ANZAC TALES

Commemorating the centenary of Anzac
and the involvement of Rushworth and district
in World War 1

The following articles were published fortnightly in the Waranga News from 2015-2018. They were prepared by Tony Ford, 1/47 Race Street, Flora Hill, Victoria 3550.

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THE STORY BEHIND ANZAC TALES

I have always had a strong interest in the history of the Rushworth area. Living in the town from 2009-2017, a subject that was of great interest to me was the impact of the First World War on the town and district.

In conjunction with the local community newspaper, the Waranga News, it was decided that there would be a series of regular articles in the paper, called Anzac Tales. Over the years when the centenary of the Great War was being commemorated, the column would run as a tribute to all those men and women who served, as well as the communities they left behind.

The stories ran in roughly chronological order, covering the years from 1914-1918. They were meant to be interesting and informative and give the locals a better understanding of the enormous impact that the war had on the town and district. Although the stories followed the events that took place over those years, it is the personal stories that really shine through.

I have been staggered at how much information is now available to researchers. Anzac Tales is really just the tip of a very large iceberg. It has been much easier to collect information now than it was 15-20 years ago, when I was writing a book about Tatura and the Great War (*Our Heroes – Tatura's World War 1 Roll of Honour*, published in 2003).

There are some lists of names that I prepared when I was working on this project that are available on the Rushworth Cemetery website (www.cemeterymapping.net.au/Rushworth/). Anyone who is searching for basic information about the local men and women who enlisted could look there as a starting point.

I would like to sincerely thank the Waranga News for providing the space on page 4 every fortnight, editing and formatting, and encouraging my efforts. To anyone who has supplied information for inclusion in the stories, or given feedback, I am most appreciative.

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SECTION 1 – 1914-15

COMPRISING ARTICLES 1-20 PUBLISHED IN THE WARANGA NEWS DURING 2015

1 INTRODUCTION

At the outbreak of World War 1 in Europe in August 1914, the vast majority of Rushworth and district residents had their roots in the United Kingdom. Even though Australia had become a federation 13 years earlier, it was still very much seen to be part of the British Empire. As a result, there was a rush to enlist by Australians keen to show their support for the Empire. Enlistment papers even attested to the fact that the person enlisting was a "natural born British subject."

Before the end of the month, there had been patriotic meetings held in the town, and the wheels had been set in motion for young men to enlist. Captain McCraw arrived in Rushworth on 17/8/14 to conduct medicals for the volunteers, and the first seven local men were selected for service – H V Lucas, E C Muhlhan, J C Johnson, D O'Leary, T Finn, J Calley and W Florence.

O'Leary left for Melbourne the same day. The other six were treated to "a right royal" send-off from the Rushworth railway station on the following day. It was estimated that over 600 residents turned out to see them off, with the Rushworth Brass Band playing suitable patriotic music.

Men with Experience

At the same time, men with local connections who already had a military background were being called up. For instance, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Semmens was offered the command of the 6th Battalion, one of 4 battalions being raised in Victoria to contribute to a force of 20,000 men that Australia had offered to the "Home" (i.e. British) government. A battalion consisted of about 1000 men.

Lt Frank McNamara, of the Brighton Rifles, who was at the time one of the officers in charge of the fort at Queenscliff, was also called up. And Frank Burrell, who worked at T G Anderson's blacksmith's shop in High Street, was called up as he was already a member of the Victorian Artillery Forces.

Members of the local Light Horse contingent went down to Seymour for their medicals, which five of the initial group passed - Trevor, Frank and Ben Burge, D Chambers and T Primrose. The Light Horse was a bit like today's Army Reserve. Members were usually good horsemen and good shots, and used to living rough. They were civilians who trained regularly to the point where they could quickly be assimilated into the regular armed forces.

Supporting the War Effort

Meanwhile, in Rushworth, it was agreed that members of the Rifle Club and other volunteers would drill in High Street on Wednesday afternoons (which was then a half-day holiday) from 2 to 5 pm. A Patriotic Fund set up at a meeting at the Shire Hall raised over 100 pounds ($200) by the end of the month.

2 OFF TO WAR

Before the end of August 1914, there were four more local enlistments, including Reg Bond and Cliff Little (Rushworth), W Anderson (Waranga) and Ern Prentice (who had been working in Melbourne). When this group left Rushworth, virtually the whole town turned out to give them a great send-off.

Shortly afterwards, in September, the town celebrated a momentous event in its history - the official turning on of the electric power supply for the first time.

Many of the early enlistees sailed with the first Australian contingent to go overseas, which arrived in Egypt in early December 1914 after a four week voyage in a large convoy from Western Australia. Their camp was established at Mena, close to the pyramids, where training began in earnest.

Before the end of 1914, a second Australian contingent was already being raised, with many young men volunteering from the Rushworth area. This contingent was soon following the first, and began arriving in Egypt in early February 1915.

Training in Egypt

The experiences of these early enlistees are graphically documented in a series of letters that was published in the "Rushworth Chronicle" under the pen name "The Juvenile". "The Juvenile" was, in fact, Edwin Charles Muhlhan, who had worked as a printer at the "Chronicle" office in High Street prior to his enlistment. His father, also called Edwin, had been the editor of the "Chronicle" since 1903.

Edwin junior describes his excitement at being in Egypt. "Who ever would have thought that a short time back that I would be camped at the foot of the much-talked-of Pyramids and Sphinx. But here I am, with about sixty or eighty thousand other Australians and Territorials, located right at the foot of these historical and marvellous creations of mankind in bygone ages – camped in a depression on the edge of the great Sahara Desert. Our camping ground is all in sand and it is dreadfully hard to walk about in."

Edwin was fascinated by Egyptian village life, which he witnessed while travelling on the troop trains from Alexandria to Cairo. "The native villages were the most interesting of the lot, though. Hundreds of mud huts, built one into another, formed these native quarters, and extraordinary structures they looked to be. Most of them had some sort of arrangement on top for the fowls and other feathered creatures. There were no windows in these huts and the natives appeared to live like rabbits in a burrow, although not half so clean. Hum! Man alive, the station yard gutter at Rushworth, or the Stephenson Street drain at Murchison, give off a perfume like rosemary, Eau de Cologne or pure lavender water compared to these villages, which can be smelt miles away."

As they settled into training in Egypt, the troops were very upbeat. As well as training very hard, they had time off to see the sights of Cairo and the Nile Valley.

3 FIVE BOB A DAY TOURISTS

Australian soldiers in World War 1 were paid a standard five shillings (50c) a day. Although this does not sound like much today, it was deemed by many to be a considerable amount, and for some, a motivation to enlist. (By comparison, British troops were only paid one shilling and two pence, or 12c a day) Northern Victoria was in the grip of a severe drought in 1914, so jobs were scarce in the Rushworth district.

When the Australians arrived in Egypt en route to the war, it was the first time most of them had been overseas. They were enthusiastic tourists when on leave, hence the moniker "five bob a day tourists".

A Nervy Trip

Edwin Muhlhan, who wrote many letters home to his parents in Rushworth, describes a visit to the pyramids, which were near the Australian camp at Mena.

"Since writing my last I have had several pleasant trips. Only yesterday I got away to the Pyramids and climbed to the top and had a good look around. It is 615 feet (187 metres) up the outside, the height being 473 feet (144 metres) vertical, and it covers an area of eleven acres (4.5 hectares), so you can form some idea of the immense size. It is marvellous how the Egyptians got the immense boulders up so high. I had a nice cup of coffee at the top. Today our company was marched to the Pyramids and also to the Sphynx and then dismissed. With three others I went through and explored the passages and chambers of the Pyramids. They seem to have been built solid, with passages through to the inner chambers where the King's and Queen's bodies were placed, and I saw the King's coffin, which appeared to be of marble. It is a nervy trip, however. From the top, dozens of other Pyramids are visible in the distance…The Spynx (sic) is also a great sight, but Napoleon is credited with spoiling the features when he blew the nose off with a cannonball."

The Sights of Cairo

Cairo was a favoured leave destination. "Reg Bond and myself had another turn into Cairo and had a bit of a birthday. We hired a couple of donkeys, and made for the Mosque of Sultan Hassan…Though it has a fairly old appearance from the outside the interior is quite the reverse… we were only allowed to enter the outer chambers, but even here the splendour was such as to create an impression never likely to be forgotten. It appears that the grandfather of the recent Khedive left money to build this Mosque when he died, and in one of the many chambers he and his wife sleep their last long sleep encased in beautiful coffins of alabaster inlaid with silver…The floor is covered with the most lovely Turkish carpet and one is not allowed inside without slippers… In front of the coffins are three fine volumes of the Egyptian Koran, while there was also a little round chair, like a card-table, and this was made of solid ivory and ebony. So much for our visit to the Mosque."

4 ON DUTY IN CAIRO

When the Australian troops were camped at Mena, near the pyramids in Egypt, they were subjected to a rigorous training program. This included route marches in the desert, rifle practice and learning tactics. The heavy training program was occasionally relieved by other official duties.

Rushworth's Edwin Muhlhan was a member of the 7th Battalion, and most of the men in B Company had been recruited in the Goulburn Valley. The battalion was employed to provide security in Cairo just before Christmas 1914. Great Britain had decided to annexe Egypt, and instal its chosen leader, and it was expected that this may cause some trouble.

Not a Little Proud

Edwin recounts "We then fixed bayonets and marched through the crowded streets to our position. We looked A1 as we marched past with our swinging stride, which is the envy of the Territorials (British reservists), and I tell you we felt not a little proud. The Egyptians are very much taken with the Australians, and class them above all the other troops, and as we made our way through the crowded thoroughfares we were given a very hearty reception. We took up our position in one of the main streets not far from the hoisting place of the flag, and we were formed up on both sides of the street at intervals of about a yard…The procession was a very short one, but it was on such a gorgeous scale that it was worth going miles to see, and it gave one an idea of the magnificence of the celebrations on the Royal visit to India (in 1911)."

First Brush with the Turks

In early February 1915, the Turks made a sortie southwards to try to seize control of the Suez Canal. There was much excitement, as the 7th Battalion was part of the force that moved up to protect the

canal. Being a reserve battalion, the 7th only got within 3 miles (5 km) of the fighting, which was short-lived as the Turks were beaten back. However, Edwin and his mates got to escort some Turkish prisoners. "Our platoon had some interesting work allotted it, for sixty of us were selected as an escort to take 172 prisoners into Cairo, your humble servant being one of the number. We had our rifles loaded with five pills and were told to shoot on the slightest provocation, it being explained that the men had played treachery on the Indians. We had to escort them along a very dark road to the railway station at nine o'clock at night, and if they had wished to do a break they could easily have accomplished it, for it was so dark that at times one could not see the man in front of him. We marched them in a column of four, and marched alongside ourselves in single file. Some of the prisoners were wounded slightly, but we got them in to the train alright, and nothing eventful happened. We handed them over to the Territorials at Cairo station."

5 PREPARING FOR WAR

While the Australian troops were in Egypt, waiting to be mobilised into action, they trained hard. For the infantry, rifle practice was an essential part of that training. Many of the Rushworth and district boys were experienced with guns. Rushworth's Edwin Muhlhan explained in a letter home that "My past experience with the gun in Australia has now stood me in good stead. Four men from each company have been selected as sharpshooters, and I am one of the four chosen to represent our company. It will be our duty at the front to do nothing but pick off officers, so our job should not be an arduous one." In hindsight, the level of naivety reflected in the last statement is quite astonishing.

One of the sharpshooting tests was loading and firing ten rounds of ammunition in 40 seconds, and Edwin explained "you can just imagine the noise occasioned by 60 rifles firing all those shots in less than a minute."

Route Marching

Part of the physical training for the Australian troops involved route marches in the desert. Although this was not a favourite activity, it was seen as a necessary evil. Edwin Muhlhan reported in early January 1915 that "A five mile march as usual is our refresher for tomorrow (Sunday) morning, and as this is done through sand you can imagine what it is like. It is the sort of thing to make men of us, though, and all the local boys are in the pink of health and condition."

Practising for the Real Thing

The troops also practised military tactics in the desert. On one occasion, Edwin's section sighted "enemy" trenches, and "after being given the guessed range by the section commander, the men were told to open fire on the trenches. At 1150 yards (just over 1 km), our fire was so accurate, and the judging of distance so perfect, that had there been an enemy in the trenches instead of dummy men, escape from death was impossible. At closer ranges, the fire was very deadly, and it makes us wonder how it is that so few get killed by rifle fire."

The Australian infantry also got to watch the artillery practising nearby. "The little we saw and heard at a distance gave us some idea of what things are like in a big battle, and with a little more experience of noise we should be quite used to it and ready for the front." They were impressed by the accuracy of the artillery fire, which in battles to come would indeed create many more casualties than those inflicted by rifle fire.

Training included night exercises. "Yesterday we went out on a bivouac at 4.30 and arrived home at 7.40 this morning after a very hard night's work. We never had a wink of sleep and topped up with a few hours rifle drill today."

6 THINKING OF HOME

When the Australian troops wrote letters home, they were clearly thinking a lot about life in Rushworth and district. Edwin Muhlhan's letters home to his parents were peppered with such musings…"I often wonder how things are at home and in the old town. Does the old car still go well or has Fryberg yet annexed it for scrap iron? Is Joe Brody still unmarried, and does he still wend his weary way along the glory paths of Moormbool (i.e. the Rushworth forest). These and lots of other important matters recur to our minds, as we have not yet had letters and have not learned the news. Anyhow, we wish to be remembered to all our friends with an extra thought for frequenters of the "lost dogs' shelter"."

On another occasion, Edwin asked his parents to "Remember me to Drs Heily and Christie, and we all wish they were here in "Long Bill" (our army doctor's) place. That worthy has the same remedy for every ailment, and a drastic one at that, and a number of our men have grievances to settle with him after the war."

Letters from Home

Letters from home were highly valued. Just before Christmas 1914, Edwin Muhlhan lamented that "So far we have not received our Australian mail, for which we are all anxiously looking. " This was nearly two months after they had left Australia.

Eventually, the mail system improved. In early January 1915, Edwin advised "We get mail from home every week now, and it is something to look forward to. We understand there are 34 bags of November letters still to be sorted, therefore we are getting them later than the December mail…Sometimes we wish we were back at the old place indulging in the various pastimes, but our work is too interesting for us to think much about anything else."

Local news was much sought after…"I was very pleased to receive a copy of the "Chronicle" of Dec 4th, and needless to say we read every word of it."

Catching up with the Locals

There was clearly a strong link between all the Rushworth and district boys who were training in Egypt. They sought each other out at the end of the day. When they were on leave, they often got a group of locals together for an outing.

It has been well-documented that Australian troops on leave in Cairo did create some mayhem. Edwin was concerned that the folks at home might get the wrong idea. "I think the representative of the Victorian dailies (*ed. this was Charles Bean, war correspondent and historian*) painted the Australian troops a bit too dark, though at times I must say many of them were over the limit. However, I can assure you that the Rushworth boys have not done anything discreditable since they left Rushworth – none of them touch drink, and that is a strong point." Perhaps a little hard to believe, but as they say, truth is often the first casualty in war.

7 RESTLESS SPECULATION

The Australian troops in Egypt were constantly speculating about where they might be sent when their training was completed. Rushworth and district lads were all part of the rumour mill. Edwin Muhlhan and his mates were "… all anxious to get a shift out of Egypt. We have got a real sickener of the everlasting sand. Cairo has not the attraction for our boys that it had."

"It has been frightfully hot on the sand lately, and the hottest day I ever experienced in Rushworth was but a joke to it. It's quite a different heat – just like standing in front of a roasting fire. This is caused by the reflection of the sun on the sand. To sit down on the sand is like sitting on a stove."

Some of the possibilities that were discussed as a possible destination included travelling to the Western Front in France and Belgium, or fighting the Turks, who had come into the war on the side of the Germans. With the latter, discussion centred round such diverse possible objectives as Jaffa or Jerusalem (in Palestine), Syria or Constantinople (Turkey).

There was some disdain for officers, which has been a common theme in reports about the Australian troops in the war. "Our Colonel used to get on a mound and talk of the fighting we were going to get – always on the following morning."

