles men to do what they like', while Colonel Jobson recognised in men who believed themselves ready and 'full up of boy drill' an anxiety to be away. \(^\text{44}\) At Casula camp in February 1916, men struck against new training and leave conditions. \(^\text{45}\) The strike (in military terms a mutiny) later gave way to a large scale riot as men from Casula and Liverpool made

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\(^\text{40}\) Robert Ernest Williams, In Appreciation And Valedictory: Personal To The Staff Of The 3rd Military District Head-Quarters, speech made 15 February 1917, AWM PR, PR89/149.

\(^\text{41}\) Age, 4 July 1916, p.8; Knyvett, 'Over There' With the Australians, p.32.

\(^\text{42}\) Age, 27 November 1915, p.13.

\(^\text{43}\) Allan, AWM PR, letter 11 December 1915.

\(^\text{44}\) National Archives, MP 367/1, AS89/12/1, Records of Office of Inspector General A.I.F.

\(^\text{45}\) Age, 23 December 1915, p.8.
their way to Sydney, where military police eventually fired upon the mob, killing one soldier. John Allan despaired of the results of riotous behaviour:

> Once it was an honor to wear khaki but if justice is not meted out to this lawless element recruiting will fall off and the disgust of soldiers and their actions will be in evidence and go very much against our returned wounded soldiers of the future and their welfare.\textsuperscript{46}

Allan had his eye to the future, perhaps noting how public opinion of the soldiers compromised his hopes of returning to a grateful society. What was happening, however, was that recruits continued to recognise a growing agency in Australian society, a realisation that would come to fruition during the conscription campaigns and upon their return.

As the recruiting situation became more critical, the gulf between volunteer and ‘eligible’ became more pronounced. In Egypt in August 1915, Lindsay Ross was ‘glad I took the chance when it came and got away before men have to be practically forced to go’.\textsuperscript{47} Ross identified himself with the ‘dinkums’, rejecting those who came after as too late and of a lesser patriotism. Contact between volunteers and apparent eligibles revealed the gulf. On a route march from Geelong, Athol Lewis noted that ‘Any passer by of military age was greeted with interjections as to why he was not wearing a white hat or if he had cold feet etc.’ Lewis recorded further instances, where recruits ‘Passed several young fellows on the way in civilian attire and they were vigorously booted—one group of these in football guernseys in particular—by the soldiers as they passed and there were over 1000 soldiers’.\textsuperscript{48} The conscription campaigns gave a focus to extant feelings among soldiers. Alex Mackay wrote: ‘The number of eligibles knocking about [in Sydney], makes one feel very sore. We saw some returned soldiers speaking in opposition to some labour crawler and anticipated a scrap but it didn’t come off.’\textsuperscript{49} The proclamation calling men up for compulsory home service provided an opportunity for volunteers to compare and define themselves against conscripts. Conscripts left little

\textsuperscript{46} Allan, AWM PR, letter 11 December 1915.
\textsuperscript{47} Ross, La Trobe, letter 12 August 1915.
\textsuperscript{48} Lewis, La Trobe, diary 3 May; 13 July 1916.
\textsuperscript{49} Alexander Mackay, AWM PR, letter 2 October 1916.
doubt as to their own hopes. While waiting for a train back to camp Athol Lewis noted
'a trainload of the Called up men in blueies from Broadmeadows went through—they
displayed the large issue biscuits with "Vote No" written on them and I suppose most of
them trust the "No" vote will win'. W. L. Hawkins, in command of a group of
conscripts, noticed that they were all 'Anxiously awaiting result of Referendum'.
Hawkins formed a 'definite opinion of the real cause of all anti-conscription
movements.

'COLD FEET. FUNK.'

'Politics be hanged. Not in it.'

After the loss of the referendum, Alex Mackay was 'practically certain, those
[conscripts] now in camp won't get out, so they might just as well enlist. I'd give
anything to see martial law proclaimed at once.' The first conscripts left camp in mid-
November. Hawkins watched his men march out in civilian clothes, 'All very happy'.

After the conscription referenda, appeals to the rhetoric of voluntarism increased, and
steadily drew further apart those who had and those who had not volunteered. On the
transport Heavie, the Officer Commanding Troops appealed to his men: 'We are all
Volunteers, and in all that is required of us let that spirit of voluntaryism [sic] show
itself'. Among volunteers, Hamilton Gray noticed, 'We discuss politics and religion
and conscription very frequently, but the discussions are entirely free from that
acrimony and bitterness that we have become so accustomed to in Australia in the last
few bad years of internal strife and disharmony'. Some, however, could not accept the
situation, and months later Hawkins continued to aggravate issues: 'The more one sees
of our Australian Army the more one realises what a hopeless thing it is. Of course it
must be remembered these are reinforcements—the sweepings of the exhausted
voluntary system.' The splintering of Australian society brought the volunteer into a
higher regard among loyalists, but as image and reality sheared away from each other,
recruits found themselves alienated even from the loyalists' heightened patriotic
discourse.

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50 Lewis, La Trobe diary 26 October 1916.
51 Hawkins, La Trobe, diary 28-29-30-31 October 1916.
52 Alexander Mackay, AWM PR, letter 30 October 1916.
53 Hawkins, La Trobe, diary 14 November 1916.
54 The Heavie, AWM Troopship Serials, 4 July 1917.
55 Hamilton Gray, 'Why we come Late', The Wyreemian: The Magazine of the Ship's Company of
H.M.A.T. Wyeama, AWM Troopship Serials, 7 November 1918, p.11.
56 Hawkins, La Trobe, diary 24 July 1917
The disillusionment of recruits that began in Egypt had an almost immediate impact in Australia. The permanently wounded made their way back to Australia, sometimes encountering men on their way to the front. In Colombo, Charles Moore 'spent the afternoon speaking to men who were on their way back home. Some of them looked as if they would be lucky to reach there. They gave us a fair idea of what we were going into.' 57 Back in Australia, Roy Smith heard that a lot of wounded had returned, and that 'a few of them have gone silly'. 58 The wounded brought back new understandings of the war, which they began to impart to recruits in camps. Contact between recruits and returned men was not uncommon, as those considered well enough were sent back to camp in order to prepare for a return to the front. The wounded also often visited camps, looking for acquaintances. The attitudes returned men expressed were often repeated among recruits. Allan Tongs heard some 'thrilling accounts of the war', and Athol Lewis found himself listening to Gallipoli veterans on a train: 'Suvla Bay failure they thought would never have occurred if the landing party had been Australian, and the whole expedition 'ld have been successful if larger forces had been landed at first.' 59 Upon hearing a padre tell of how the 'Australians were underpaid and the English much overpaid' at Gallipoli, Graeme Stobie could not help but wonder: 'Is this the universal experience or is it merely Australian partiality for Australians or is it narrowness?' 60 Despite the conjectures of recruits, returned men gradually imparted a new appreciation of the front. Shortly before he left for overseas, Tongs noted 'what a harvest [is] in store for the grim reaper. How thin those ranks will be in a few months['] time.' 61