Itching to Go

There was evident frustration amongst the troops. Edwin wrote to his parents that "The war seems to be progressing very slowly, and we think it will be some time yet before the Allies advance into Germany. Then the fighting will commence in earnest." (Ed. History tells us that subsequent events proved the last two thoughts to be way off the mark)

A recurring theme in Edwin's letters was that all the Rushworth boys were raring to go ("All the Rushworth boys are splendid"), albeit with some trepidation. "We are all very anxious to get to the front, though how we will feel when the bullets are flying past remains to be seen."

On other occasions, there was a degree of overconfidence and bravado. "We all think here that the war will really only start at the beginning of May, and the troops have every confidence that they can "stouch" the Germans by the end of August or September, and then we will be thinking of Home, Sweet Home."

Rising Frustration

Censorship was increasing dramatically, both in the information that could be sent home by the troops, and what they were told about the progress of the war. The lack of information compounded their feelings of frustration.

By mid-March 1915, the Australians were over training, and just wanted action. Edwin wrote to his parents, with the letter headed Mena Camp, Egypt, that "As you see by the heading, we still remain here, much to our disgust. There has been some little hitch in the embarkation arrangements but this will soon be rectified, and then to the firing line – probably Constantinople."

8 MARCHING ORDERS

After months of training in Egypt, the Australian troops felt they were more than ready for action. They had to endure numerous inaccurate statements from officers about when and where they would go into action. By the end of February 1915, there was still plenty of speculation, with a transfer to the Western Front in Europe deemed to be a likely option.

Rushworth's Eddie Muhlhan wrote home to his parents "We are still here, although the latest order is that we leave on Thursday next and take tents with us. The opinion has altered somewhat about our destination, and Jaffa is now spoken of mostly. We would rather France but don't mind so long as it means into the firing line somewhere. We are all very excited and are busy packing up our kits."

The departure date kept being deferred. With hindsight, we can understand what a massive logistical operation it was going to be to land thousands of Allied troops on foreign soil via a seaborne invasion. There was much to be organised, and it all took time.

By mid-March, it was clear that something big was in the wind. The troops were advised "that we would probably be at the front in a fortnight. We have all been served with the active service card, and as we only receive one per week you will hear practically nothing from us for some considerable time. We have been working very hard lately constructing bomb-proof trenches and barb-wire entanglements, and at times have been pretty well knocked up."

Focus on the Dardenelles

At the end of March, Edwin Muhlhan told his parents "We have just had an address from General Sir Ian Hamilton. He is to command the forces at the Dardanelles, and he promises some fighting in a week or a fortnight. He did not tell us our destination, but it was not hard to guess from his remarks. Sir Ian said "There will be a few Germans and a great many others there." We are told that on account of our weight we Australians will be sent into the thick of the fight and have to force things with the bayonet. Our instructions are to stop at nothing."

A Message From the Rushworth Lads

In his penultimate communication to Rushworth before complete censorship was imposed, Edwin wrote "With the other Rushworth boys I can say, "We set out for the front and we are going to the front irrespective of consequences – there will be no turning back."

On Easter Sunday 1915, Edwin followed up with a quick postcard – "We are off in a few minutes and will board our troopship tomorrow. We are promised heavy fighting against odds the moment we land, so we are all greatly excited. No time to write more, so with best love to all, but don't worry over the Rushworth boys – we will be alright."

9 GALLIPOLI INVASION

Rushworth's Eddie Muhlhan's circumstances had changed dramatically by the time he was able to write to his parents (in July – three months after the event) about the landing at Gallipoli. His last communication from Egypt had been a quick postcard in March, prior to his embarkation with the 7th Battalion AIF. By late August, he, like many other original Anzacs, had succumbed to illness in the frightful conditions that they had to endure at the front. Eddie was transferred to a casualty clearing station on the Greek island of Imbros, ultimately being sent to England for further treatment.

The Landing at Gallipoli

The 7th Battalion was in the second wave of the attack on the first Anzac Day, so when they were heading in to land, it was daylight and the Turkish defenders were fully alert. His group's landing boat was towed towards shore by a steam pinnace (like a small tugboat), then they were cast off and had to row in under fire. Eddie described the landing. "We could see the Turks on the ridges on our left, and a machine gun which was enfilading us was cutting up the water just in front of the boat like a knife. O'Leary (Ed. Pte Daniel O'Leary, one of Edwin's best mates) was on one oar quite cool. One very fine chap next to me was first to go – shot through the stomach. Others soon got hit. Although a good distance from the shore, we started to jump out of the boat, and I can tell you it was almost a case of swim ashore. How I escaped I don't know; but I think it must have been on account of being under water for so long. There were dozens of men lying behind the little cover on the beach, and here we threw ourselves down and got rid of our packs. A few shells soon caught us, however, and, on a call for B Company men to advance, we made a move, but the shrapnel had left its mark."

Confusion

With the confusion of the landing, the various units became mixed up. The remnants of Eddie's company found themselves with members of the 1st Brigade, who had been in the first wave of the attack. They were "cut off from their own Battalion for five days and five nights…Getting to the firing line we had to contend with an awful lot of sniping and also land mines. Those five days in the trenches I won't attempt to describe - it was hell. We made a couple of bayonet charges and had to dig ourselves in with our little trenching tools."

Back with the 7th

After five days, Eddie's battalion was relieved and reorganised. It was only then that he "soon learned of (Rushworth boys) Roy Hodgson being badly wounded and of Reg Bond and Dan O'Leary's deaths."

B Company of the 7th Battalion could only muster 63 fit men from a total of 240 who had landed on Gallipoli.

10 RUSHWORTH IN MOURNING

One hundred years ago, news took time to filter through from Gallipoli. Usually the first to know would be the staff at the Post Office, who would receive the dreaded telegram advising that someone local had been killed or wounded. This would often happen weeks after the event. Post Office staff would then contact the minister or priest of the church that the casualty had been a member of prior to their war service. In 1915, virtually everyone was at least nominally attached to one of the four main churches in town. Then, the minister or priest would have the unenviable task of going to the family home to deliver the telegram, and try to provide comfort to the family.

Mates Killed on First Anzac Day

As far as we know, at least four Rushworth and district lads died on the first Anzac Day. Two who were mentioned in the previous article in this series were Reg Bond and Dan O'Leary. They were both good mates of Eddie Muhlhan, whose story we have been following through his letters home to his family.

An eye-witness account says that Reg and Dan, who were best mates, and had both worked at Walbran's store, died within seconds of each other. They had just come ashore when Reg Bond was shot dead. Private George Silver later verified that "Dan O'Leary, his pal, took his cap from him, put it on and down he went, holed like Reg. It may sound far-fetched – two men killed wearing the same cap – but I saw it."

Other Fatal Casualties

Eddie, Dan and Reg were all in the 7th Battalion, as was Private Alf Baldwin, a Whroo boy who worked at the post office in Rushworth. It is unclear just what happened to Alf on that fateful morning, but he was also killed. Sadly, his workmates at the post office would have been the first in town to know that he had been killed.

George Pyle of the 5th Battalion, who had been working as a shearing expert around Rushworth, was also killed at the landing. George's landing craft was apparently hit by artillery fire, and it was assumed that he was killed before he got ashore.

Lack of Information

Today, we get news instantaneously. In 1915, it was much different. The army held inquiries to try to determine what had happened to people who were killed or missing in the war. These inquiries would often be inconclusive e.g. in some of the above cases, the army would only say that the death had occurred between 25 April and 2 May. George Pyle's parents never really got any reliable information about what happened to him.

It is hard to imagine the impact on the town and district of the news of the loss of four fine young local men on one day. For the families, apart from being plunged into grief, the fact that there was no possibility of the remains of their loved ones being repatriated was potentially devastating.

11 A SECOND LANDING AT GALLIPOLI

Members of the 7th Battalion AIF had been involved in the original landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. Despite the fact that the 7th had been decimated in that landing, the remnants of the battalion were taken off Anzac Cove, and re-landed at Cape Helles, on the southern tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula, less than two weeks later.

Edwin Muhlhan and Jim Johnson, both Rushworth boys in the 7th Battalion, took part in this second landing. This was despite having just heard the news that two of their best mates, Dan O'Leary and Reg Bond, had died on 25 April.

The original landing at Cape Helles by French and British troops had occurred simultaneously with the landing at Anzac Cove by the Australians and New Zealanders. It had met with pretty much the same fate. Only minimal advances had been made, and a stalemate had quickly developed.

Renewed Push

Additional troops were landed at Cape Helles with a view to taking the strategically located town of Krithia. The plan was ill-conceived, because the Allied troops had to advance across an open plain, which rose steadily towards the town. Heavily reinforced Turkish defenders had a clear view of any advance, onto which they could pour sustained artillery, machine gun and rifle fire.

This was one of the battles in which some British commanders were criticised for showing little imagination, and even a callous disregard for the troops under their command.

British (including Indians and Gurkhas) and French troops attacked unsuccessfully towards Krithia on 6-7 May. On 8 May, first the New Zealanders, then the Australians were brought into the fray.

Another Rushworth Boy Down

The Australians began their attack in the late afternoon, but were brought to a shuddering halt within an hour. In that short space of time, there were 1000 casualties (dead, wounded and missing) – one-third of the entire attacking force.

Amongst the casualties was Private Jim Johnson of Rushworth. Jim had been in the Rushworth Band before he enlisted, and was the designated bugler for his unit.

Best Mate a Witness

Sergeant Eddie Muhlhan of Rushworth was commanding the section of (about 15) men next to Johnson's section "when a shell burst over the section, practically destroying the whole number…I was

later informed that Johnson was badly injured in the face, and was crawling away when hit by another shell."

This information was only elicited from Eddie in 1921, over six years after the event.

Heartache for the Family

Jim Johnson's family spent years vainly trying to find out exactly what happened to him. The best that the Defence Department could eventually come up with was that he was missing presumed dead. Jim's remains were never located. Consequently, he has no known grave, but his name listed on the Cape Helles memorial. This was probably small comfort for his family. Nevertheless, two of Jim's brothers subsequently enlisted for World War 1, and later served in France.

Eddie Muhlhan survived the so-called Battle of Krithia physically unscathed, but no doubt the mental scars were pronounced. His three best mates from Rushworth had died within two weeks.

12 CASUALTIES OF WAR

Those who lose their lives in war are often the primary focus of remembrance and commemoration, and rightly so. However, this is sometimes at the expense of all those who suffered physically and mentally as a result of their involvement in war.

Over three hundred thousand Australians served overseas in World War 1, out of a population of just under five million. There were around three-quarters of a million admissions to hospital amongst those who went overseas, for wounds, gassing, illness, injury and so-called "shell-shock" i.e. on average, every digger who went overseas to the war went to hospital on between two and three occasions.

Badly Wounded at Gallipoli

As well as the deaths of four young Rushworth and district men killed on 25 April, there were many other non-fatal local casualties that we tend to forget. One of those seriously wounded soon after the landing was Captain Roy Hodgson.

Roy was shot in the hip joint by a Turkish sniper when he was acting as a forward observer for his artillery battery. He was reported dead, and an obituary even appeared in the Kyabram Guardian of 11.5.1915.

After several operations on his hip, Roy was repatriated to Australia in 1917. One leg was much shorter than the other, and he had to always walk with a stick.

Family Background

Roy's father, Robert Hodgson, was Headmaster at the Rushworth State School in the period leading up to the war. Roy had also taught at the school briefly as a trainee before commencing his military training. He had spent his formative years with many of the young Rushworth men who subsequently went away to war.

Military Service

Roy was in the first intake of cadets at Duntroon Military College, where he spent four years in training. He graduated in 1914, and was given a commission as a Lieutenant in the 5th Battery of the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade. After his repatriation, he stayed in the army until 1934, rising to become head of military intelligence.

Triumph Over Adversity

Despite his disability, Roy went on to have an active career as a diplomat. Prior to and during World War 11, he rose to become head of the Department of External Affairs (now Foreign Affairs). After that war, he served as a diplomat, including a stint as the Australian Ambassador to France.

Deserving Our Respect

Roy was perhaps one of the lucky ones. Apart from the 60,000+ Australians who died in World War 1, another estimated 8,000 died prematurely due to war-related causes. A further 550 men are estimated to have died by their own hand, as a result of the horrific experiences they had endured.

Many of the "survivors" were scarred for life, physically and mentally. They may not have died, or won medals for gallantry, but they also deserve our respect and remembrance.

Reference: Noonan, David, *Those We Forget* (MUP 2015); Australian Dictionary of Biography

13 SURVIVOR GUILT

A question that almost inevitably comes up for those who come home from war is to ask "Why did I survive, when others did not?" In war, injury and death are often the result of random circumstances which are completely unpredictable. However, the survivors may still carry with them a sense of guilt, sometimes for the rest of their lives.

Our correspondent Edwin Muhlhan may well have suffered from survivor guilt. His three best mates, who he had enlisted with soon after the war commenced, were all dead within two weeks of the commencement of the Gallipoli campaign. Many other Rushworth lads were maimed and injured.

Visit to a Fortune Teller

While he was in Egypt, and playing the "five-bob-a-day tourist", Edwin visited an old Egyptian man who was a fortune teller. He was advised that he was soon going to be involved in some serious fighting, but would come through without a scratch. At the time, the troops had no idea that they were going to be involved in a seaborne invasion of Turkey.

Edwin brushed off the prophecy as nothing but a bit of an amusement. However, he did in fact survive unscathed through the early months of the Gallipoli campaign, until he was evacuated through illness.

Off to Hospital

In a battle zone, a large number of the soldiers succumb to illness, because of things such as exposure, poor diet and hygiene. Disease was rife, and it meant that many Anzac troops were taken off Gallipoli to hospitals in such diverse places as the Greek islands, Malta, Egypt and England.

Surprisingly, Eddie Muhlhan's illness was apparently unrelated to his war service. He was diagnosed with varicocele, which is similar to varicose veins, and affects the scrotum.

Eddie was also diagnosed with the vague term "debility". One can only guess at what that meant, given his experiences during the first four months on Gallipoli.

Treatment in England

In August 1915, Eddie was transferred off Gallipoli to casualty clearing stations on the Greek islands of Imbros and then Mudros, before ultimately being sent to England for further treatment.

He was treated at the St George Hospital on Hyde Park Corner in London, and eventually declared permanently unfit for further service. During his time in England, Eddie met and married a young Englishwoman.

Repatriation

Once declared unfit for service, it was decided that Eddie was to be sent back to Australia and discharged from the army. As a result, he missed being involved in the horrors of the war in Europe, which is where many of the Australian troops finished up after the end of the Gallipoli campaign.

Eddie returned to Australia in April 1916, and then to Rushworth. In early May, there was a tumultuous "Welcome Home" event held at the Shire Hall, to welcome Eddie, Sgt Major Hoare, and Corporal Burge of Wanalta.

The soldiers may well have been less than enthusiastic about their participation, even though the town felt that it was doing the right thing.

14 THE AUGUST OFFENSIVE

Soon after the landings at Gallipoli in April 1915, the campaign was reduced to a battle of attrition. Both the Turkish and British forces were well-entrenched, and the front line did not change much over a period of months.

By early August, the British generals had decided that a new front needed to be established at Suvla Bay, which was about 6 kilometres north of where the Australians and New Zealanders were positioned.

This new landing involved mainly British troops, with part of the designated role of the Anzac troops to be engaged in diversionary tactics, to try to draw the Turks' attention and reserves away from the main thrust.

Battle of Lone Pine

The infamous Battle of Lone Pine was launched on 6 August, and raged for four days. Australian troops took some strategically-positioned Turkish trenches, and held them against repeated counter-attacks by the Turks.

Eddie Muhlhan's 7th Battalion was heavily engaged at Lone Pine, but it is uncertain whether he was there. It was about this time that he was taken off Gallipoli with illness, never to return to the front.

The 7th, however, still contained many local lads, both those who had survived the first few months of the Gallipoli campaign, and the reinforcements that flooded in to cover the heavy losses already sustained.

The Battle of Lone Pine is often remembered because no less than 7 Australians won VCs, but there were really no winners.

Horrendous Casualties

The 6th Battalion, a Victorian-raised battalion like the 7th, was also engaged at Lone Pine. Local lad George Wedmore was one of the many casualties of the severe fighting. Horrendous losses were experienced by both sides – an estimated 2000 Australian casualties and more than double that for the Turks, in just four days.

George Wedmore of the Weir

George was one of the many Australians killed at Lone Pine. He had been working as a labourer at the Goulburn Weir when he enlisted in the AIF at Nagambie, just before Christmas 1914. After training, he arrived at Gallipoli with the 3rd reinforcements of the 6th Battalion, at the end of April 1915.

George's father, also George, lived and worked with his son at the weir. There is a strong connection between the family and Rushworth, because George's sister Rose married Jack Le Deux, and the couple lived in Rushworth for many years.

Quite a Gloom was Cast

The Nagambie Times (1.9.1915) reported that "quite a gloom was cast over the district last Thursday when it became known that Lance-Corporal George Wedmore…had been claimed as another victim of the cruel war which is at present raging…(George) had spent nearly all his life at Goulburn Weir, therefore the news of his death came as a shock to all. We offer our heartfelt sympathy to his parents, brothers and sisters, all of whom have the consolation of knowing that he died fighting for his King and country." Whether it was, in fact, any consolation to the family is a moot point.

15 THE CHARGE AT THE NEK

Most Australians have some awareness of the so-called charge at The Nek, because if its depiction in the 1981 Peter Weir film "Gallipoli". Like the Battle of Lone Pine, charge at The Nek was intended to be only a feint, to distract the Turks from actions further to the north. Like the Battle of Lone Pine, it was unmitigated disaster, albeit on a much smaller scale than Lone Pine.

Four Waves of Light Horsemen

Light Horsemen were generally selected for their riding and shooting ability, as well as being able to "live rough". They fought as infantry at Gallipoli.

The ill-conceived thrust at The Nek involved four waves of men from the 8th (Victorian) and 10th (Western Australian) Light Horse Regiments, who were ordered to attack Turkish trenches across a narrow saddle of land which dropped away steeply on both sides. This meant that the men had to bunch together, making them an easy target for Turkish machine guns and rifles.

Many of the boys in the 8th Light Horse had been recruited in country Victoria, including quite a few from the local area. The 8th formed the first two waves of the attack.

Trooper John Considine

Born at Moora in 1894, John Considine was a local boy who was killed in the Charge at the Nek. He had attended school in Rushworth and was an apprentice baker by the time he enlisted for World War 1, aged 20. His step-mother Elizabeth was a publican, who ran the Rushworth Hotel at the top end of High Street, on the corner of Taylor Street. (The bottom pub was then called the Cricketers Arms). John lived there with his mother and three step-siblings.

There Wasn't a Man Standing

Tatura boy Andy Crawford survived The Nek to provide an eye witness account of the charge. "We went out to attack the trenches opposite…The Turks had not fired a shot until the first line had got halfway to their trenches. Then they opened up a tremendous fire from machine guns and rifles and commenced to throw bombs. The crackle was deafening and the smoke from the bombs terrific.

Nearly all of the front line was shot down. We were only a minute or two behind the first line, and when we got up to them, there wasn't a man standing, so we lay down and took as much cover as we could…The 10th Regiment formed the third and fourth lines and they came out soon after us. We got up and tried to rush forward with them but it was of no use. I got hit in my thigh as I started to get up, and was rolled right over." (Tatura Guardian 12.10.1915)

Questionable Tactics

The Nek was one of many actions during the course of the war that give rise to serious reservations about the tactics employed, and the apparent disregard for the lives of the troops. The 8th Light Horse suffered 80% casualties for no gain.

John Considine has no known grave, but his name is commemorated on the Lone Pine Memorial with nearly 5000 other Australians and New Zealanders.

16 WILLIAM CAMERON AND HILL 60

Shepparton News readers are probably aware of Gallipoli diary of Rushworth lad William Cameron, excerpts of which were published in the lead up to Anzac Day 2015. The diary gives a graphic account of life on Gallipoli from late May until William's death in early September.

William is a relative of former Rushworth resident Lucy Harper (nee Munsey).

Witness to The Nek Slaughter

The charge at The Nek was carried out by the men of the 8th and 10th Light Horse Regiments. William Cameron was a member of the 9th Light Horse, and witnessed the slaughter.

"I was in charge of sharpshooters who took up position on the right…as they (the 8th Light Horse) rose to charge, the Turkish machine guns just poured out lead and our fellows went down like corn before a scythe…The distance to the enemy trench was less than 50 yards yet not one of those two lines (the 8th Light Horse) got anywhere near it. The 10th were called up and ordered out, and went in similar manner facing death unflinchingly. They were cut up something terribly…Yes, it was heroic. It was marvellous the way those men rose, yet it was murder."

August Offensive Fails

Like all other attempts to break the Turkish lines, the August offensive was a failure. William summed up the view of many of the Allied troops – "The whole operation seems to have resulted in failure, partly from want of full recognition of the Turks' ability to fight and because we had not enough men at hand to hold on when positions were won, which is the disheartening part."

Promotion to Lieutenant

By late August, William had been rapidly promoted through the ranks to become a Lieutenant. "We wet this occasion in the Colonel's dugout…" Later there was a reception for recently promoted soldiers which was "most cordial and we sang and toasted until 8 o'clock."

Rumours of a possible imminent withdrawal from Gallipoli added to the good humour of the occasion, although this proved to be a "furphy".

Hill 60

Shortly afterwards, the 9th Light Horse were moved 5 km north for another forward push. After a tiring march, "we slept very soundly and relished the change from trenches to grass." The objective for the push was the Turkish held Hill 60. This proved to be part of the last major Allied assault of the Gallipoli campaign, as the troops at Anzac tried to link up with the British forces at Suvla Bay.

8 Out of 42

After repeated attempts to break the deadlock, William lamented the casualties. "In my own troop, I could only muster eight effective out of forty-two." In a subsequent attack, William was killed in early September, and his diary abruptly stopped. He is buried in the 7th Field Ambulance Cemetery, but his exact resting place is unknown. A special memorial at the cemetery notes "Their glory shall not be blotted out."

Reference – "Our Anzacs" Commemorative Booklet, Shepparton News (April 2015)

17 A LONELY GRAVE IN MALTA

In the cauldron of war, people finish up in some unexpected places. Such was the case for a young Rushworth soldier, Hector Hicks. Hector was part of the 6th Reinforcements of the 8th Battalion, which landed at Gallipoli in early August 2015. He joined the battalion on 6.8.1915, coinciding with the launch of the Battle of Lone Pine and related battles. Hector lasted for one day, and did not even get to the front line.

The 8th Battalion was in reserve, and was subject to concentrated artillery attack by the Turks. Receiving wounds to the face, hands and a compound fracture of the right leg, Hector was evacuated from Gallipoli, and finished up in the Floriana Hospital on the island nation of Malta.

Signing a Death Warrant

Born at Carag Carag to parents Thomas and Ellen, Hector was only 18 when he enlisted in late April 1915. His enlistment was accepted in Rushworth by Mr Edwin Muhlhan Senior, editor of the Rushworth Chonicle, and father of Edwin Junior whose story we followed earlier in this series. Edwin Senior was a Justice of the Peace, and therefore able to sign off on enlistments.

Men under 21 had to have written parental approval to enlist. Thomas duly signed a statement endorsing Hector's application to enlist. In the light of later events, it may have been hard for him not to feel some blame for his son's fate, albeit unwarranted.

A Large Family Grieves

Hector was the youngest son in a large family, with connections to many local families (including Marks', McLeods and Downings) through the marriages of his brothers and sisters.

The large family was left to grieve when the news came through in September that Hector had succumbed to his wounds and injuries, and had died. At that early stage, it was assumed that he had died at Gallipoli.

The family notice in the Kyabram Free Press (17.9.1915) ended with the words "Greater love hath no man than this", part of a well-known Biblical quote, which in full, ends with "That a man lay down his life for his friends."

Died of "Exhaustion"

Hector was first evacuated to the 15th Casualty Clearing Station on the Greek island of Mudros. A few days later, he was placed aboard the hospital ship "Dunluce Castle", on which he was transferred to Malta.

Soon afterwards, Hector was reported as being "dangerously ill." He died on 20.8.1915, nearly two weeks after his evacuation from Gallipoli. His army file reports that he "died of exhaustion", perhaps a way of softening the blow for the family, by shielding them from the horrific nature of his injuries.

A Grave on Foreign Soil

Hector is buried in Grave AX6 at the Pieta Cemetery, on Malta, one of 1468 Commonwealth casualties buried there. Less than 200 of the casualties are Australians from the Gallipoli campaign and unlike Gallipoli, Pieta would rarely see any Australian visitors. It seems so isolated and remote from Australia, so far away from Hector's family.

18 WOMEN AT WAR

Unlike later conflicts, there was very limited opportunity for women to be directly involved in Australia's war effort during World War 1. The main official role that was open to women was through service as nurses, and several local women signed up to serve in this capacity.

During the Gallipoli campaign, hospitals were set up and expanded in many places around the Mediterranean Sea, including Egypt, the Greek islands and Malta. Many of the casualties were sent on to England for further treatment and recuperation.

Over 2000 Australian nurses served overseas during World War 1, and seven of them are listed on the Shire of Waranga war memorial in Rushworth.

Nurse Louie Bicknell

One of the nurses listed on the local war memorial is Staff Nurse Louisa Annie Bicknell, or "Louie" as she was better known. Louie's family were farmers on the Elmore-Toolleen road at Runnymede, then part of the Shire of Waranga.

Louie was the seventh of a family of 12 children of John and Eliza Bicknell, many of whom were born at Runnymede. She completed her nursing training at Mooroopna Base Hospital. By the time she signed up for service with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), she and a friend she had trained with (also from the Elmore area) were running a private hospital in Bairnsdale.

Off to Egypt

Aged 35, Louie enlisted at the end of March 1915, and within two weeks was on her way from Sydney to Egypt on HMAT "Kyarra", with 13 other Victorian nurses. Her arrival in Egypt, where she was stationed at the No 1 Australian General Hospital, coincided with the arrival of huge numbers of casualties from the Gallipoli campaign.

The Victorian nurses hit the Egyptian ground running, having to cope with injuries and wounds the like of which they had probably never seen before.

All in the Game

Sadly, Louie has the dubious distinction of being the first Australian nurse to die on active service. She had only been in Egypt for a month when she died of septic poisoning. At the time, her matron wrote "we are in deep grief, (as) she was one of the brightest, healthiest and unselfish nurses I have known. She was as brave as any fighting soldier, and said when she was dying, "How hard it is to die with so little accomplished, but I would go through it all again to help, and it is all in the game."

Louie was one of 20 to 30 Australian nurses who died on active service during World War 1.

The Work Goes On

Louie was buried with full military honours in what is now called the Cairo War Memorial Cemetery, amongst "our fallen Australian boys, and an open grave was waiting next (to) hers for the remains of one of our wounded men to be interred that day. The work goes on just the same today. We have no time for regrets here, but some of these sad scenes we can never blot out of memory." (Matron Pilkington, AANS)

19 ON THE HOME FRONT

There was a limited role that women could play in active service overseas, restricted to the Australian Army Nursing Service. Employment opportunities for women at home were also extremely limited. However, World War 1 saw a massive rise in the role that women played in voluntary roles which supported the war effort.

Wife of the Governor-General, Lady Helen Munro-Ferguson set about establishing the Australian Branch of the British Red Cross, only two days after the declaration of war in August 1914. Country towns were quick to establish local branches, and within a year there were over 400 branches in country Victoria.

Rushworth Red Cross Society

Established in early 1915, the Rushworth Red Cross Society was organised under the capable presidency of Olive Wray for its first three years. Grace Stewart (nee Semmens), wife of local solicitor J Burt Stewart, was Honorary Secretary in what was essentially an organisation of middle-class women of the town. "Many ladies (have) expressed themselves as anxious to lend a helping hand" (Rushworth Chronicle 18.12.1914) and membership subsequently included women from prominent local families e.g. Taylor, Lambden, Pyle, Walbran, Semmens, Plummer and O'Sullivan.

By mid-1915, the Rushworth branch was an active contributor to the war effort, raising funds, and producing and collecting a wide range of goods that could be sent overseas to the Australian troops. In July, the Rushworth Chronicle gave an extensive list of items ready to be sent, including a great contribution from Mrs Steigenberger, of Waranga, aged 75, who "has knitted 15 scarves for the local branch."

Mesdame Olive Wray

Olive Wray was the wife of the rector of St Paul's Anglican church in Rushworth. She may have been motivated to lead the Red Cross in Rushworth because her husband (Frederick William Wray) had already left for Egypt to serve as a Chaplain in the army.

Reverend Wray served at Gallipoli, where he was Mentioned in Despatches for "distinguished and gallant service", despite suffering from enteritis and dysentery. Apart from a brief trip back to

Australia at the end of 1915, Olive did not see her husband for five years. Like many Australian women at the time, throwing herself into voluntary work was one strategy for coping with the loneliness and anguish associated with having her husband in a war zone.

An Impressive Contribution

After gearing up in 1915, the first full year of operations in 1916 revealed an impressive contribution by the Red Cross. As well as raising well in excess of 400 pounds ($800) – a huge sum in those days – for the benefit of the French Red Cross and others, the local group co-ordinated a large number of volunteers to provide a steady stream of "comforts" to the troops. In the process, women were gaining many skills in management and organisation which would stand them in good stead in the post-war years.

Reference: McKernan, Michael, The Australian People and the Great War (Thomas Nelson Australia, 1980)

20 THE GALLIPOLI CAMPAIGN ENDS

As 1915 drew to a close, the Gallipoli campaign was also winding down. The campaign had been a complete failure in its inability to achieve its major military goal. Within a few weeks of the landing, the invasion of Turkey had become a stalemate, with a resilient Turkish defence of their homeland foiling all Allied attempts to advance towards Constantinople. As the weather deteriorated dramatically towards the end of the year, a decision was finally made to withdraw the Allied troops.

A Terrible Wrench

For the Australians, it was a terrible wrench to leave their dead mates on foreign soil. Around 8000 Australians had died in the Gallipoli campaign. Ten of these men and one woman were from the former Shire of Waranga, and are listed on the Rushworth war memorial. There was no possibility of repatriating their remains for burial in Australia. Many would not receive a decent burial until after the war, if indeed their remains could then be found and identified.

Many thousands of other Australians had been maimed or wounded, or had succumbed to illness during the eight month campaign.

The Withdrawal

The withdrawal from Gallipoli, with no casualties, is sometimes lauded as a great achievement. One wonders whether the Turks, who could hardly have been unaware of the evacuation, decided to just let the Anzac troops go unhindered.

There must have been a massive sense of relief amongst the Turkish troops that the invasion was over. Perhaps there was also a grudging appreciation of, and respect for the Anzacs that contributed to an apparently seamless withdrawal.

The Birth of a Nation?

The landing at Gallipoli is sometimes touted as signifying the birth of the Australian nation as we know it today. This narrative runs along the lines that a nation can only really be tested in the cauldron of war.

However, that view does not seem to take any cognisance of many other factors that come into play in nation-building: tens of thousands of years of successful occupation by indigenous Australians, settlement by our white forebears, the multicultural melting pot that was the gold rush, the significant

role of women, and by 1915, well over 100 years of social, economic, agricultural, industrial, educational, cultural, scientific, environmental, technological and political achievements and developments.

A Change in Attitude

At the end of the Gallipoli campaign, a change in mood was certainly evident in large parts of the Australian population. Instead of an almost universal gung-ho attitude to Australian involvement in the war, and subservience to the British Empire, divisions started to open up.

The long casualty lists that appeared daily in the papers, the perceived ineptitude in British command of the Australian forces, and the fact that the war was clearly not going to be "over by Christmas", all contributed to a growing sense of disillusionment on the home front. Political and social divisions were starting to emerge which were to be accentuated by the conscription referendum and other issues in 1916.

SECTION 2 - 1916

COMPRISING ARTICLES 21-44 PUBLISHED IN THE WARANGA NEWS DURING 2016

21 A BRIEF RESPITE

Early 1916 saw most of the Australian troops back in Egypt. After the failure of the eight month long Gallipoli campaign, it was a time for rest, recuperation, training and reinforcement, while their next move was decided by the Allied military strategists.