At the end of 1916, the disparity between the public rhetoric about volunteers and the lived conditions of the soldier was becoming apparent to recruits. A feature that the Age picked up from the London journal The Nation put a perspective on issues generally not evident until after the war. 62 What followed was an English soldier's

57 Moore, AWM PR, diary 13 February 1916.
58 Roy Smith, AWM PR, letter 22 July 1915.
59 Tongs, La Trobe, diary 8 September 1915; Lewis, La Trobe, diary 6 June 1916.
60 Stobie, AWM PR, diary 4 April 1916.
61 Tongs, La Trobe, diary 27 September 1915.
denunciation of a print media that had constructed and popularised a world at variance with the one the soldiers endured.\textsuperscript{63} The anonymous author also saw, perhaps unwittingly, into the heart of the disparity recruits felt between popular ideas and their own attitudes as their expectations of war changed. ‘There are occasions’, he wrote, ‘when I feel like a visitor among strangers whose intentions are kindly, but whose modes of thought I neither altogether understand nor altogether approve’.\textsuperscript{64} His true insight began when he established the existence of two worlds, one public and secure, the other private to soldiers, and removed from the society from which they came:

I read your papers and listen to your conversation, and I see clearly that you have chosen to make to yourselves an image of war, not as it is, but of a kind which, being picturesque, flatters your appetite for novelty, for excitement, for easy admiration, without troubling you with masterful emotions. You have chosen, I say, to make an image, because you do not like, or cannot bear, the truth; because you are afraid of what may happen to your souls if you expose them to the inconsistencies and contradictions, the doubts and bewilderment, which lie beneath the surface of things.\textsuperscript{65}

The author was describing the same state of mind that occupied recruits as they volunteered and anticipated their war experience. If the soldier-author’s reflections indicate the kind of knowledge recruits were deriving from their contacts, then recruits found themselves uneasily between a public knowledge of war they knew to be distorted, and a world as yet unknown to them. They would have been beginning to understand that there has been ‘invented a kind of conventional soldier, whose emotions and ideas are those which you find it most easy to assimilate with your coffee and marmalade’.\textsuperscript{66} The author detailed the process that recruits went through, constructing their own images of war, and yet caught in a flux, as the incongruity of the two worlds challenged them to negotiate new narratives to and from war.

\textsuperscript{63} John F. Williams has elaborated further on what he calls the ‘virtual war’ of newspaper reports in \textit{Anzacs, the Media and the Great War}, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 1999.
\textsuperscript{64} ‘Some Reflections of a Soldier’, \textit{Age}, 28 December 1916, p.5.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p.5.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p.6.
Men in Australia now recognised that however they imagined the war, France was probably worse. At sea in January 1918, Len Clarkson told his father:

We get some splendid lectures on Trench warfare one in particular making us think that (in theory) the trenches are not so awful as we think, but personally I'm under no disillusionment [sic]. Soldiering isn't all honey, but I'm having a good time while I can.  

Likewise, Ellis Pooley thought that though the weather in camp was bad, there was ‘no use growling, it’s worse in France’. Writing home from camp at Maribyrnong, Pooley broke off musing about life after the war to reveal a deeper concern at what he was about to go into:

That's if this war ever ends. Things are getting more serious I think. The submarines are playing havoc with shipping and Russia is about finished by all accounts the paper gives. Then we have industrial troubles here. One wonders if the old world will ever be the same or whether as all nations keep joining this war this be “Armageddon”. Goodness only knows it seems like it.

Though Pooley would only realise his prediction when he got to France, his thoughts suggest the impressions that Australian recruits had garnered by 1917. Like most other recruits, however, Pooley continued to make his way forward voluntarily, little concerned that the war would be over: ‘[T]he war seems to be going on long enough for us to get there even if we don’t go away very soon.’

Recruits continued to be cast in the public mould for volunteers, and were displayed as objects of honour for public consumption. Parades through Melbourne became more common in this period, though their meaning had clearly changed since 1914. Even the most recent recruits were displayed to the public, not to exhibit any military prowess, but to admonish those who looked on. Recruits no longer saw parades

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67 Clarkson, AWM PR, letter ‘Somewhere at Sea’ c. January 1918.
68 Pooley, La Trobe, letter 12 August 1917.
69 Pooley, La Trobe, letter c. July 1917.
70 Pooley, La Trobe, letter 12 August 1917.
in a positive light, as they only highlighted the growing disparity between the public’s imagining of the war and their own. In Adelaide, Lindsay Ross was supposed to march on ‘War Savings Day’. ‘I didn’t march’, he wrote, ‘but was on guard of honor which was just as bad. I don’t like being an exhibition to the public.’ Embarkation was, as in 1914, a relief. Men still expressed anxiety to get to the front, though often escape from Australia was as much responsible for that relief. As the war continued, recruits fretted less that the war would be over, and sought more to assess the possibilities of returning. One contributor to the *Maltameter* mused as he left Australia in 1918:

Memories of comfortable homes, and the freedom and the pleasures of civil life had hampered our early training, but now through months of camp life we are possessed to some extent of the true instincts of soldiers; in troop and squadron personal individuality has been sunk, and the troublesome memories of hearth and home are pigeon-holed in other cells of the brain, just as responsive as previously, but curiously enough, as a result of our obtaining a truer perspective of this war and its issues, acting rather as an inspiration to our present work than as a retarder.\(^7\)

By 1918, Australian recruits were imagining a war that might not ever end, and were themselves sustained only by the thought of coming home, on the condition that they had ‘done their bit’. They still came forward, eagerly, reluctantly, resigned, but few shared the visions of triumphant homecoming that animated so many of the 1914 men. Caught between two worlds, recruits plotted their course to battle, knowing that only through battle might they have the opportunity to return.