Ultimately, it was decided that most of the Australian infantry would go to France to serve on the Western Front. Embarkation for France began in March 1916.

The Light Horse would remain in Egypt to help protect British assets, particularly the Suez Canal, which was of vital strategic importance to the war effort. Their main protagonists would be the Turks, whose influence at that time extended well into the Sinai Peninsula.

Back to Rushworth

For a small number of Australians, illness and injury meant that they were repatriated to Australia. One of those who was lucky enough to come home, albeit briefly, was Sergeant Egbert Smith. "Eggie", as he was nicknamed, "was amongst the lucky ones in that he escaped injury at the hands of the enemy, but like many others, he eventually went down to the prevailing illness caused by the unsatisfactory surroundings."

Smith had contracted enteric (or typhoid) fever, which spread rapidly in the trenches at Gallipoli because of the unsanitary conditions. He spent a month in hospital in Egypt before being repatriated.

Welcome Home

In late 1915, Rushworth started gearing up for the return of soldiers. When Egbert arrived, "some hundreds of men, women and children assembled at the Rushworth Railway Station." They included school children, army cadets in uniform and members of the Rushworth Brass Band "under bandmaster Williams, and as the train steamed into the station they played "Home, Sweet Home"."

There was much cheering and patriotic speech making on the platform, before Egbert responded. Typical of many Australian soldiers of the time, he downplayed his role. "He did not think he had done anything great. He simply went forward on the path of duty and was prepared to go again." He lamented the death of Lt William Cameron, who had been in his unit, and who was mentioned earlier in Anzac Tales.

Call to the "Eligibles"

A procession, led by the band, marched down to the rotunda in High Street, where more patriotic speeches were made and music played.

Local solicitor, J Burt Stewart, used Egbert's example to exhort other young men to enlist. "Were it not for such men as Sgt Smith, what would become of the British Empire? What would become of Australia? …Sgt Smith's words and his presence there amongst them should prove an inspiration to other young men of the district to follow his lead and do likewise."

Not everyone shared Stewart's enthusiasm, which effectively constituted the opening shots in the conscription referendum debate of 1916.

Back to War

Meanwhile, true to his word, "Eggie" embarked on another stint of overseas service. Being a Light Horseman, he would serve in the Middle East, where he had many adventures over the next three years.

Reference: Murchison Advertiser 26.11.1915 and 3.12.1915

22 BACK IN EGYPT

At the end of the Gallipoli campaign in December 1915, most of the Australian troops from the Gallipoli campaign were returned to Egypt.

One of the local boys who saw service at Gallipoli, then found himself back in Egypt, was Ernest LaPeyre. Ernest had been in B Company of the 7th Battalion, along with quite a few other Rushworth and district soldiers. Several had been killed, many others were sick and injured, and the long and brutal campaign would also have taken its toll on everyone's mental health.

Although he escaped Gallipoli physically unscathed, his experience as an infantryman may have prompted Ernest to look at alternatives for future service. He was transferred to the Imperial Camel Corps in January 1916.

Further Training

The Camel Corps was clearly going to remain in the Middle East, to fight the Turks and their allies, while most of the infantry would go to Europe. Ernest underwent further training in Egypt to prepare him for his new unit, which he joined later in the year.

Despite being warned of the dangers of Cairo's brothels, many troops ignored the warnings. While back in Egypt, Ernest contracted venereal disease, which was not uncommon amongst the Australian troops. By February 1916, nearly 6000 Australians had to be treated in isolation wards, with an average stay of over a month. Authorities took a dim view of this drain on manpower and medical resources, which in Ernest's case considerably delayed his deployment.

Imperial Camel Corps

Initially formed in January 1916, the Imperial Camel Corps (ICC) was used to fight in a little-known theatre of WW1 – the western Egyptian desert – against the pro-Turkish Senussi tribesmen. Ernest was posted to Matruh, on the north-west Egyptian coast in June 1916. He travelled there by ship from Alexandria.

It has been suggested that some infantry battalion commanders used the formation of the ICC to offload some of their "hard cases". This is not to suggest that Ernest was in this category, but subsequent events listed in his army file seem to indicate that he was no angel.

After the Senussi had been subdued, the ICC was deployed against the Turks in the Middle East, alongside the Australian Light Horse and other units.

LaPeyre Brothers

Two of Ernest's older brothers, Victor and Leon, both served in WW1. Victor, a 34 year old bachelor, was an older enlistee who would serve in France for over two years, from 1916-18.

Leon was part of the 6th Battalion reinforcements that arrived in Egypt in early January 1916, so he missed the Gallipoli campaign. He also went to France, but was badly wounded near Rouen in May. He was hospitalised in England before being repatriated to Australia later in the year.

Their father, Jean Auguste LaPeyre, was no doubt proud of the fact that his boys had served in the land of his birth and his forebears.

23 TRAINING FOR THE ARTILLERY

With the rapidly increasing mechanisation of war, the artillery became an integral part of the armed forces. Some of the troops arriving in Egypt in early 1916 were being trained for the artillery. Local Waranga lad, Alfred "Boy" Hammond, was in this category.

"Boy" was an educated young man, having just completed a science degree at Melbourne University towards the end of 1915. This was a proviso for his parents giving their consent for him to enlist.

Being a prolific writer of letters and diaries, "Boy" has left a wealth of material for latter day researchers, including relative Irene Finch (nee Laurie). Irene has published an excellent book documenting the family history in WW1.

Arriving in Egypt

Having been involved with his studies, Alfred Hammond missed the Gallipoli campaign, arriving in Egypt in mid-December 1915 as the withdrawal was taking place. Like earlier Australian arrivals, he marvelled at Egyptian history and visited all the landmarks.

His first Christmas on foreign shores was recorded in his diary. "Xmas Day. Breakfast: bully beef and biscuits. Dinner (i.e. lunch): biscuits and bully beef. Went to Cairo in afternoon. Visited the mosques and citadel. Got first mail from Australia today, 5 letters. Had Christmas Dinner at the Petrograd in Cairo." Hopefully the dinner at the Petrograd Hotel was a bit more exciting than the two meals eaten earlier that day.

In its infinite wisdom, the army chose to pay the soldiers on New Year's Eve. Alfred's diary continues – "Friday 31.12.1915 - Inoculated. (sic) Paid at night. Few of the boys come home merry. Sergeant's tent let down. Lots of abuse hurled around by Sergeant Major."

Into Training

Straight after Christmas, serious training in gun laying started i.e. learning how to align the axis of the barrel so that it pointed in the right direction for firing. By mid-March, when the Australians were ready to go to France, "Boy" had become quite proficient in this role. He had also been promoted to Bombardier, the artillery equivalent of a Lance-Corporal in the infantry.

There was great pleasure derived from Christmas parcels, probably the work of the Red Cross, even though they did not arrive until late January. Writing to his sister Edith, or "Cis", "Boy" enthused that "We received some Xmas cake, tinned fruits, lollies, a pipe and a tin of tobacco as our Xmas box. Not too bad, eh?"

Embarkation for France

By 14 March 1916, "Boy" was in Alexandria, and boarded a ship bound for Marseilles, in southern France. Thousands of Australian troops were to make this week-long voyage across the

Mediterranean Sea, to then be transported by train to the front. His diary recorded "Left at 5am in the morning. 1992 troops on board and 300 horses. Tucker not too bad and weather good. No parades so having a good time. Ships steering a zig gag (sic) course. Saw a British submarine at dinner time. Slept on deck. Lights out at 5.30. 12 knots by day, 17 knots by night."

Reference: Finch, Irene, *Somewhere in France* (Irene Finch, 2015)

24 MORE ENLISTMENTS

With the losses at Gallipoli, and the shift of the bulk of the Australian troops to France, there was constant pressure at home for more enlistments. In January 1916, Australia offered Great Britain an immediate 50,000 volunteers, and 9000 a month thereafter.

There was still a steady stream of young (and not so young) men enlisting to serve. They had heard plenty of stories about the Gallipoli campaign by this stage, but the horrors that awaited them on the Western Front (Europe) were yet to be well documented. That would all change in 1916.

Hit and Miss

Some of the men who enlisted around this time ended up serving overseas, were repatriated to Australia, then died either during, or a short time after the war. Invariably, these deaths were as a result of their war service. However, they are often not recognised on lists commemorating the war dead.

Our war dead have an exalted status in Australia, but surely people who died young as a result of their war service should have the same status. Indeed, all men and women who enlisted to go overseas, knowing their potential fate, are deserving of recognition for their courage in adversity.

Rushworth Veterans Die Young

Several Rushworth lads are buried in our local cemetery, their early deaths clearly a result of their war service. Ben Jones, who enlisted in February 1916 as a 30 year old, was a Rushworth soldier in this category. He probably never should have enlisted, as he was often short of breath, and apparently had a bad cough for six years before his death.

In training camp, on the miserably damp Salisbury Plains of southern England, Ben had chronic bronchitis and pleurisy, resulting in time in hospital. When he finally got to France in early 1917, his stay was short-lived. He went back to England, and was repatriated to Australia in July. Sadly, Ben died in the Caulfield Military Hospital, and was buried in Rushworth.

The Demise of Egbert Smith

Egbert Smith, who we met in an earlier story, returned to Australia with shocking facial injuries after the war. A member of the 9th Light Horse, he had been in all the major battles of the Middle East campaign, until badly wounded at the battle of Es Salt in May 1918. Captured by the Turks, he was eventually released when the Allied forces captured the last Turkish bastions of Damascus and Aleppo (tragically, still the scene of bitter fighting today).

Egbert made it back to Australia in 1919, had numerous operations on his face, and went back to work with his father, bootmaker Fred Smith, in High Street. However, "his health was never the same", and he died quite suddenly in August 1923. He is buried at Rushworth.

Statistics Can Lie

A statistic often quoted about WW1 is that about 60,000 Australians died. This figure does not include many thousands who died prematurely as a result of their service. Boys like Ben and Egbert are deserving of greater recognition.

Reference: Nunan, David, *Those We Forget* (MUP 2014)

25 ANOTHER NEW ENLISTMENT

With pressure mounting on Australia to supply more volunteers, John Sutton Laurie enlisted in the AIF in February 1916. Nearly 30 when he enlisted in Seymour, John was older than many of the earlier enlistees. He was a bachelor, and was a farmer prior to his enlistment.

Writing to his brother Will a few days after entering camp, John enthused "Just a note to let you know I am getting on all right. We are having a bonzer time of it. There is any amount of sport, a concert or pictures every night and next Friday night they start boxing competitions. Tomorrow is a half holiday for the races. Nearly all the camp is going in, somewhere between 2 and 3 thousand. We got our kit a few days ago, tons of clothes of all sorts and 2 pairs of boots."

A Prolific Letter Writer and Diarist

John Laurie was a prolific letter writer and diarist. Fortunately, his family have retained his writings, which graphically capture his experiences of the war first hand.

After just over three months of training in Victoria, Jack and his mates boarded His Majesty's Transport (HMT) "Persic" to go to the war in Europe. Unlike most of the earlier troops, who had gone via Egypt, these troops were transported across the Indian Ocean, around the southern tip of Africa, then on to England. Further training would follow on the Salisbury Plains, in the south of England, after the two months long sea voyage.

It Will be Bonzer

Writing to his future wife Rose Hammond while at sea, John said "Just a note to let you know that I am still alive and above board. Though I was a bit off colour for a start, I'm beginning to get my sea legs a bit now and after a while it will be bonzer. We have very little to do as there is not much room on board for drilling. About half an hour's physical jerks is all we have done so far, so at this rate I reckon we will be as fat and lazy as pigs by the end of the voyage. We are to have sports at one port on the way over, so that will be a welcome break in the trip. We get the very best of food on board including pudding for dinner so you can see it is a very big improvement on camp life in that respect."

A Boxing Champ on Board

The current Australian lightweight boxing champion, "Hughie" Mehegan was also on board the "Persic", much to the delight of the men. Mehegan fought over 90 professional bouts in the days when the bigger fights went for 20 x 3 minute rounds. Hughie helped organise boxing tournaments, and regularly sparred with the officers to teach them some skills. John reported in his diary "There are several sets of boxing gloves on board, and any amount of boxers, so there is plenty of sport and some black eyes." Ironically, Hughie Mehegan died in 1917 of injuries sustained in a boxing bout.

Reference: Finch, Irene, *Somewhere in France* (Irene Finch, 2015)

26 NURSE NIELSEN GOES TO WAR

Staff Nurse Mary Margaretta Nielsen of Rushworth boarded HMAT "Kyarra" in Melbourne in late August 1915. She was bound for the Middle East, where the Gallipoli campaign was raging. Her first unit was the No 2 Australian General Hospital, based at Mena, near the pyramids. This hospital was initially under canvas, before moving into the converted Mena Hotel.

After serving in Egypt for several months, Mary came back to Australia on the "Nestor" in February 1916. Her nursing duties on board involved tending to the sick, wounded and maimed from Gallipoli. The "Nestor" left Suez on 9/2/1916, with the voyage to Australia lasting just over a month.

She sailed back to Egypt later that year, where she served until early 1917, before going on to the Western Front in Europe.

Family Background

Born in 1885 in Rushworth, Mary went to school in Whroo before doing three years of nursing training at the Mooroopna Hospital. Mooroopna was then the main Goulburn Valley hospital.

Her father Niels, who was mine host at the Whroo Inn, had died well before the war. Born in Denmark, he came to the Rushworth area with his parents in the 1860s. Mary's mother, also Mary (nee Hageman) lived in Moora Road at the time she enlisted, aged 30. By then Mary already had nine years of experience, working at Mooroopna Hospital and Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital, as well as being a charge sister at St Andrew's Private Hospital in Brighton for a time.

Mary enlisted with her best friend, Edith Ann Moorhouse, who was born in Undera in 1886. They had trained together at Mooroopna. During the war, they often served in the same unit. Sadly, Edith was another Australian casualty of the Great War. While serving in France, she contracted pneumonia and died just after the official end of hostilities.

When Mary eventually went to England and France in 1917, she suffered from illness herself. She experienced recurrent laryngitis, swollen eyes, high temperature and fever. Her army file suggests that this was the result of nursing men who had been gassed at the front.

Coming Home

Promoted from Staff Nurse to Sister in late 1918, Mary continued to serve in Europe until the end of 1919. During 1919, she had three months leave of absence, during which time she studied at the British College of Cooking. She arrived back in Australia on Boxing Day 1919, and was finally discharged from the army three months later.

Mary married Cecil Percy Thompson in at St Mary's Anglican church in Elsternwick in November 1920, and died in Brighton in 1940. Cecil was also a veteran, who served in the Middle East for the duration of the war. He was in and out of hospital with various illnesses and disease while Mary was in Egypt, so there is a good chance that they met while he was there.

Sources: AWM, NAA and Trove websites; Alan McLean's obituary collection

27 FIRST ANZAC DAY COMMEMORATION

In April 1916, Rushworth recognised the first anniversary of the landings at Gallipoli. It was the forerunner of commemorations that have been held annually in the town ever since. The word Anzac comes from the acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), the name of the force that landed at Gallipoli on that fateful day.

Commemorations in Rushworth were fairly subdued, comprising a large gathering at the Rushworth State School which included the students and teachers, and many other community members. Interestingly, three of the four speakers were local ministers of religion. Reverends Rowell, Churchward and Miller all addressed the gathering, but no mention was made in the paper of what they said. It would be interesting to know.
Obviously, there was no Anzac Day march in Rushworth, as very few soldiers had returned by that stage. There were, however, marches in other places which established a long-held tradition.

Soldier's Father Speaks

Edwin Muhlhan Snr, who at the time of the gathering was editor of the Rushworth Chronicle, was the only lay speaker at the commemoration. Again, the paper did not report what he had to say, but it was probably an emotional experience for him. His son, also Edwin, was at sea, being repatriated to Australia from England because of illness.
The return of Eddie Muhlhan and Bennie Burge was reported in the Rushworth Chronicle a week after the report on the Anzac Day commemoration. Edwin Jnr had no physical injuries as such, but one suspects that apart from his illness, he was suffering from a severe case of what is now called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). His three best mates had died at Gallipoli, and he was virtually next to Bugler Jim Johnson when Jim went down.

More Soldiers Departing

At the same time, more young men were leaving to commence their training or go overseas. In Rushworth, there was a send-off for Privates Rupert Johnson and Les Spence.
Out at Moora, the locals gathered in the Presbyterian church to farewell Privates Andrew Lawrie and Jack Laurie, who despite the different surnames, were cousins. The evening comprised musical items, speeches and the presentation of gifts to the men, followed by supper. Cr McCrae, who chaired the evening, hoped that the gifts "would ever remind the departing boys of their Moora friends, who would ever be hoping for their safe return."

Call to Arms

A poem by Trooper Richard Cleary, who was in Egypt, urged young men to follow the lead of those who had already enlisted. It was published in the Chronicle, and in part it read –

Our country still is calling, don't let her call in vain
But come and avenge the noble boys that in this war have been slain
Our country sorely needs you, and every man that's fit
Should go and join the colors, and do his little bit.
Then rally up, young Australians; don't show the feather white…

On his return, Eddie Muhlhan may have had mixed feelings about this message.

Source: Rushworth Chronicle, 21 & 28.4.1916 and 5.5.1916

28 CALM BEFORE THE STORM

In May 1916, it was like the calm before the storm for the young men and women of Rushworth and district who were in the AIF. The Gallipoli campaign was well and truly over. Most of the infantry had

moved, or were being moved to France and England from the Middle East, but had little direct involvement in the European theatre of war by that stage. Astonishingly, there were around 100,000 Australian and New Zealand troops in France by July, at a time where Australia's population was still under 5 million.

More troops were coming from Australia, but they were now usually sailing via South Africa, rather than through the Suez Canal. There was limited fighting in the Middle East, as the Turks and the Allies regrouped after Gallipoli, and planned new strategies.

Into "The Nursery"

The war in Europe was already at a stalemate at the time the Australians and New Zealanders were arriving in 1916. Parallel lines of opposing German and Allied trenches and defensive fortifications stretched across northern France from Switzerland to the English Channel.

It was customary for troops new to the front line to go into a relatively quiet sector, to become familiar with the life in the trenches before going to sectors where there was more fighting. The Australians first went into an area called "The Nursery", south-west of Armentieres, in April 1916. Through May, activity was mainly limited to sniping, and patrolling in No-Man's Land, although the Australians got their first unpleasant taste of poisonous gas, concentrated artillery bombardments, and trench raids by the Germans.

A Fair Bit in Return

"Boy" Hammond, who we met in an earlier story, served with the artillery. His unit went into action in France before the Australian infantry. In a letter to his sister "Cis", he described part of his baptism of fire. "Have now shifted to another part, and are doing a bit to win the war – getting a fair bit of shooting to do. The Germans are sending us a fair bit in return, but have not done much damage so far. The shrieking of shells is quite common and we are used to it by now. At first if we were speaking and a shell came by we would stop in the middle of the sentence to listen for the burst, but have got past that now. The rattle of the machine guns at night reminds us of what it must be like up in the trenches."

Hunt for Souvenirs

Australian troops were well known for their love of a souvenir. "Boy" was no exception. "When a shell bursts close we always have a look for the fuse as they are souvenirs. So far I have not found a whole one, as they generally smash up when they hit anything solid."

References: Odgers, George, *100 Years of Australians at War* (Lansdowne Publishing PL, 1994); Finch, Irene, *Somewhere in France* (Finch, Irene, 2015)

29 SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

When writing letters and postcards home to family and friends, Australians serving in France would often start with the words, "Somewhere in France". Any outgoing mail was strictly censored. It was considered by the authorities that a specific location given in the text of a letter could potentially give the enemy restricted information on, for instance, where a particular battalion was located. Censorship also meant that the Australian troops were not free in correspondence to discuss actions that they were engaged in, or had been engaged in.

Mail was vitally important to both families at home and to the Australians serving overseas, despite the fact that it might take months to reach the intended recipient.

Embroidered Postcards

Many collections of World War 1 memorabilia include examples of postcards from France with an embroidered lace front cover. Presumably, these were embroidered by French women and sold to the troops as mementos to send home.

One of these postcards was addressed to a young woman at Pine Lodge, dated 7 May 1916, and headed with the familiar "Somewhere in France". In 1921, the young woman married Heriot Percy Breton Strawhorn, known as "Brit", who had served with the Australian forces in France and is listed on the Rushworth war memorial.

It was always assumed in the family that the precious little collection of postcards from France had come from "Brit". However, he did not arrive in France until much later in 1916.

An Impressive Moniker

Brit got his impressive moniker as the result of an 1887 Rushworth marriage between Andrew Strawhorn Jnr and Agnes Bedwell. The Strawhorn and Bedwell families were both early selectors north-west of Rushworth, with the names 'Heriot Percy Breton' coming down through the Bedwell line. A long line of Bedwells had served in the Royal Navy. Agnes' father Heriot Percy Bedwell resigned from the RN in 1852, came to the Victorian goldfields, then subsequently acquired property just out of Rushworth called "Belle Vue".

Five Strawhorn/McLean cousins and siblings served in the war, with Brit and his cousin Andrew Strawhorn being listed on the Rushworth war memorial. (Andrew is also listed at Colbinabbin and Kyneton – more about him in later stories) Brit had attended Moora South State School in the very early 1900s. It is believed he and Andrew were in the area at the time the war started because their uncle Robert had just died, and there were no boys in Robert's family to run the farm for his widow.

An Ongoing Mystery

Brit's family had moved from Rushworth to the Pine Lodge/Cosgrove district, where he probably met his wife to be. But perhaps her first love was the man who sent her the treasured little collection of beautiful French postcards, "with fondest love". What happened to him? Did he survive the war? Did he return to Australia a changed man? Did the relationship not stand the test of time? Or was there some other reason that it was Brit she ended up marrying?

30 SUPPORTING THE FRENCH

While the Australian troops were away, preparing to fight in France, in Rushworth there was significant support for the French Red Cross. In June 1916, a carnival was held to raise funds for the cause. There was an afternoon of activities held in the town, as well as a concert in the Shire Hall in the evening. Profits of over 150 pounds ($300) were raised at the carnival which, as well as being an excellent fundraiser, would have helped lift the spirits of the townspeople in those dark days.

The carnival included a whole host of activities, including sporting events, rides in Mr Slee's car (which was obviously still a novelty in 1916), stalls (sweets, flowers, produce and a "jumble" stall), raffles for bags of wheat, a wood sale, Fire Brigade events and afternoon tea.

An Active Committee

Unlike many of the community organisations of the day, which tended to be totally dominated by men, the carnival committee comprised both men and women. A meeting was held in the Masonic

Hall after the carnival, with local solicitor J Burt Stewart (who had his office in the present day Glasgow Buildings) in the chair.

Attendees included Mrs Wray, whose husband was overseas serving as a Chaplain in the army, along with Mesdames Stewart and Curtis, and Misses Carr and Lambden. Many of the men who attended were local business owners, including Messrs Lynch, Curtis, Chandler, Muhlhan, Slee, McDonald, Davys, Coyle and Prentice.

A Financial Success

Secretary/Treasurer of the group was Thomas Tulloch, who at the time owned the business known as D Wilson and Co. (Tulloch had previously worked for Daniel Wilson, then acquired the business from him) A comprehensive financial report was provided to the meeting, showing a profit of over 23 pounds for the concert, and 125 pounds for the afternoon carnival. Mr Tulloch said that when some outstanding amounts were received, the overall profit would be over 150 pounds.

The Chairman Sums Up

Mr Stewart summed up the efforts of the committee. "The people of Rushworth had every reason to congratulate themselves on the result of this effort. If they looked at the papers they would observe that this little town compared favourably with much larger places. This was not a wealthy community, but they were the class of people from whom donations were forthcoming for such appeals as this. He was sure the local Red Cross ladies were very pleased with the result."

In reference to the French people, who were going to be the beneficiaries of the profit, Mr Stewart said "The French were a very heroic people, as shown by their defence of Verdun. They (the committee) had assisted in a noble cause on behalf of a noble people."

As the war continued on the Western Front, the links between the Australian and French people strengthened irrevocably, and remain strong to this day. The French were amazed and delighted that Australians would come 20,000 kilometres from the other side of the world, to support them in their hour of need.

Source: Rushworth Chronicle, June 1916

31 THANKING THE WOMEN

In 1916, a letter from France arrived at an address in Albany, Western Australia, written by a former Rushworth lad, Jim Anderson (No 4069, 4th Battalion AIF). The purpose of the letter was to sincerely thank the recipients for sending him a parcel which had included a letter and scarf.

Jim wrote "It (the scarf) is a regular comfort to me in this very cold country. It has been snowing, raining and freezing here. It is terrible. I am quite proud of our women folk, especially our girls, who seem to be always doing, or trying to do something for us here…we are indeed grateful. You are encouraging us greatly by your efforts and are well worth protecting."

Although the letter does not say so, the scarf was probably knitted under the auspices of the local Red Cross group in Albany.

A Far Cry From the Bush

Conditions in France were a far cry from what Jim was used to, shearing in the backblocks of New South Wales. Having grown up in Rushworth, Jim enlisted at Casula, NSW, as a 39 year old in late 1915.

A veteran of the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902), Jim explained to the woman in Albany that he had visited their "pretty seaport town" on two occasions – going to, or returning from war.

In the Boer War, Jim had been in the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles, forerunners of the Light Horse. It almost goes without saying that the men were selected on the basis of being tough, good horsemen, crack shots and used to living in rough conditions.

Rushworth Boy at Heart

In his letter, Jim said "I may say I come from Victoria, a mining town called Rushworth. My mother and sisters live there and are all workers for the cause in some way or another."

Jim (James Percy Anderson) was one of twelve children of Rushworth blacksmith George Anderson and his wife Susan. George had run his smithy on the site now occupied by the Rushworth Community House. Sadly, he died in April 1916 while Jim was still away in France.

Remaining Circumspect

Reiterating his thanks towards the end of his letter, Jim said "I think you are another little friend added to my account and would indeed always be glad to hear from you."

Jim remained circumspect about his chances of surviving the war. "I may, of course, get killed at any moment, but I trust whatever may be my fate I have the satisfaction of knowing I have tried to do my little bit."

Thankfully, Jim was to survive the war, albeit being wounded on a couple of occasions, rising to the rank of sergeant and witnessing all the horrors of the battles on the Western Front. Like many Australian soldiers, he married an English woman before he returned home.

References: Rushworth Chronicle, June 1916; Bons, Tracey, Rushworth Businesses and Their Owners – Gold Rush to Great War

32 RECRUITING TRAIN COMES TO TOWN

As part of the campaign to recruit more young men to enlist in the AIF, the government decided to send a recruiting train around country areas. On board were various politicians, army personnel and a 30 piece band.

In addition to the recruiting train, there was already a local "Recruiting Committee" of concerned citizens, led by some of the Shire of Waranga councillors. There were also army recruiting sergeants based at strategic locations, whose sole job was to try to encourage more "eligibles" – basically men from 18-35 – to sign up.

Rushworth was considered an important enough location for the recruiting train to stop, which it did in mid-1916. Businesses closed from 2.30 to 4.00 "and this allowed many to attend who would otherwise have had no choice of doing so."

A Very Large Muster

When the train arrived in Rushworth, "there was a very large muster of people, amongst whom were many apparent likely recruits." The band led the procession from the station down to the rotunda in High Street, with the army cadets, townspeople and school children following behind.

The program, chaired by Cr Furphy, included speeches from five Federal and state politicians who had arrived on the train. In sometimes colourful language, they exhorted young men to enlist, but one would think that hearing from five politicians in succession would almost be enough to put anyone off.

Pulling No Punches

The pollies were followed by hard hitting speeches from two servicemen, one of whom had earlier been "standing shoulder to shoulder in the trenches with Private Jack Goodwin (No 1460, 8th Battalion AIF, who was later the father of sometime Rushworth minister Rev John Goodwin), a Rushworth boy, who although wounded in several places was looking forward to the time when he could go back again. Could they lag behind when they observed such patriotism as this?"

The program concluded with more music from the band, and the members of the band singing "There'll be no more German sausage." However, despite the best efforts of the speakers, only two new enlistments were forthcoming from Rushworth.

Not Impressed

An editorial piece in the next Rushworth Chronicle (2.6.16) poured scorn the recruiting train concept and its cost. "When one considers the cost of the train, with its band of 30 performers, to say nothing of the Parliamentary "junketers" and their dear lady friends, the cost per volunteer enrolled would probably not fall far short of 5 pounds – yet Parliament has the conscience, or rather want of it, to preach to us the necessity for economy."

The writer felt that the army recruiting sergeants and the local recruiting committees were far better placed to encourage the "eligibles" to enlist for overseas service, and went further to say that conscription should be introduced to force the unwilling to enlist.

At the same time, for a whole variety of reasons, there were plenty of "eligibles" who had no intention of enlisting.

Reference: Rushworth Chronicle, May-June 1916

33 BLOODBATH AT FROMELLES

The Australians had gained some experience in the front line in France between April and July 1916. Although there were some raids on the German trenches, there had been no large-scale assault involving the Australians. That all changed on the fateful night of 19-20 July 1916.

The British had launched a major attack, hitherto unsuccessful, along the Somme River on 1 July, about 80 km south of the village of Fromelles. Australian and British forces, working in concert around Fromelles, were supposed to provide a distraction to try to ensure that the Germans did not take reinforcements from there to the scene of the main assault.

The Germans quickly realised that Fromelles was just a feint by the Allies, and were able to smash the attack – which was inexplicably launched in broad daylight - from their well-fortified defensive positions. Machine gun and artillery fire was particularly lethal. One Lance-Corporal Adolf Hitler was amongst the Germans defending their positions.

Massive Casualties

The Australian 5th Division suffered an horrendous 5533 casualties (killed, wounded or taken prisoner) in less than 24 hours – the most Australia has ever suffered in such a short space of time. By comparison, losses on the first day of the Gallipoli landing were about 40% of this.

Naturally, with so many casualties, Shire of Waranga men were caught up in the maelstrom. Private John Bowman Clarke (No 3224, 53rd Battalion), who had local connections, was killed at Fromelles. "Jack" or "Nobby", as he was known, had been born at The Rock, in southern NSW, and enlisted at Cootamundra, a year before his death.

Jack's widowed mother, Cecilia Clarke, was living in Murchison when he enlisted. This probably accounts for the fact that John's name appears on the Shire of Waranga war memorial in Rushworth.

Missing in Action

Like many others, Jack was reported as "Missing in Action" on 19 July 1916. A subsequent court of inquiry, held over six weeks later, established that he had been killed. He had been in France less than a month, and was quite inexperienced as a soldier.

The Australian War Memorial holds Red Cross reports of many of the soldiers who went missing in action. These reports often relied on eye witness accounts from other soldiers. It seems that Jack was in the second wave of the attack on Fromelles. About 140 metres out from the Australian trenches, he and his mates reached the remnants of the first wave, when he was killed. His mates reported that he was either shot in the head, or hit by shrapnel, and died instantly.

"Butcher" Haking

The British officer deemed to be largely responsible for the disaster at Fromelles was Lieutenant General Sir Richard Haking. He already had a poor record of defeats on the Western Front, earning himself the nickname "Butcher". His apparent disregard for the welfare of the troops under his command led to scathing assessments by many Australians, including the Official War Correspondent, Charles Bean. It also led to 1971 largely unnecessary Australian deaths.

34 THE HORROR OF POZIERES

Within a few days of the Australian 5th Division being savaged at Fromelles, other Australian divisions were committed to a major battle at Pozieres in the Somme River valley. In some respects, Pozieres was everything Fromelles was not: an ongoing battle extended over two weeks compared to just a day, the deployment of Australian troops with battle experience and a "victory" in terms of territory gained.

However, one thing that Pozieres had in common with Fromelles was the horrendous level of casualties suffered by the Australians. The Australian 1st Division (with a nominal strength of around 12,000 men) was the first to be committed to the attack on Pozieres. Ground was gained, but this ground was then pulverized by German artillery over several days, resulting in well over 5000 casualties.