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\(^7\) Ross, La Trobe, letter 20 December 1917.

\(^7\) *The Maltameter*, AWM Troopship Serials, October-November 1918, p.2.
1916-1918: England and France

"We are to have a lecture today. "How to win the War."

Charles Moore, diary 4 January 1916

Letters home often started: 'Just a few lines to let you know that I am still alive and well'. The very real possibility of death dictated this convention, but letters served to sustain the hope that the writer would return home. From mid-1916, notions of 'home' began to transform for Australian recruits. Having internalised the attitudes of returned men from the Western Front, recruits were more aware of the implications of going to war. Notions of victory and defeat became less relevant, and men consciously sought ways by which a safe homecoming might be secured, and aspired to little more than staking a claim to 'having done one's bit'. 'One's bit' was never quantifiable, but if in 1914 or 1915 it meant seeing the war through, then by 1917 and 1918, it was reduced to just seeing the war. Men continued to go to war, but after 1916, they took with them a growing understanding of how grim the struggle had become. The corollary of this understanding was a realistic appreciation of one's own mortality, and a knowledge that homecoming was not likely to be triumphal, but qualified by a trial of mind and body. Yet Australians continued to express a desire, and even an anxiety, to see the front. In 1917 and 1918, however, their reasoning had changed. The front still represented the essential condition for satisfying the conventional narrative of war, but the notions of 'home' that men held could now be redeemed without heroism. 'Home' assumed more concrete dimensions, where men did not necessarily intend that their service would precipitate a radical change in their social status. Rather, they hoped to return to the same comforts that they now realised they were relinquishing.

After the Australians' transfer from Egypt to France, recruits resumed their training in England. Housed in a series of permanent camps on Salisbury Plain, men noted its bleakness. Athol Lewis thought the surrounds 'rather monotonous—as far as
the eye can reach there are mess huts and parade grounds and buildings associated with a Military Camp—except on one side ... where there are green fields and the few stone slabs of Stonehenge'.\textsuperscript{1} Despite such conditions in England, recruits were fully aware that conditions in France were worse. Philip Nicholas noted a man on leave ‘talking of the front ... He speaks of it as a good place to keep away from.’\textsuperscript{2} Eric Hadlow’s rifle and bayonet froze and his fingers lost sensation while on guard at camp, yet he ‘thought of the boys in France’ and remembered that ‘I am not under fire and also that I am dry and not hungry’.\textsuperscript{3} Any impulse towards tourism in England encountered consistent obstructions. True, the very fact that they were in England was a fillip for many men, who perhaps found the ‘cultural inheritance’ that Richard White considered part of the Australians’ drive to war. Most Australian soldiers in England, however, seemed overwhelmed not by the familiarity of the old world, but by the militarisation of England, where all activity was geared towards the war effort. Len Clarkson could hardly reconcile English conditions with the Australia he had left, let alone with the England he may have imagined. Rather than realising any tourist ambitions, Clarkson was restricted on all sides:

Oh, you can’t realise what England is like; Khaki is the dominant colour. You can’t get away from the War for five minutes; say, for instance, you go for a quiet stroll on Sunday afternoon, fed up with the army and desiring a little civilian reflection, on the good old days that were, and are to be. You settle down for a few minutes [but] away in the distance you can hear the thundering of the Artillery, miles away, where they test the big guns for France. A footstep approaches, you look up and a Tommy goes whistling by; you feel annoyed, for you long to get out of the embrace of the army, if only for 5 minutes; but you can’t. ... [T]he Civilian is a nonentity, he has ceased to exist, so to speak.\textsuperscript{4}

Organised totally for war, England affirmed on every hand that the men were soldiers going to war, rather than tourists intent on personal agendas. Australians often recorded the belief that ‘people in Australia don’t know there is a war on’.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1} Lewis, La Trobe, diary 12 April 1917.
\textsuperscript{2} Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 10 February 1917.
\textsuperscript{3} Eric Hadlow, La Trobe, MS 9614, diary 8 December 1916.
\textsuperscript{4} Clarkson, AWM PR, letter 7 April 1918.
\textsuperscript{5} Ross, La Trobe, letter 2 March 1918; also Pooley, La Trobe, letter 14 March 1918.
Australians were now encouraged to identify with the Anzac figure that received such popular support in England for a period in 1916. Australian recruits arrived to find that the ‘Australian soldier is right in the boom in England the girls simply adore them’.  

Jack McLeod thought that Australians were well treated in England, ‘just because we were Australians, and because we wore the King’s uniform, and because too, [of] those of us who had gone before and won imperishable fame at the Dardanelles’. Even before they arrived, troopship journals encouraged men to live up to the Anzac example. Men on the Aeneas were told to face the pressures of war ‘in the spirit of your predecessors who have laid the foundations of Australia’s military history … you have a reputation to live up to’. Australians certainly grasped the opportunity to express their difference. Athol Lewis noted that ‘one never hears the Cooee at home—but go abroad with Australians and one never hears anything else’. By June, Will Cam thought: ‘It is nothing to be called “Anzac”[.] I think that is the name now for all whether they were on Anzac or not.’ The integration of new recruits into Anzac began early, helping to cement a popular self-image among Australian recruits and soldiers for the remainder of the war. In the latter part of 1916, the Australian reputation in England began to sour, and in October recruits were warned that ‘Australia’s fair name is in danger of becoming a bye-word of disgust and shame, not only among our enemies but amongst our friends’. Yet if the Australian name was going down in the estimation of outsiders, the soldiers’ appreciation of their own distinctiveness grew in the final years of the war.