Shell Shock is Real

Under the incessant German bombardment, some of the Australian troops suffered from "shell shock". Although the authorities did not, at that stage, classify shell shock victims as casualties, it could render men totally incapable of carrying out their normal duties.

After four days of hell, the 1st Division (or what was left of it) was pulled out of Pozieres and replaced by the 2nd Division. A soldier who had watched them come out of the line said after the war "They looked like men who had been in hell. Almost without exception, each man looked drawn and haggard, and so dazed that they appeared to be walking in a dream, and their eyes looked glassy and starey. Quite a few were silly, and these were the only noisy ones in the crowd…In all my experience I've never seen men so shaken as these."

Local Boys Fare Badly

At least two boys with local connections were killed at Pozieres. Private Richard Matthews, born in Murchison (No 4253, 6th Battalion AIF) was in the initial attack, but was killed in the constant German barrage as his battalion tried to hold on to the ground that had been gained. Richard's family suffered terribly during the war, as his brother Daniel was also killed, serving with New Zealand forces in 1918.

Private Henry Berry (No 2332, 20th Battalion) had been born in Whroo, although his mother was living in Fitzroy by the time he enlisted, a year to the day before he was killed. Henry's battalion was part of the Australian 2nd Division, which was preparing to come into the line to relieve the 1st. German artillery, observing from higher ground, would have targeted the 2nd Division to try to stop them from doing so. Witnesses saw a direct hit from a German shell kill Berry and several of his mates.

War of Attrition

The Western Front had quickly become a war of attrition, with neither side being able to deliver a decisive blow. Small gains of territory, like the initial advance at Pozieres, were only achieved with dramatic numbers of casualties.

Reference: Carlyon, Les, The Great War (Pan McMillan 2006) p 166.

35 POZIERES TO MOUQUET FARM

After four days of systematic shelling by German artillery, the Australian 1st Division was withdrawn from the front line at Pozieres, being replaced by the 2nd Division. Finally, the 4th Division was thrown into the fray. Pozieres, and the heights above the village were taken, albeit at a terrible cost.

Over seven weeks of the Pozieres, and subsequent Mouquet Farm battles, the AIF suffered 23,000 casualties, including nearly 7000 dead. The death toll was almost as high as for the entire eight month Gallipoli campaign, while the total casualties (including wounded, sick and POWs) were higher. The main reason for the difference was the sustained and systematic use of artillery.

Local Boy Killed

After Private John Müller (No 3917, 5th Battalion AIF) was killed near Pozieres, the Anglican rector probably had the unenviable job of visiting his mother, Wilhelmina, at her home out at Hard Hill, east of Rushworth, to give her the sad news.

Müller's father had died many years before, and Wilhelmina had remarried. Sadly, her second husband died shortly after her son, but she probably did not learn of John's death until later because of the long delays in communication at the time.

Of German Descent

John Müller is interesting in that he had been born in Rushworth, but was of German descent. His grandfather Christian Bertram, who is buried at Rushworth cemetery, was born in Hamburg, Germany.

When John chose to enlist in the AIF in 1915, it seems he was quite proud of his German heritage. By the First World War, the names Miller and Müller tended to be used interchangeably, but John deliberately used the German form of the name when he enlisted, with the two dots above the letter "U". In the German language, the dots are used above three of the vowels to change their sound.

Many people of German descent who were living in Australia during the war were interned. There is an unlikely possibility that Christian may have been interned, but he was over 90 when war was declared, and died in 1915.

Victim of Artillery Fire

By 1916, artillery fire had become a deadly science, causing tens of thousands of casualties along the Western Front. In a Red Cross report, two of John's mates from "A" Company reported seeing him hit and killed when a shell landed near him.

After the war, John's remains could not be located for a decent burial. As a result, his name is simply recorded on the Australian memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. He is one of a staggering total of more than 10,000 Australians with no known place of burial.

Little Comfort for Mother

By the end of the war, Wilhelmina had moved into town, living in Murchison Road. She received a pathetically small number of John's personal effects, which included an identity disc, a testament, a kit bag handle, a scarf and some handkerchiefs. She had not even received the medals John was entitled to before she died in 1921, although she did receive a small government pension in the interim.

36 STILL FIGHTING THE TURKS

While most of the Australian troops were fighting in western Europe in 1916, there was still a fight going on in the Middle East against the Turks. The main Australian force deployed in the region was the Light Horse.

In August 1916, the Turks made a thrust across the Sinai Peninsula towards the Suez Canal, with a force of 12-14,000 men under the command of a German general. On the night of 2 August, they advanced on Katia, a few kilometres south-east of the strategic town of Romani, which was held by British forces.

Romani

The Australian Light Horse formed part of the defences around Romani. In particular, about 500 men from the 1st Brigade were deployed in small posts "covering a frontage of five kilometres". As the main part of the Turkish forces pressed forward, they came into contact with these posts.

As the men of the 1st Brigade strategically withdrew, they were gradually reinforced by other units. Amongst the men of the 2nd Brigade who came to their aid was Trooper Charles Harrington. Born in Temora, NSW, Charles was a 23 year-old labourer when he enlisted in 1914. His parents were Phillip and Margaret Harrington, who were farmers at Wanalta.

Over the two main days of the battle (August 4-5), the Turks were routed, taking significant casualties. The threat to the Suez Canal was eliminated, and not long afterwards the Allies began pushing the Turks back across the Sinai Peninsula.

A Chequered Career

Chas Harrington was a Trooper in the 7th Light Horse Regiment (No 361), which was raised in New South Wales. He had fought with his unit at Gallipoli, before being withdrawn sick. Re-landing at Gallipoli in October, he served there until the general withdrawal in December.

Over the next six months, Charles was in an out of hospital, with a whole range of medical issues ranging from dysentery and enteric fever to venereal disease. He re-joined his unit from hospital just two weeks before the Romani battle. One suspects that he performed creditably in that engagement, because shortly afterwards, he was promoted to temporary Corporal.

Distinguished Conduct Medal

For the next six months, Charles was engaged in the Middle East campaign, where he served with distinction. In March 1917, he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. His DCM appears to have been awarded for a sustained performance over time, rather than a one-off act of heroism.

This was reflected in the citation, which read "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He has performed consistent good work throughout, and has at all times set a fine example of courage and determination." London Gazette 24.4.1917

Shortly after the award of his DCM, Charles again spent several months in and out hospital, and was finally repatriated to Australia suffering from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. Ironically, he later worked for the Repatriation Department, which assisted with the reintegration of soldiers back into the Australian community after the war.

References: Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The Encyclopedia of Australia's Battles* (Allen & Unwin, 1998); www.naa.gov.au (service record)

37 A BUSH POET GOES TO WAR

Trooper Chas Harrington, who we met in the previous Anzac Tales, was not the only member of the family to serve in World War 1. At least one of his brothers also enlisted and served overseas. Twenty-one-year-old Edward (Ted) Harrington (No 3518, 4th Regiment, Australian Light Horse) followed in Charles' footsteps, enlisting in February 1917, and also serving in the Middle East.

The third son of Wanalta farmers Phillip and Margaret Harrington, Ted was already establishing himself as a respected bush poet well before he enlisted. He was regularly published in the Catholic weekly "The Advocate" during that period, and his poems also appeared in the "Rushworth Chronicle". A farm labourer (presumably on his parents' property), Ted was thought to gain much of his inspiration from the Wanalta area.

Where the Old Sphinx Stares

Before Ted enlisted, he was also writing poetry about the war, probably with thoughts of his brother Charles in mind. A poem was published in "The Advocate" (16.9.1916) in which he eulogised the deeds of the Light Horse at Gallipoli, then focussed on the role they were then playing in the Sinai –

Now on the desert again they've met; The Light Horse lads and their stubborn foe; And the Moslems, broken, sore beset; Are reeling backwards beneath the blow.

But many a heart is ever stilled; And in distant homes when the lists are scanned; Many will mourn their loved ones killed; And laid to rest 'neath the drifting sand.

But duty is duty, what'er the cost; The dead who die do not die in vain; And though we mourn for our loved ones lost; We know they die but to live again.

To live again! We must cease to sigh; To deathless glory the dead are heirs; Let us breathe a prayer for the lads who lie; Way out where the old Sphinx stares and stares.

Australian Dictionary of Biography

Edward Harrington was later sufficiently highly respected as a poet to earn an entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Post-war, he worked in fairly humble careers, with his great love always being poetry. He published five collections of verse. Many of the poems were put to music by the likes of Edith Harrhy and Peter Dawson. Late in his life, he also wrote a number of short stories.

After his war service, Ted suffered from poor health for the rest of his life – a common experience for war veterans. He eventually died in virtual poverty in North Melbourne in 1966, from emphysema and chronic bronchitis. In 1962, a friend said "He looked spry enough, but the dreadful cough was with him then. A tiny man (5'2") with a coat too long and legs so short, but one could see him with an emu feather jauntily in his hat and those legs in breeches, a Light Horseman of the AIF, who fought once at Beersheba."

References: Australian Dictionary of Biography website; Trove website.

38 A FAMILY AFFAIR

The Wilson family of South Murchison made a huge contribution to the war effort. Two of the girls – Mary and Margaret (both born at Whroo) - served with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS). Their school teacher brother William (born at Bailieston) was a Captain in the 53rd Battalion of the AIF, where he won a Military Cross. Another brother, Stuart (born at Murchison), enlisted in Queensland and joined the 9th Battalion.

All of these family members are listed on the war memorial at the Goulburn Weir, where their father William had worked for the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission as an overseer. William died in 1913, after which his wife Ellen moved to East Malvern. She called her home there "Whroo", indicating the significance of Whroo in her family history.

Career Nurses

Mary, generally known as "Molly" and Margaret ("Peggy") were both career nurses who did their general nursing training at Mooroopna Hospital, when it was the main hospital in the Goulburn Valley. Molly also did some specific training at the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital in Melbourne.

After enlisting in the AANS in 1915, Molly went overseas and was employed nursing casualties from the Gallipoli campaign. Then she came back to Australia with a boatload of sick and wounded Australians, arriving on the "Runic" in Melbourne in mid-May 1916.

During this time, she had to deal with the fact that her brother Stuart was missing at Gallipoli. It was only in late 1916 that Molly and the family received the awful result of a Commission of Inquiry, which concluded that Stuart had died at the Gallipoli landing.

Second Tour of Duty

After just over a year back in Australia, Molly re-embarked for the Middle East, arriving in Suez in July 1917. It could have been expected that she would remain there, where Australians were still fighting, or go on to Europe where there were ever-mounting casualties on the Western Front.

However, Molly was directed to an obscure theatre of war in which the AIF had no involvement. Until early 1919, Molly served in British hospitals at Salonika (now known as Thessalonika) in Greece. The aggressors were the Bulgarians, who were allies of the Germans.

Apparently, there was disappointment among the Australian nurses that they would not be nursing Australian soldiers, but at the time the deployment of Australian forces was largely controlled by the British.

To England then Home

With the cessation of hostilities in Greece and the Balkans, Molly went to England, where she spent six months before her return to Australia. During this time, she had extended leave, and attended a course at the National School of Cookery, Buckingham Palace Rd, London. At the same time, she was coping with the grief of discovering that a second brother, William, had been killed just before Armistice Day.

Throughout her periods of service, Molly kindly sent a large proportion of her pay home to her mother Ellen, who must have been suffering intense grief after the death of her husband and two boys in the short space of five years.

References: AWM and NAA websites

39 COMINGS AND GOINGS

One hundred years ago, Rushworth people were starting to witness some of the horrific effects of war. Jim Peel (No 174, 16th Battalion) came back to a lively welcome at the Rushworth station. He was missing an arm after being hit by shrapnel on Gallipoli a year earlier. Prior to the war, Jim listed his occupation as "sleeper hewer". Clearly, he was going to be looking for a new job.

Returning about the same time was Private Bert Mason (No 137, 8th Light Horse). Bert's family lived at "Paringa Vale", just out of Rushworth, and would have been horrified by his appearance as he literally hopped off the train. He was missing a leg. During the infamous charge at "The Nek", Bert was mown down and had already been through 8 operations, with more to come (Rushworth Chronicle 15.9.16). At least he was alive, unlike the majority of his mates from the 8th Light Horse.

Private George Pyle's father received his son's identity disc, confirming that George had been killed at Gallipoli 17 months earlier. There would be no "Welcome Home" for George.

Departures

Rushworth men were still leaving for war. There was a gathering at the Exchange Hotel (which used to be where the library now is) to farewell Private Frank Guy (No 5840, 21st Battalion). Frank was the oldest man to yet enlist from the area, officially being 43 when he signed up. Unofficially, it appears as though he may have been quite a bit older. His son was already serving overseas.

Orlando ("Orrie") Woodyatt (No 2417, 37th Battalion) was farewelled at the Criterion Hotel, with speeches being made by many of those present. One of the speakers was Mr Lambden, who made a presentation of a watch to the departing soldier. Constable Theobold quipped that if Orrie "was as good with the rifle as he was with the fishing line" the Germans would be in trouble.

Town Support for the War Effort

During September 1916, the students from Rushworth State School were running a series of concerts to raise funds for the State Schools Patriotic War Fund.

At the same time, the Rushworth Red Cross was busy collecting donations and producing a huge number of "comforts" to be sent overseas to the Australian troops. There was a weekly report in the "Chronicle" listing all the latest donations.

Conscription Campaign Launched

In September 1916, Prime Minister Billy Hughes launched the "Yes" campaign for the referendum on conscription. The referendum was due to be held in late October. Up until this time, men could be compelled to enlist for military service, but not to serve overseas. Hughes was concerned that not enough men were enlisting to fight in Europe and the Middle East, despite the huge contribution Australia had already made. Successfully pursuing the "Yes" campaign would allow the government compel men to enlist and serve overseas. A divisive campaign followed the launch.

References: Rushworth Chronicle; Murchison Advertiser; Bons, Tracey, *Rushworth Businesses & Their Owners – Gold Rush to Great War*

40 EXEMPTION COURT HEARINGS

In 1916, Rushworth courthouse was the scene of many hearings which determined the fate of "eligibles" i.e. men who were of military service age (21-35). If men wished to be exempted from service, they were required to make application to the court, and face the potential wrath of a generally unsympathetic Police Magistrate, Richard Knight.

The main grounds for exemption included being in employment or study which was in the national interest, being an only son or from a family where half the boys had already enlisted, or where the applicant was financially supporting older parents or younger siblings. However, fitting into one or more of these categories appears to have been no guarantee of exemption.

Dispelling a Myth

Over the years, we have been imbued with the idea that virtually every young man in Australia jumped at the opportunity to serve in World War 1, but this was far from the truth. 45% of eligibles never enlisted, and these men often had to front court to seek exemption.

On being summonsed to appear, the men had to present their own cases. They were not able to use legal representation, which could put them at a distinct disadvantage. This was especially the case if the magistrate was predisposed to allowing as few exemptions as possible.

Sarcasm Rears its Head

Police Magistrate Richard Knight had two sons at the war, and was often caustic in his remarks to the young men who fronted him seeking exemption.

Lancelot Risstrom appeared and stated that "I am the only remaining son. Also, that my father cannot possibly carry on farming and contracting without my services. In the event of my being conscripted, it would mean that my father would have to realize his property, stock and plant." Knight rejected the claim, ordering Lance to go into camp within seven days, saying "it will only be a holiday for you."

John Aylward, of Waranga Basin claimed various medical ailments, including insomnia, rheumatism, varicocele and having suffered from a nervous breakdown. The claim was rejected, with Mr Knight contending that "a month's training in the open would be a splendid tonic for nervousness and insomnia."

Conscientious Objection

It was relatively rare for men of the time to declare themselves as conscientious objectors. William Wason, a farmer from Myola said "I cannot see my way clear to kill any man. I have got to assist in getting the harvest off. I am prepared to go with the Red Cross as a non-combatant." Knight gave him a brief respite to help with the harvest, after which he was required to go into camp. His moral scruples were ignored.