In France, Jack McLeod observed:

The Australian soldier is noted wherever he is, for his daring, inquisitiveness, and activity, and is different to any soldier I have seen, and I have seen many nationalities of soldiers, French, Portuguese, Indians, Canadians, and all the Scotch and English and Irish regiments. But none are quite like the Australians.

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6 Leahy, AWM PR, letter 23 August 1916.  
7 McLeod, La Trobe, diary 30 July 1916.  
9 Lewis, La Trobe, diary 10 March 1917.  
10 Cam, AWM PR, letter 16 June 1916.  
12 McLeod, La Trobe, diary 4 January 1917.
Particular traits were identified as uniquely Australian. Henry Gullet, comparing Australian and European troops, suggested that ‘the young Australian is supreme in his physique, his intelligence and his shrewd sense of humour’. Likewise, a contributor to *The Persique* thought that ‘Humour and a sense of the ridiculous has always been a trait in the somewhat complex character of the Australian’. Some balked at the growing stereotype, claiming that ‘we are no “gallant Anzacs”, but we are proud of being Australian reinforcements’, while others actively dissociated themselves from ‘those conceited fools known as Anzacs’ who had ‘too much blow’. Yet for significant numbers of recruits, the urge to identify with the positive image of Australian soldiers counterbalanced their growing awareness of conditions at the front.

Some soldiers, having discovered the disparity between the popular image of war and the reality of the trenches, attempted to enlighten friends and relations. Implicit in their attempts was the knowledge that something very powerful was causing men to continue to volunteer for the war. Initially, men seemed only to warn their friends and relatives against the infantry. Walter Hackett did not seek to dissuade his brother from enlisting, but wrote to his mother: ‘Tell George if he enlists to try his best to get into the Army Service Corps as a driver, but on no account take on the Infantry.’ Warnings not to join the infantry were steadily transformed into warnings not to enlist at all. Philip Nicholas, already tired of the war upon reaching Capetown, wrote, ‘I hope Tom or any other of ours will give up any idea of enlisting. If this is what we get. Thank God conscription did not pass.’ Back in England after seeing France, Ern Poppins wrote to his brother Vic:

> Although this is a great game in one way, it is no good and although for your own sake, I would like to have you here yet for them at home and yourself take it from one who knows this game is best left alone. At any rate do not trouble till you are eighteen.

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14 *The Persique*, AWM Troopship Serials, 7 April 1918.  
15 *The Persique*, AWM Troopship Serials, 19 May 1918; Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letters 1 May, 2 April 1917.  
16 Hackett, La Trobe, MS 10177, letter 21 April 1916; also Ross, La Trobe, letter 8 April 1918; Oliver Coleman, La Trobe, MS 10141, letter 4 December 1916.  
17 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 25 December 1916.  
18 Poppins, La Trobe, letter 4 July 1917.
Tom Nicholas was more strident. He wished his brother Philip a safe trip home from England, and told him to ‘keep Fat there too—tell him from me infantry isn’t a good job and if he is anxious to come over to apply to the Red Cross or Y.M.C.A’. Men who came forward later in the war knew that they were going to a war absolutely unlike that which men imagined in 1914 and 1915. Men had to seriously entertain the notion that they might not return. The meaning of home, crucial to the way recruits imagined their war unfolding, was totally transformed by 1918, as men recognised home for the haven it was even before departure. By 1918, survival, rather than triumphant return, dominated the mindset of recruits as much as soldiers in the lines.

Recruits understood that the war was becoming more desperate for the Allies in 1917 and 1918. This desperation, more intense now than after the failures at Gallipoli, had a profound effect. Despite his own advice, Ern Poppins remained painfully aware and understanding of his brother’s continued desire to enlist. He tried to explain the problem to his mother:

I don’t know what to do in Vic’s case. I know what the poor boy’s feelings are and how in after life he will be sorry for it if he does not come here. He told me he would wait till 18 and do nothing rash but I know by the tone of his letters he is dying to be here. But Mother I tell you this is a hard life.

The young seemed particularly susceptible to the mystique of war, though in common with the older recruits, they shared a knowledge of the grim demands of the lengthening war. Lindsay Ross was disappointed to discover in 1917 that ‘a very poor stamp of men are enlisting now. The majority of men are either over 40 or under 21 and that is not the stamp of men who are needed.’ There is little reason to suspect that the motives of older recruits were different from those just reaching military age. Hamilton Gray, still in transit when the Armistice was announced in November 1918, expected that people would ask why he and his fellows were late. He answered them through the columns of the ship’s magazine:

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19 Tom Nicholas, in Letters of the Nicholas Family, La Trobe, MS 12068, letter 16 August 1918.
20 Poppins, La Trobe, letter 24 September 1917.
21 Ross, La Trobe, letter 2 September 1917.
Three-quarters of this ship's company are young single men, and two-thirds of the reinforcements on board are boys under the age of twenty who were at school when the war broke out, and even now have barely reached maturity. Of the others, many are married men approaching middle age who, under any system of conscription, would not have been called upon to go at all, but whose patriotism had forced their enlistment in order to keep up the falling numbers.  

Gray concluded that '95 percent of those here have come at the earliest possible moment that could be managed'. Married men had a particularly difficult decision to make, responsibilities to wives and children ensuring that they only came forward as they could. Married volunteers represent a much more poignant reminder of what 'home' came to mean in the latter stages of the war. From his training camp in England, 35 year-old Arthur Johns wrote to his wife and daughter: '[P]lenty of married men like myself [in this battalion] with their thoughts ever turned Melbourne wards, we think and say Australia is the place for us and nowhere else is just it.'

In England, recruits were introduced to the 'Bull Ring', where all elements of soldiering considered necessary were taught. Men were taught more of the same marching and drilling, but were also taught bombing, erecting barbed wire, entrenching, sapping, and most importantly, gas precautions. The men were being taught almost exclusively by experienced staff, and Len Clarkson believed 'it pays one to pay full attention to what the Instructors tell you. They are chaps who've been through the mill in France and don't talk froth and bubble.' Even this, however, could not help the men to reconcile their training with their growing knowledge of the war. Godfrey McLean, in noting that he had passed his marching test, added the rejoinder: 'By what we hear about the other side I don't think it will matter how we march over there'. Recruits tired of their training and questioned its value, especially as it took a physical toll on them. E. H. Biggen decided that 'if ever I was sorry at joining the Military

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23 Ibid., p.11.  
24 Arthur Phillips Johns, La Trobe, MS 9647, letter 15 November 1917.  
25 Clarkson, AWM PR, letter 27 February 1918.  
26 McLean, La Trobe, diary 13 November 1916.
Forces, it is tonight[.] I am tired[.] I feel just fit to drop
Nicholas found that ‘the “new” drill is all rot’, intended only t
safe instructional jobs.28 In England, however, unlike Australia or
lost the sense that the war would claim them eventually. The sounds and sights o.
were more immediate here, as Wilfred Barlow noted: ‘As I write the booming of guns
and bombs and the rattle of rifles maxim and lewis guns helps to let you know why you
are here but of course it is only practise yet.’29 The disappointment with training
seemed only to grow with proximity to the front, and Gerald Douglas found his own
frustration hard to contain: ‘Thought we came over to fight! Shown new way to change
arms. Always changing something.’30

Though increasingly aware of the true nature of the front, recruits retained a
personal conviction that they would get there. The desperation of the war was one very
strong impetus, as well as a perceived duty to one’s countrymen. An editorial in the
troopship journal The Persique wished it to be known that:

We will strive to remember that we are no irresponsible tourists on a holiday
jaunt, but a small quota of the A.I.F. ... Most of us are new to war, but ... we hope
to kindle anew and keep ablaze that flame of comradeship and espirit [sic] de
corps that is carrying us into the ranks of the A.I.F. on active service—our
comrades and cobbers overseas.31

Allan Tongs noticed a variety of impulses among his fellows as they became more
accustomed to conditions on the Western Front. ‘[H]undreds are being slaughtered
daily’, he wrote, ‘and we know not when our turn will come. [N]o one seems to care.
[S]ome are indifferent some so sick of a soldier[’]s life some enjoy fighting for the love
of fight but there are no cowards in any ranks friends or enemies.’32 Some had the
opportunity to remain in safe jobs in England, while others were forced to remain until
they were nineteen before they could go to the front. Ern Poppins thought such a job

27 E. H. Biggen, La Trobe, MS 10170, diary 2 August 1916.
28 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 13 March 1917.
30 Douglas, AWM PR, diary 16 January 1917.
31 The Persique, AWM Troopship Serials, 31 March 1918.
32 Tongs, La Trobe, diary 23-24 April 1916.
'would not do me as I want to go to France'.\textsuperscript{33} Len Clar
realised that 'I won't see France for another 7 or 8 months',
myself for that consolation while Nelson and the other chaps are 1.
attitudes were tempered to some extent by hardship in camp, but hardshi
challenged the basic drive to the front. '[O]f course we enlisted to go through with it',
Arthur Johns told his wife.\textsuperscript{35} Still in England several weeks after expressing his desire
for France, Ern Poppins told his father: 'My word Dad soldiering is not at all the great
game it is cracked up to be, but it has not lessened my desire to go to France.'\textsuperscript{36} Anxiety
that the war would be over before they got there was again evident as men grew bored in
camp. The necessity of seeing the front was central to having 'done one's bit', and
Athol Lewis thought 'it would be very disappointing if the affair finished before we got
there after all—one would feel so uncomfortable afterwards: though I am sure everyone
really hopes for peace'.\textsuperscript{37} Hugh Knyvet believed that 'none could think without dread'
that they might 'endure the lowest depths of humiliation in returning home without
having struck a blow'.\textsuperscript{38} On arriving in France Ern Poppins wrote: 'I can't imagine how
chaps can stay in England and never come here. I simply couldn't go home without
being over here.'\textsuperscript{39}

'Home' is the key to the way that Australian recruits viewed their service in the
latter part of the war. Just as Australians were becoming aware of the nature of the
Western Front in 1916, recruits were being encouraged to believe that 'thoughts for
home and those near and dear should be parallel to those for King and Country'.\textsuperscript{40} Of
course recruits recognised no such equality. Bill Gammage suggests that men's
homesickness was symptomatic of a rejection of England, and a belated longing for the
land they had 'quit so readily', yet homesickness was consistently expressed by men
before any such disillusionment with England and the war could compound it.\textsuperscript{41} As they
approached the front, the malady simply became more pronounced. Ern Poppins hoped
that the war might end soon, and suggested that 'we won't be sorry as there never was a

\textsuperscript{33} Poppins, La Trobe, letter 26 January 1917.
\textsuperscript{34} Clarkson, AWM PR, letter 17 February 1918.
\textsuperscript{35} Johns, La Trobe, letter c. Jan-Feb. 1918.
\textsuperscript{36} Poppins, La Trobe, letter 8 March 1917.
\textsuperscript{37} Lewis, La Trobe, diary 20 March 1917.
\textsuperscript{38} Knyvet, 'Over There' With the Australians, p.42.
\textsuperscript{39} Poppins, La Trobe, letter 11 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{40} The Armadale News, AWM Troopship Serials, 19 September 1916.
\textsuperscript{41} Gammage, The Broken Years, p.207.
place like home’. Upon first arriving in England, Len Clarkson wrote of the comfort he took from a photograph of his family: ‘And dear Mother’s face always bringing me right back HOME, the best place on God’s earth. Perhaps I never realised that till now, properly.’ Philip Nicholas revealed the level of feeling in England when he wrote: ‘We all want to go home. There are few hot footed Australians over here. We all wish we had stayed home and discussed the war.’ Nicholas and his comrades, however, submitted themselves willingly to the trial of the front. Nicholas continued, explaining that since ‘the only way home from here is through France most men are anxious to get into it as quickly as possible’. The front, as far as he was concerned, was only a prerequisite for going home. ‘In France we do some training’, he wrote, ‘Then we go to the firing line. After that we might get a chance of seeing home again.’ Once in France, what most men already thought was confirmed. ‘Well Mother’, Ellis Pooley confided, ‘content yourself I’ll be back and hope I am a better son than I’ve ever been before. To come here makes one realise how and what home is.’ Graeme Stobie suddenly ‘fully realised the parting of Australian ties’ in France, and felt that the ‘last step up the line will be a happy one as far as I am concerned’. Stobie hoped soon to be rid of ‘this narrow, unnatural life or rather existence—the sooner it comes the better as far as I am concerned’. Men had left those dear to them in Australia, but they did not forsake them to become soldiers. For men departing for a war that no longer held the mystique of 1914, these relationships became the focus of their drive to return home.