Conscription Referendum Looms

At this stage, men who could not get exemption were still only required to serve on the home front. They could not be forced to fight overseas until there had been a plebiscite on conscription, which was to be held at the end of October 1916.

Reference: Article by Jennifer McNeice in *Provenance: The Journal of PROV*, Issue 14, 2015

41 CONSCRIPTION REFERENDUM

At the end of October 1916, Australian voters were asked to decide whether men of army service age should be compelled to enlist and serve overseas in the war. Prior to this, the government could call men up for compulsory military service, but only to serve on home soil.

The Prime Minister of the time, Billy Hughes, was determined to get the "Yes" vote through, and campaigned vigorously in pursuit of this goal. A committee, led by solicitor J Burt Stewart, vocally supported the "Yes" campaign in the local area.

Sectarian Divisions Open Up

In Rushworth, as in many parts of the country, bitter division emerged within the community as it wrestled with the issue of conscription.

One tends to imagine that everyone in Rushworth was behind the so-called "war effort". However, there was some clear division along sectarian lines. The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, was prominent in the "No" campaign, and tried to influence his flock accordingly. An Irishman, Mannix had no love for what he saw as British Imperialism, and the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland was a recent and painful memory.

Class Differences

Although Australia was generally seen to be less divided along class lines than Great Britain, there was definitely more support for the war from the middle classes.

There was some resentment about the perception that working class men were the cannon fodder, while sons of farmers could be reluctant to enlist. One of the speakers at a pro-conscription rally in Tatura lambasted local farmers for keeping their sons "penned up like prize cattle".

As men started to arrive back in Rushworth maimed, wounded and mentally scarred, many people began to seriously question whether Australia should be fighting in a war – at great cost – on the other side of the world.

Rallies in Rushworth

During the course of the referendum campaign, there were a series of public meetings in Rushworth, which drew large crowds. The Shire Hall was full on 20 October to hear an address for the "Yes"

campaign by "Dr Morrison of Melbourne" and "the meeting was very orderly, despite the fact that a number of those present were anti-conscriptionists, but these persons, to their credit, refrained from obstructing the meeting in any way." (Murchison Advertiser 27.10.16) There was also a big crowd at a rally a week earlier, when Burt Stewart gave the address.

The local press appears to have been pro-conscription, as there was little reporting of meetings proposing the "No" vote, even though it had many supporters.

The Outcome

History tells us that overall, the "No" vote prevailed in Australia as a whole. Rushworth was then part of the Echuca electoral division. Although the overall Echuca division voted "Yes", in Rushworth there was a small "No" majority (753 Yes/762 No), which highlighted the deep division in the town and surrounding area. Rushworth was one of nine of the twenty-six districts in the Echuca division supporting the "No" vote. Nearby, Runnymede and Heathcote strongly supported the "No" vote.

42 MORE LOCAL CASUALTIES

In the period between the major engagements of July to early September 1916, and the battle of Gueudecourt in November, the Australians were not engaged in any large set-piece battles. However, they did take their turn in the line, guarding sections of the Western Front trenches.

During this period, casualties continued to mount as a result of the ever-present shellfire, small arms and machine gun fire. Two lads with Rushworth connections were killed in this period of the war.

All So Precious

Fred Cracknell (No 3305, 11th Battalion) was born in Rushworth, and was only 19 when he enlisted at Norseman in Western Australia in August 1915. He was a grandson of George Cracknell, who ran a bakery in Rushworth for decades from the mid-1860s, as well as having extensive mining interests.

Fred's mother Bessie wrote a letter from her home "Rushworth House", Greenbushes, WA, giving her approval for him to enlist, as he was under 21.

Fred was killed near Ypres, Belgium in mid-September 1916 and is buried in the Railway Dugouts Burial Ground. Writing to the Defence Department to thank them for returning a few meagre possessions of Fred's after his death, Bessie said "They are all so precious."

Long Journey to the Front

Walter John Charles King (No 2543, 29th Battalion) was born in the parish of Waranga, enlisting in Melbourne in February 1916. By that time his parents had both passed on. Known to all and sundry as "Chas", he was the only boy in the family, having three sisters, and was a hairdresser at Costerfield.

It took Chas a long time to get to the front. He first went to Egypt, where like many Australian troops, he contracted venereal disease. Going to England for further treatment and training, Chas went AWOL on two occasions – one for three days and one for nine. He forfeited a substantial amount of pay as a result.

"Very Few of us Seem to get Hit"

Finally arriving at the Western Front in late September 1916, Chas went into the line for the first time. In a letter written on 10 October, he said "We get plenty of work, and not much spell, as there are always supplies to be carried to the front line. As I write in my dugout, the shells are bursting and

bullets flying past me a treat. But we get used to it, and very few of us seem to get hit. We are only 40 yards off Fritz's front line, so often get a pot shot at them. Our artillery keeps them moving, and they seldom reply to our big guns."

Chas' apparent over-confidence in the letter was misplaced. He was killed by shellfire two weeks later at Flers. Eye witnesses said he was buried just behind the trench, but the grave was evidently never found later. Chas has no known place of burial, and is commemorated on the Villers Bretonneux memorial.

Reference: Bons, Tracey, *Rushworth Businesses & Their Owners – Gold Rush to Great War*; AWM and NAA websites

43 BACK TO THE MUDDY SOMME

After the Australians had suffered enormous losses in earlier battles along the Somme River, they moved to what was then a relatively quiet sector of the Western Front near Ypres (now Ieper) in Belgium. In mid-October 1916, the reinforced 1 Anzac Corps (which comprised four Australian Divisions, or upwards of 40,000 men) was returned to the Somme.

Gueudecourt

The village of Gueudecourt was the scene of two attacks by the Australian forces in the first half of November 1916. Conditions were considered some of the worst that Australian forces encountered during the entire war. Rain and mud meant that the attacks ground to a halt. Where they did manage to take some ground, it was quickly recovered by the Germans.

Soon after Gueudecourt, winter set in, which meant that the Western Front basically shut down for a few months while troops did the best they could to endure the appalling conditions.

The First Snow I Ever Saw

Amongst the troops coming into the Somme in November 1916 was Pte Jack Laurie (No 928, 5th Battalion), who we met in an earlier Anzac Tales. In a letter to his future wife, Rose Hammond (dated 24.11.1916), he said "This country beats anything I ever saw for mud and slush. Up at the trenches they say it is feet deep and men often get stuck in it and have to be pulled out."

With winter approaching, Jack experienced snow for the first time in his life. "We had a fall of snow one day last week, the first I ever saw. It is a very pretty sight to see the trees, houses, roads and everything covered with snow. We had a great bit of fun snowballing, in which the Chaplain (a major) joined. We peppered him a treat, but he enjoyed it and fought back. The day before it came on was one of the coldest I have felt for many a day but after the snow fell it began to get warmer, and it is not too bad now."

Into the Trenches

About the same time, Jack wrote to his sister-in-law, Cis Laurie (nee Hammond). He reported that "The battalion is resting in billets for a few more days and then we are going up to the trenches to get our first taste of scrapping. From what I can hear, the mud up there is a bigger nuisance than the Huns."

"Boy" Hammond, brother of Cis and Rose, was stationed on the Somme with his artillery unit. In mid-November, he wrote in his diary "Very heavy frost. Ice one and a half inches thick on all shell holes. Ground frozen hard. Places where you would sink to your knees a couple of days ago, you can now

walk over the top. Very good." The following day it was "Snow all over the ground a couple of inches thick…Rained through the morning and made things muddy again."

References: Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The Encyclopedia of Australia's Battles*; Finch, Irene, *Somewhere in France*

44 WHITE CHRISTMAS

Many Australians who were overseas during World War 1 spent Christmas 1915 in hot, sticky Egypt, licking their wounds after the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign. Christmas 1916 could hardly have been a bigger contrast. The majority of the Australians now found themselves experiencing the vicissitudes of a northern winter – snow, ice, hail, sleet, rain, mud and gales coming in from the Atlantic.

Troops along the Western Front were obliged to hold the line, which meant regular rotations in and out of the front line. Living conditions in the trenches were horrific. At least there was some measure of relief when a unit went back behind the lines for a rest and to assist with the multitude of tasks required to keep an army in the field.

Behind the Lines

Rushworth's Private Jack Laurie and his mates were behind the lines for Christmas 1916. Before they could settle in to briefly enjoy Christmas, they had to build a large dugout. Even in the back areas, the German artillery targeted any likely concentration of troops. Just as they arrived at some huts they were to use as accommodation, a German shell hit one of the huts, killing four men and wounding five.

Jack's diary entry for Christmas day was succinct – "Had a half holiday and a good meat and pudding dinner. Each of us got a box of smokes, pipe, lollies etc., sent by the Australian Red Cross."

Christmas Dinner

Writing to Rose Hammond just after Christmas, Jack elaborated on his Christmas Day experience. "We spent a very quiet Xmas but our cooks made an effort and gave us something like a dinner, roast beef and vegetables followed by pudding. Before serving the pudding, rum was poured over it and set on fire, so you see we did it in style, but some complained it was a waste of good rum. In the evening our gift boxes were dealt out to us. They were all the same: a small cardboard box containing tobacco, cigarettes, pipe, cards, ginger chewing gum, lead pencil and a few other things, all very acceptable. Your parcel, not any from home have reached me yet, so when they come I will be able to have another Christmas."

John "Jock" Rose (No 5410, 22nd Battalion), a cousin of Jack Laurie's, was elsewhere along the Western Front at the time. Under the heading "Somewhere in France, Xmas Day, 1916" he wrote in a postcard home to family "Dear Bill and Sis, Just a line to let you know I am still safe and well and to thank you for your Xmas card. I have never met Jack (Laurie) yet or any other Rushworth boys…We had a bonza dinner today – poultry, ham and plum pudding, quite a treat after bully beef I can tell you. Well I must close now wishing you all a happy and prosperous New Year.
Best wishes from your loving cousin Jock."

Reference: Finch, Irene, *Somewhere in France*

SECTION 3 – 1917

COMPRISING ARTICLES 45-68 PUBLISHED IN THE WARANGA NEWS DURING 2017

45 AN UNCOMMON SURNAME

Lawrence James "Jim" Darrigan (No 849, 37th Battalion) was apparently the only person with that surname to enlist in the AIF in the First World War. Born at Corop in the early 1890s, Jim enlisted at Seymour in February 1916. His parents, Michael and Margaret, listed their address as Burrumboot East, via Wanalta. The Darrigan family were of the Roman Catholic faith, with the 1912 census showing that apart from Jim's parents, three siblings (Joseph, Mary Jnr and Michael Jnr) lived at the family home.

Jim was a relatively experienced soldier before he enlisted, having served for four years in the 17th Light Horse Regiment. This was a militia unit which operated along similar lines to today's Army Reserve.

Off to War

After completing basic training, Jim embarked on His Majesty's Australian Transport (HMAT) "Persic" from Melbourne in June 1916. The "Persic" landed at Plymouth just over seven weeks later. The troops on board then went into further training on the Salisbury Plains, in southern England.

Four months later, Jim departed from Southampton to cross the English Channel to France. With other reinforcements for the 37th Battalion, Jim joined his new unit at the start of the northern winter, one which proved to be particularly severe.

In and Out of the Line

Over the next two months, the 37th Battalion went in and out of the line. Because the extreme weather conditions made fighting impossible, it was a matter of maintaining the line until the springtime.

Jim was killed at the end of January 1917, although his army file gives no clue as to what happened to him. At the time, the 37th Battalion was located around Armentieres. The Australian War Memorial holds unit diaries for each battalion. The 37th's diary for 28/1/1917 recorded "Enemy shelled gun positions near BHQ (Battalion Headquarters). Blew out two guns. We had one casualty..."

Sadly, a soldier with Jim's extensive training was dead, probably without having fired a shot in anger.

A Local Memorial

In August 1918, a sequel to Jim's death took place during an Arbor Day in the grounds of the Burrumboot East State School. Three trees were planted by family members commemorating local soldiers who had been killed in the war. They were Jim Darrigan and Andy Strawhorn (both of the 37th Battalion) and George Robinson (60th Battalion). "Substantial guards, to which were attached inscribed tablets to the memory of the fallen heroes, were placed around the trees."

The school children planted sugar gums around the playground and tennis courts, which was followed by a patriotic speech by Burt Stewart, the Rushworth solicitor, and a "sumptuous" afternoon tea.

One of the long forgotten 'inscribed tablets' turned up in the 1970s, recovered by Alan Curnick. It now holds a place of honour in the Colbinabbin hall. It would be interesting to know what happened to the other two, including that of Jim Darrigan.

References: NAA website, Murchison Advertiser 16/8/18

46 NATIVE OF GOBARUP

When he enlisted in July 1915, Private Gilbert Roulston (William Gilbert Roulston, No 3939, 5th Battalion) proudly wrote on his application that he was a "Native of Gobarup". The address of his next of kin, parents James and Ellen, was recorded as "Cornella East by Colbinabbin".

By November, Gilbert had completed his basic training, and was at home on final leave. The local community took the opportunity to organise a farewell in "Mr Wright's barn". There was speech making, gift giving and supper, then "cards and dancing were indulged in until the small hours..."

A Familiar Journey

Gilbert took what was by now a familiar route to the Western Front, going by ship to Egypt, doing further training there, then being transferred to the front via Marseilles in March 1916.

In mid-1916, Gilbert received a shrapnel wound to his left shin and foot, which necessitated a trip back to England for treatment and convalescence. He went back to France in November, rejoining his unit on the first day of winter. Conditions during the winter of 1916-17 were appalling, and the front line soldiers suffered terribly.

Trench Foot

By 17 December, Gilbert was out of the line again, suffering from "trench foot". This was a condition which affected men whose feet were continuously immersed in cold water, and was a constant threat to men who were in the wet and muddy trenches. In some of the worst cases, the feet turned gangrenous, and had to be amputated.

Fortunately, Gilbert made a fairly quick recovery. Improvements were made (use of duckboards, regular changes of socks, rubbing whale oil into the feet etc) which helped to limit the chance of succumbing to the condition again.

Trench Raiding

After three weeks recovering from trench foot, Gilbert rejoined his unit. While there was minimal action on the front in winter, occasionally the Australians launched raids on the German lines. On 10 February 1917, Gilbert was part of a group of just over 100 troops who raided what was known as Bayonet Trench. The raid did not go well, with the Australians suffering nearly 50% casualties. Gilbert was one of eight who were killed.

A Family Mourns

Gilbert's family was devastated by his death. On the first anniversary of his death in 1918, they placed the following poignant "In Memoriam" notice in the paper – "Gone is the face we loved so dear/Silent the voice we long to hear/A painful blow, a shock severe/To part with one we loved so dear. No-one knows how much we miss him/Friends may think the wound is healed/But they little know the sorrow/Deep within our hearts concealed. Inserted by his loving father and mother, brothers and sisters, brothers-in-law and sister-in-law."

Families were able to choose the few words to go on soldiers' headstones. Gilbert's family chose "There is a link death cannot sever/Loving remembrance lasts forever". The grave lies in the beautiful little Bazentin-Le-Petit Military Cemetery, the last resting place of 182 men.

References: NAA and CWGC websites; Murchison Advertiser 19/11/1915 and 9/2/18

47 RED CROSS ANNUAL MEETING

In early 1917, the Rushworth branch of the Red Cross held its annual meeting at the Shire Hall. Olive Wray, who was the president, was the wife of the Reverend F W Wray, who was serving as a chaplain in the Australian army overseas. Secretary/Treasurer Grace Stewart (nee Semmens) was married to solicitor Burt Stewart, who had his legal practice in what was then the relatively new Glasgow buildings.
Burt Stewart chaired the evening, which took the form of a social, as well as incorporating a review of the Red Cross branch's business during 1916. The Rushworth band was in attendance "for the occasion, and considerably enlivened proceedings."

The Program

During the evening, there were two performances by the band, with many of the tunes being of a patriotic nature. In addition, various individuals performed songs, and a recitation by Miss Molly Taylor received an encore. There was even a cornet solo by Mr T G Williams selected from a Verdi opera – "Ah! Che la Morte" (roughly translated "Ah! That Death").
Lieutenant Holder, who was in charge of recruiting in the area, addressed the meeting, "thanking the Red Cross for the great benefits it had bestowed on the forces abroad."
He went on to implore the young men in the area who had not enlisted to do so. The Rushworth Chronicle had reported a week earlier that the local recruiting committee had just held a meeting that had received a "meagre attendance". It was claimed at the meeting that there were 70 local men in the 21-35 age group who were eligible to enlist, but had not done so.