By going to the front, Australian recruits sought to show themselves to be ‘dinkum’. Jessie Grant recognised this impulse in writing to George Doig: ‘I know you had always hoped to be a real dinkum, soldier and I do hope you will be able to do your part and come back to us smiling still.’ Ellis Pooley decided that while he remained in England, he was ‘no hero yet’, and later expressed his desires plainly: ‘I want to get to a Battery and there earn my right to be called a “dinkum” fighter for Australia and earn a name for myself’. For Edward Dengate in the Middle East, the change was to come

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42 Poppins, La Trobe, letter 13 March 1917.
43 Clarkson, AWM PR, letter 17 February 1918.
44 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 1 February 1917.
45 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 1 February 1917.
46 Pooley, La Trobe, letter 1 September 1918.
47 Stobie, AWM PR, diary 7 June 1916.
48 Stobie, AWM PR, diary 3 July 1916.
49 Jessie Grant to George Doig, in George Doig, La Trobe, MS 10299, letter 5 August 1918.
50 Pooley, La Trobe, letters 29 April, 6 May 1918.
immediately he entered battle. Dengate expected that ‘I will soon be a soldier a dinkum one, (or a dead one). ... I am going out to the front tomorrow ... I am about to go through my test’.\textsuperscript{51} Though proximity to the front encouraged men to feel inevitably closer to consummating their war experience, departure from England was tempered by the possibility of death. Athol Lewis noted the ‘great rush of will makers, going on draft’.\textsuperscript{52} Ellis Pooley reassured his mother: ‘I am just as eager for the war as ever and am looking forward to it. I’m not morbid but with war anything may happen’.\textsuperscript{53} Initial experiences in France did not fulfil expectations of immediate action. Men were shunted back into training, much to their frustration. Noel Nicholas noted that they could hear the booming of the guns while they trained: all the men were ‘wishing to get there it will be a blessing, fancy being a few miles off dinkum warfare and saluting by numbers’.\textsuperscript{54} Experiencing the conditions in France compounded men’s doubts about the value of their training. Godfrey McLean thought his ‘training in England will come in very handy here; I don’t think’.\textsuperscript{55} Noel Nicholas believed that since he had enlisted he had done ‘practically nothing’ but hoped that he would now go ‘into it almost immediately’, while Stobie condemned training in France: ‘If the firing line is run on similar lines God help us we will be murdered in cold blood’.\textsuperscript{56}

First experiences under fire tended to fulfil the desire to be ‘dinkum’, but showed the distance between what recruits imagined and what they experienced. Recruits first registered the unworlidy and indescribable landscape of war. Jack McLeod found the ‘whole scene ... one of utter desolation. If I were to try with weeks of writing yet I could not fully convey to the minds of my friends at home a true picture of the scene or the sounds and sights’.\textsuperscript{57} Men retained their curiosity to experience the lines. Though Philip Nicholas was one of them, he qualified his interest: ‘Still I don’t want any special stunt for my sake’.\textsuperscript{58} The endless fields of graves were an inescapable part of the landscape confronting men, and Eric Hadlow thought that only now did men ‘begin to realize as never before the frightfulness of modern warfare. Dotted over all the

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\textsuperscript{51} Dengate, AWM PR, letter 19 May 1917.
\textsuperscript{52} Lewis, La Trobe, diary 2 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{53} Pooley, La Trobe, letters 29 April, 7 April 1918.
\textsuperscript{54} Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter postmarked 27 May 1916.
\textsuperscript{55} McLean, La Trobe, diary 4 January 1917.
\textsuperscript{56} Noel Nicholas, La Trobe, letter postmarked 30 July 1916; Stobie, AWM PR, diary 6 June 1916.
\textsuperscript{57} McLeod, La Trobe, diary 10 November 1916.
\textsuperscript{58} Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 17 June 1917.
plain are graves, mostly with the crosses marked "Unknown British soldier". Under fire, men were brought to realise truly what they could not before. W. L. Hawkins' first experience 'made me think some—what a rotten existence for men'. Godfrey McLean noted plainly in his diary: 'First experience under heavy fire. Change of trousers needed.' For Oliver Coleman, the final journey to the front grew progressively more intense:

We then left our billets, the bombardment started and never before had I an idea of what a bombardment was. From the time we left the billets about a mile and half from the front line you could not speak to your mate for the continual roar. It was an awful strain on one[']s nerves and I can tell you as we progressed and came in contact with the wounded coming from the line and seen the dead laying in a single row in a little cemetery close to the dressing station I often thought of dear old home and the loved ones.

At these moments home and family assumed their most idealised characteristics, as the distance between home and war stretched to its greatest extent for the soldier.

Men came to fully realise the horror of the battlefield in a way that could only be understood by experience, and they believed that they had endured enough. Graeme Stobie found his sensations during one bombardment 'indescribable—I was at times in almost an agony of fear ... I did not think before that I could be so terrified'. R. A. McInnis summed up the issue: 'We thought we knew something of the horrors of war, but we were merely recruits, and have had our full education in one day'. The men had been delivered to battle, and now sought only to be delivered from it. Ellis Pooley, who had wanted to 'earn a name for myself', now found that 'you cannot realise what war is and means until you are in one ... Do not think me a great hero kiddies I am only doing my bit as best I can and surely one can do no more'. Men entered a separate world, where they realised, like Wilfred Barlow, that this was 'an awful war alright. Now I

59 Hadlow, La Trobe, diary 2 June 1917.
60 Hawkins, La Trobe, diary 5-8 March 1918.
61 McLean, La Trobe, diary 6 January 1917.
62 Coleman, La Trobe, letter 4 December 1916.
63 Stobie, AWM PR, diary 15 August 1916.
65 Pooley, La Trobe, letter 18 October 1918.
know what it is really.\textsuperscript{66} The suffering of the men there 'beyond any human idea unless experienced'.\textsuperscript{67} Despite the men still made efforts to communicate this world to those at home, however, they actively denied it to them. Edgar Morrow told his brothers of had been blown to pieces by a shell, but insisted they only tell the man's family the was killed instantly by a bullet, and felt no pain. It is better that way than they should imagine their own son spread over the country-side as pieces of uniform and tom flesh.\textsuperscript{68} In a revealing letter Tom Nicholas explained the real pain of this other world:

My worst experience is on the battlefield and your mates falling all round—it isn’t your own fear so much that upsets you—but the horrible yells and cries you hear—I suppose you have seen the same. It’s all wonderful experience once you can get home; in my case and others who are still going it’s all doubt and uncertainty.\textsuperscript{69}

Despite the horror before him, Tom insisted that the conclusion of his narrative would conclude the pain once he got home. While in France, however, there could be no conclusion. Certainty could only come from arriving home. Though they could not conceive of an end to the war, men continued to hope. Morrow noted that 'We only want to get home. I am tired of the war, and I know that Bill is too. He is just as anxious now to get away from it as he was to come to it. But everybody is the same. They all wish it was finished.'\textsuperscript{70} Few men seriously entertained the notion that the war would end, and so sought other methods of escape.

A policy of 'get in and get out' grew amongst men on the Western Front, and equally affected recruits as they approached battle. At this stage of the war recruits knew that their horizons contracted dramatically at the front. As the \textit{Persic} crossed the equator in 1918, recruits were reminded that 'the Southern Cross ... will soon leave us until we return victorious or crippled—or return no more'.\textsuperscript{71} As the war ground on, men

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{66} Barlow, AWM PR, letter 2 March 1917.
\textsuperscript{67} Coleman, La Trobe, letter 27 November 1917.
\textsuperscript{68} Morrow, \textit{Iron in the Fire}, p.56.
\textsuperscript{69} Tom Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 16 August 1918.
\textsuperscript{70} Morrow, \textit{Iron in the Fire}, p.56.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{The Persique}, AWM Troopship Serials, 25 April 1918.
\end{footnotesize}
thought less of victory than of receiving a ‘blighty’, a wound serious enough to send them back to England, and maybe Australia. This was the only honourable way to escape the front that most men could imagine, and so they accepted serious wounding as a desirable outcome. Philip Nicholas knew after final leave in England that he and his fellows would only get their next leave ‘when we get pipped’.72 Ern Poppins revealed that a ‘blighty’ was preferable even to remaining unharmed:

I am going back to France on Monday or Tuesday but hope it is not long before I get a knock. You will hear people back home say how lucky so and so is being there all this time and not getting wounded but you take it from me a chap is far better off to get a hit and get out of it.73

This kind of attitude was given form in battle. In the middle of Pozières, Alec Raws observed the effect:

The sad part is that one can see no end of this. If we live tonight we have to go through tomorrow night—and next week—and next month. Poor wounded devils you meet on the stretchers are laughing with glee. One cannot blame them. They are getting out of this.74

Yet men were prepared to face their future in battle, and preferred to force the issue rather than to endure the boredom of the line. John Allan noted: ‘Our infantry are over anxious to charge or be doing something, standing or sitting down in trenches tests the stoutest nerves when shells and bombs of all descriptions are bursting in and around same.’75 Even before seeing battle, Allan Tongs decided that though he was going into ‘a very rough corner’, he didn’t ‘mind how rough it is, [I] would stand a decent wound if I could get back home’.76 A ‘decent wound’ meant incapacitation. If they recovered sufficiently, men were sent back to the front to face death again. In hospital Oliver Coleman revealed the pessimism of men facing this future: ‘They can’t expect to always

72 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 10 February 1917.
73 Poppins, La Trobe, letter 4 July 1917.
74 Margaret Young and Bill Gammage (eds), Hail and Farewell: Letters from two Brothers Killed in France in 1916, Kenthurst, Kangaroo Press, 1995, p.146.
75 Allan, AWM PR, letter 8 August 1916.
76 Tongs, La Trobe, diary 18 May 1916.
get "only a blighty" so the natural feeling is the inevitable K. in A. reported against them. Yet men still revelled in even a partial escape. Ern Poppins wrote to his parents: 'By this you will know that I have been in and out of the line again, and by good fortune got a Blighty which is supposed to be a hard job.' Men often saw their wounds in terms of 'progress'. Philip Nicholas wrote home with 'definite evidence that I am making some progress' in that he would 'ultimately end up in Blighty'. Roy Smith had his leg amputated above the knee. 'It was either lose my leg or go under myself' he explained, '[b]ut I am considering myself very lucky that I got away from such a place as we were in.' These men could now be assured that they had 'done their bit' and would escape to return home and conclude their narrative of war.

Those who could not be assured of their future remained in Tom Nicholas' 'doubt and uncertainty'. These men had generally come to the conclusion, like Arthur Armstrong, that 'I am sure I have no desire to keep at this game much longer'. Yet they also felt a duty to continue fighting strongly. Armstrong thus continued, 'I suppose that will have to wait until the other job [the war] is finished'. From hospital men resigned themselves to returning to the front. Ern Poppins wrote: 'Like most chaps I was eager to go to France the first time but like most I am not so eager to go back. ... I am quite prepared to go back to France but as I said I am not dying to go back.' John Allan seconded, claiming that men desiring to return to France are One of Two things Liars or Lunatics. No one who has gone through this war and has actually witnessed its horror is anxious to get back to it. I am going back, it is not by choice. It is my duty and that alone makes me go into it again, but crave to go back[—]Never.

The front really only served to reassert and intensify a longing for homecoming, which could only be redeemed by honourable service and honourable escape. Understandably, men were cautious as the end of the war approached. Though Bert Bishop found

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77 Coleman, La Trobe, letter 27 November 1917.
78 Poppins, La Trobe, letter 23 June 1917.
79 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 16 October 1917.
80 Smith, AWM PR, letter c. August 1916.
81 Arthur Armstrong, AWM PR, letter 24 July 1916.
82 Poppins, La Trobe, letter 3 August 1917.
83 Allan, AWM PR, letter 8 August 1916.
himself 'thinking of survival, of getting home', he felt that his 'hopes must not be allowed to go too far'. Upon the declaration of the Armistice, Lindsay Ross had to 'keep pinching myself to make sure it is not all a horrible dream'. The opportunity for homecoming on the best terms had been achieved, and men could barely accept it.

From the time that Australians began to experience the Western Front in mid-1916, recruits gradually adapted their expectations of war service until they reflected only the most basic desire to experience the front and return home. 'Home' was largely relieved of the burden of providing the glory that recruits had imagined in the early years of the war. Recruits now took comfort in the stability of their social world at home, rather than the potential of the war to positively alter it or their status within it. Though the impulse to even see a war so horrible may be difficult to understand, the fate of Ern Poppins' brother Vic may give some indication of the forces at work. Shortly after the Armistice, Ern wrote home:

I was not surprised to know Vic had enlisted. I have been expecting it for many a letter. I suppose he would not get long in camp as, soon after the armistice they would all be discharged. I am sorry in a way for him that he did not get a chance to sail as it would have been some satisfaction to him but never mind, he has done what he could and I am glad he did not have to go through what I have had to.

That disappointment should be evident amongst men in November 1918 is a testament to the complexity and conflict of emotions engendered by the war. 'Home' grew progressively more immediate in the minds of recruits as the war continued. By war's end, 'home' dictated the relevance of all other activities. Though battle remained an essential component of any narrative of war, it held no intrinsic meaning of its own, no mystery to be revealed, nor promise of purification or social elevation. In the mind of the recruit, battle served only to qualify the possibility of returning home.

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85 Ross, La Trobe, letter 19 November 1918.
86 Poppins, La Trobe, letter 22 December 1918.
Conclusion

This thesis has shown that men constructed a linear narrative of their experiences before, as well as after, they went to war. At the apex of this vision for the vast majority was neither conducting a tourist expedition, nor experiencing battle, but the thought of returning home. Under the illusions of previous wars, early recruits perceived themselves returning after a short conflict to a welcoming society, where their social status would be enhanced. This vision suffered under the realities of a protracted war, and a growing awareness of the real conditions at the front. As this knowledge found its way back to Australia, recruits found themselves between two worlds of war, one constructed through newspapers and propaganda, the other becoming more apparent in attitudes gleaned from returned men and letters from those at the front. Both claimed to know the war, yet recruits knew neither world to be entirely true. Increasingly, recruits came to a closer understanding of the war, the corollary of which was that their vision of home changed in its emphasis. Men continued to be drawn by the war, but now sought to return to homes they came to regard as a haven. They no longer anticipated that the war would enhance their social status after they returned. What they retained was a desire to reach the war and see battle, in order that they might earn the right to return home.

It should also be noted that men knew they were constructing their narrative of war. Though recruits plotted a path that would take them to war and bring them back, training, travelling and battle do not describe a linear experience. The troughs of recruits’ lives—sustained lulls between moments that accorded with the presumed flow of events—were typical rather than exceptional. Yet these men, their preconceived notions of war and homecoming in hand, consciously suspended memories which were peripheral to the journey. Philip Nicholas, as in so many other instances, exemplified the process: ‘When we get back’, he wrote from France, ‘I suppose we will forget all these little things and say we had a good time.’ Nicholas did not doubt his return, for it was integral to his war. John Allan was also aware that ‘a sort of innate confidence of seeing the thing through God Willing seems to permeate our very beings’.

1 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 14 September 1917.
2 Allan, AWM PR, letter 8 August 1916.
process of forgetting was as important to the war experience as was the process of recording. As experience brought these men to a new appreciation of what the war was about, they idealised home above all else. Battle, though integral, had no particular worth, and at an extreme was denied agency by the men. John Allan continued: ‘I could write for a week on what I have experienced but they are topics I wish to forget whilst I am recapitulating.’

For all of its four years Australians went voluntarily to the Great War. The vast majority of recruits had some conception of the home to which they expected to return. What changed over those four years was not that men lost that vision, but that they adapted it to the realities they were coming to understand. ‘Home’ ceased to be imbued with triumphal connotations after men came to realise that the war would not end in the conceivable future, and that if they returned at all, they would probably return impaired, even crippled. ‘Home’ came to represent a sanctuary to which men could return safely and where they would resume their lives. Perhaps the real tragedy for men whose imagined homecoming sustained them, was that neither of these conceptions of ‘home’ survived the war. The men of 1914 and 1915, who had envisaged a victorious and triumphant return, lost that innocence as their war dragged on. Though they had hoped that war might positively affect their status at home, it divided their community, and there was no unanimous lauding of soldiers. Those who volunteered in the latter part of the war found that they could not return to the haven they longed for at home, as they too had changed. They remained between those two worlds that they had only begun to recognise as they enlisted, and did not know how they might bridge the two. ‘I don’t know yet what I will do when I return home’, Ellis Pooley told his mother. ‘I will have to be left for a decision when I am home as both conditions in Australia and my own outlook will be changed after what experience I have had.’ Philip Nicholas hoped that he might return in control of his war memory. ‘There are few things’, he wrote, ‘that won’t be worth forgetting.’

Of course war memory became something else after the men returned. Men were forced to characterise their war differently to how they had imagined it

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3 Allan, AWM PR, letter 8 August 1916.
4 Pooley, La Trobe, letter 18 November 1918.
5 Philip Nicholas, La Trobe, letter 17 August 1917.
would turn out. Almost twenty years after enlisting, Edgar Morrow felt that the war had been discredited. ‘The compensation I desire for the great folly’, he wrote, ‘is the memory of it all. I am prepared to accept the memory of the destruction and death, of the suffering and the heart-break, if only I can retain the memory of the friendship and comradeship of the dead and of the living.’ Though ‘tragedy’ is in danger of becoming a cliché, the destruction of personal lives the Great War delivered is hardly anything other. Walt Newton was more than just eloquent when he stated in 1920 that ‘not in figures cold and calculating shall the loss ... be estimated, but in the individual memories of those who were and are not’. Perhaps Newton was writing too early to include those who lived to see home.

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