Financial Report

The report and balance sheet of the local Red Cross for 1916 was most impressive, showing that nearly 450 pounds ($900) had be raised during the year. This came from regular collections, and a whole host of fundraising activities, including picnics, a race meeting at Moora, raffles (with prizes ranging from bantam hens, to bags of wheat to canaries), dances, competitions, afternoon teas and a quoits tournament.
Nearly 150 pounds ($300) of the total was raised specifically for the French Red Cross Appeal, and remitted directly to the organiser, Sir David Hennessy.
Over half of the funds raised were used for the "purchase of tinned goods, blankets, towels, wool, flannel, flannelette and sundries for making garments." Australian soldiers overseas were the direct beneficiaries of this expenditure. The Red Cross women ran a "work-room" in which they transformed many of the raw materials into items that would be deemed useful for the men at the front.

Elections

After such a successful year, the key office-bearers were re-elected for 1917, along with business committee members Mesdames H W Lambden, O'Sullivan, Williams, King, C W Taylor and Miss Walbran.
These and the numerous other members of sub-committees received acclamation from those present before the meeting concluded with the national anthem, "God Save the King".

Reference – Murchison Advertiser 2.2.1917, Rushworth Chronicle 26.1.1917

48 TRENCH RAIDING

In a recent Anzac Tales, we learned of the tragic loss of Private Gilbert Roulston in a raid on the German trenches. A letter from Will Brown of Rushworth (No 1805 Private William Christopher Brown, 37th Battalion) to his family in early 1917 provided graphic details of a similar raid that he participated in on the night of 25/26 December 1916. His involvement in the raid resulted in him being recommended for a Military Medal, which was subsequently awarded.

Will Brown was a baker's assistant in Rushworth before his enlistment at the advanced age of 41. His brother John had established a bakery opposite the Shire Hall in 1897, moving the business to Moora Road soon afterwards. Several of the Brown brothers worked in the business.

Preparation for the Raid

The raiding party comprised about 50 men, who gathered in a forward trench, "loaded with bombs and nut-crackers (a stick with a lump of iron on the end)". A small party with wire cutters went out in advance to cut a path through the barbed wire entanglements in front of the German trenches.

Meanwhile, the raiding party "blackened each other's faces with burnt cork, removed our helmets and placed a grey woollen cap on our head. We looked a desperate lot, I can tell you."

When the barbed wire had been cut, they moved forward in the dark, to cross about 200 metres of muddy, pot-holed No Man's Land. "We had to crawl the whole way. Fritz was sending up plenty of star shells, which light up the country all around, and one had to be careful he was not seen."

Into the German Trench

When the raiding party was within 15 metres of the German trench, and resting in a shell-hole, the Germans became aware of their presence, and started throwing bombs. This instigated the attack.

There were two sections in the raiding party – one that went to the left, and one to the right when they entered the German trench. Each section was led by two men with bayonets, with Will being the second bayonet man heading to the left.

Will's letter does not go into detail about what happened in the trench, or what he did to earn an MM. However, savage violent encounters ensued until the men were recalled after 15 minutes of mayhem.

Will did not notice that he was hurt until he returned back to the allied trenches. No doubt the adrenaline stimulated by raid kept him going until then.

Military Medal

News of Will's Military Medal filtered through to local media in April 1917. It had been announced in the London Gazette in February, then was endorsed in the Australian Government Gazette in July.

In part, the citation reads "he displayed great courage and devotion to duty" in the raid. "He was wounded by the first bomb (ed. hand grenade) thrown from the enemy lines, but did not complain. He continued to take his part in the raiding operations, and his wound was not discovered until he was noticed to be staggering from weakness after returning to our lines."

References: Bons, Tracey, *Rushworth Businesses & Their Owners*; AWM and NAA websites

49 THE CURIOUS CASE OF WILLIAM WESTON

The war service of Private William Weston (No 5962, 21st and 24th Battalion), who was born in Rushworth, had an unfortunate sequel in 1928. A supporter was canvassing locally for financial support for the veteran, who by then was widowed, remarried, unwell and purportedly had six young children to look after, five of whom were also unwell.

It is perhaps surprising that in view of his service, William did not receive a war pension. However, a review of his service records provides hints as to why this may have been the case.

Enlistment

Weston made at least two attempts to enlist, finally being successful in September 1916. By that time, he was married to Violet (nee Jones) and they were living in Carlton.

After just over two months training in Australia, William was on his way to England with other reinforcements, on HMAT "Nestor". He was perhaps fortunate to spend the bitter winter of 1916-17 in England doing further training, before going to France in mid-February 1917.

Going AWOL

Within two months of arriving in France, Weston went AWOL (Absent Without Leave) for the first time. Thereafter, for the rest of his time overseas, he made going AWOL an art form.

This was different to just going missing for a few hours in the bars and fleshpots of Cairo, for example. The authorities took a very dim view of men going AWOL in France, when a battalion could be directed to the front line at any time.

As a result of being AWOL for five days at the end of April 1917, William and others in his battalion were court-martialled. He was sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment with hard labour. Three weeks later he escaped from his confinement, was captured, court-martialled again, and given another two years.

Military Prison

This time, William went into a military prison at Abancourt, where he languished for the next year. By mid-1918, the shortage of reinforcements for the front was accentuated by heavy fighting. Every available man was needed, so he was released on a suspended sentence and sent back to his battalion.

William lasted there only four days before going AWOL again. He turned up over two months later, when he was arrested and sent back to his battalion. Another court martial led to a further two year sentence.

Soon after this sentence was imposed, William bolted again, this time being apprehended in Paris six weeks later, after the war had ended.

Tragic News

On New Year's Eve, you guessed it, William disappeared again, before being detained on the French coast six months later. After being escorted to England, he was incarcerated in HM Prison Wandsworth. It was here that he would receive the tragic news that his wife Violet had died of influenza.

After cooling his heels in Wandsworth for ten weeks, he was returned to Australia where he was discharged by the AIF, probably relieved to see the back of him, in November.

Did his escapades from 1916-19 cause the government to be less than sympathetic to his plight in 1928?

References: Rushworth Chronicle 1928 (courtesy of Tracey Bons); NAA website

50 BATTLES FOR GAZA

In an earlier Anzac Tales, we met Private (and later Trooper) Ernest LaPeyre (known as "Jack") from Rushworth. After serving with the 7th Battalion AIF at Gallipoli, he fought in the Middle East with the Imperial Camel Corps.

It seems that Jack was a feisty character. In November 1916, he and a group of his mates were court-martialled for "disobeying in such a manner as to show a wilful defiance of authority." He was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour. In January 1917, he was back with his unit, preparing to campaign against the Turks.

In April 1917, as part of a general British advance into Palestine, two costly and unsuccessful attempts were made to take the strategic coastal town of Gaza from the Turks. It is likely that Jack took part in both of the Gaza battles, in the second as an infantryman.

Death in Cairo

Two days after the second battle of Gaza, in which the Allies suffered 6000 casualties, Jack was wounded in the left arm. After going to a Casualty Clearing Station, then a field hospital, he was sent to the No 14 Australian General Hospital at Abbassia, in Egypt.

It appears that Jack died when he was being operated on a week later. Official records mention the gunshot wound, but the cause of death is listed as "chloroform syncope". In other words, he died while under anaesthetic, a sad end for a soldier who had survived six months on Gallipoli, and numerous other adventures.

Meanwhile on the Western Front

With improving weather in the northern spring, large set-piece battles once more became the norm along the Western Front. The first major engagement involving the Australians in 1917 was the so-called First Bullecourt. (A second battle of Bullecourt followed soon afterwards)

At this time, most of the German army had made a strategic withdrawal to the heavily fortified Hindenburg Line. In the lead-up to First Bullecourt on 11 April, there were a number of more minor battles against the German rearguard. Ex-Waranga Basin boy George Ward (No 6423, 3rd Battalion) was killed in one of these clashes at Hermies. Nearly 10% of his battalion became casualties of this action.

Indeed Would be Very Proud

George was born near Elmore, but had enlisted at Cootamundra in NSW. His parents, Patrick and Sarah Ward, lived at Waranga Basin. In 1918, Patrick wrote to the authorities lamenting that "I have never received any kit or personal effects of my son…but indeed would be very proud to get them."

All that was eventually returned was an identity disc and some photos. George has no known place of burial, and as a result his name is simply listed on the Australian memorial at Villers-Bretonneux.

Two of George's brothers, Patrick and William, both enlisted in the 37th Battalion in 1916. William was discharged because of poor eyesight, but Patrick served right through the war, returning in the middle of 1919.

References: NAA and AWM websites; Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The Encyclopedia of Australia's Battles*

51 SECOND BATTLE OF BULLECOURT

The first battle of Bullecourt, a village in northern France, took place on 11 April 1917. Like many other set piece battles, it was an unmitigated disaster for the Australians involved. There were more than 3300 casualties and over 1000 Australians were taken prisoner by the Germans. This constituted the highest number of Australian prisoners taken in any single action in the war.

A few weeks later (3 May), a renewed attempt was made on Bullecourt, generally called the second battle of Bullecourt. This ongoing battle lasted for two weeks. Twice as many Australian battalions were involved (around 15,000 men). This time, the casualty count was nearly 7,500. Two local boys were killed on the first day of Second Bullecourt.

One of Eleven

John Frederick (or "Jack") Bren (No 4988, 22nd Battalion) was one of eleven children of Henry and Elizabeth Bren. The first six children, including Jack, were born at Toolleen and the rest in Rushworth, over a twenty year period from 1889. Their mother Elizabeth was an Irishwoman from County Tyrone, who had come out to Australia as a four year old in 1868.

Jack was apparently the only person with the surname of Bren to serve with the Australians in the war. According to his Red Cross file, which documents attempts made to find out what happened to him, Jack was shot through the head by a German sniper "in the trench across the railway at Bullecourt" and was "buried where he fell". In subsequent fighting, the grave must have been lost and never rediscovered, as Jack's name appears only on the Villers-Bretonneux memorial.

A Colbo Casualty

The other local boy killed on the first day of Second Bullecourt was Private Thomas John Price (No 4017, 23rd Battalion). Tom was a native of Colbinabbin, where his parents lived, although he was farming at Coalville in Gippsland (near Moe) when he enlisted. His married sister lived in Kangaroo Flat and he had a brother, Charles, who inherited his farm after his death.

Tom had previously been wounded in the right shoulder in 1916, which necessitated a trip back to England for treatment and recuperation. After returning to France in late 1916, he was in and out of hospital over the next few months, with gastroenteritis, trench foot and mumps.

There is no Red Cross file on Tom, so it is unknown what happened to him. Like Jack Bren, his name appears on the Villers-Bretonneux Australian memorial, which sadly indicates that he has no known place of burial.

Villers Bretonneux

The Australian memorial at Villers-Bretonneux is the principal memorial commemorating Australians killed on the Western Front. Tom and Jack are two of the staggering number of more than 10,000 Australians listed on the memorial with no known grave.

Villers-Bretonneux and Australia have incredibly strong connections as a result of the role played by the Australians in retaking the town from the Germans in April 1918. Famously, each schoolroom in the town bears the inscription "N'oublions jamais l'Australie" (Let us never forget Australia).

References: AWM and NAA websites

52 VICTIMS OF FRIENDLY FIRE

During the Second Battle of Bullecourt in May 1917, first cousins Jack Laurie and Andy Lawrie (yes, the spelling was different), were victims of friendly fire. They were both in the 5th Battalion of the Australian Infantry Forces. The battalion got into the German trenches under massive fire. After being relieved, the battalion was still in a forward position when the incident occurred.

Blighty

A couple of days later (8.5.1917) Jack stated "It was about one thirty in the afternoon when I got knocked. I had just come off post and walked around to Andy and a couple of other bombers, when a shell landed very close to us and Andy said we had better move around a bit as that spot was getting too hot, and that is the last thing I remember for some hours."
"The next thing was that I seemed to half wake up and saw Andy lying in the dressing station beside me, but I was so dopey that even now I don't know whether he was or not. It took me about two days to gather my wits together…(Shrapnel hit) my mouth and nose, cutting my upper lip from the corner of my mouth upwards for a bit, then across to the centre just under my nose, and also a break in my old Konk (nose) again, which makes the third offence for him. They stitched up my lip, but I suppose it will leave a scar, and spoil my good looks. It has given me a holiday and that's what I wanted more than anything."
Allied troops always spoke longingly about going to "Blighty" i.e. England. Occasionally they got leave there, but more often troops were sent to England to recover from injuries and illness.

No Blighty

Andy had been buried under earth thrown up from the massive explosion, in what must have been an horrific experience. However, when he finally got out, he did not have any physical injuries to speak of. It was therefore deemed that he could stay at the front line, despite the fact that, as Jack intimated, recovery from the shock took time.

Andy simply reported in a letter "I got buried with the same shell and it's not much of an experience, either. I got a shaking up but wasn't lucky enough to get away, and got a bruised shoulder and a crook ankle out of it."

The Role of the Artillery

Ironically, "Boy" Hammond (No 6358, 4th Field Artillery and brother of Jack's wife-to-be, Rose Hammond) and his unit were supplying artillery support to the Australian troops at Bullecourt. In his diary, he recorded that his battery fired 123 shells that day.

Three days later he "Went down to the 5th Battn. in the afternoon. Saw Andy Lawrie. He was badly shaken up. Jack left wounded by pieces of one of our 9.2's, which landed in their trench."

In the heat of battle, mistakes could be made, and equipment could malfunction. Hopefully the errant shell was not one fired by "Boy's" own battery.

Reference: Finch, Irene, *Somewhere in France* (Irene Finch, nee Laurie, 2014)

53 EMPIRE DAY IN RUSHWORTH

From 1901, British Empire Day was celebrated in Australia on or around Queen Victoria's birthday (24 May) and was characterised by parades, community activities, a half-day school holiday and in the evening, a bonfire and fireworks.

In 1917, the Rushworth community combined Empire Day celebrations with fundraising for the British Red Cross. A large committee organised a street carnival held in High Street, which included a procession, sports and "pastimes", raffles, refreshments and produce stalls. In the evening there was a "grand concert", followed by dancing at the Shire Hall.

A Dull and Cheerless Day

A local paper reported that the day "broke dull and cheerless, with frequent showers, and no doubt this was responsible for the absence of a great number of country folk. The townspeople, to their credit, turned out en masse, and everyone was there to spend."

Despite the ordinary weather, festivities kicked off at 1.30 with a procession from the Masonic Hall to the band rotunda, headed by Bandmaster Fred Rich and 28 members of the band. "They were followed by the Boy Scouts and a column of school children." On arrival, each of the children received a bag of lollies and fruit.

Stalls and Competitions

Patrons could shop at various stalls, including afternoon tea, "jumble" sale, sweets, flowers and produce. Most of the items for sale were donated. These stalls yielded receipts of 74 pounds ($148) – a large sum at the time. Cash donations of nearly 134 pounds ($268) were collected before and on the day.

Running and novelty events were organised for the children, and members of the Fire Brigade organised some events as well.

Grand Concert and Dance

In the evening, the Shire Hall was the venue for a grand concert, followed by a dance. Advertising for the concert boasted "National Flag Pageants. Spectacular Displays. Excelsior Quartette Party." Music was provided by "The Flappers", and the program included a "sparkling comedietta" (i.e. a light farcical comedy) entitled "Sarah's Young Man". Admission costs were 2s and 1s (20c and 10c).

The concert raised around 25 pounds ($50), so given the admission costs, it appears that the Shire Hall would have been bursting at the seams. Anyone who still had any energy left after the day's events could stay on for dancing until the wee small hours.

Awards for Soldiers

If the Empire Day festivities buoyed the local community, the news of bravery awards to two men with Rushworth connections probably had the same effect. It was announced around Empire Day that Captain James Arthur Lambden (37th Battalion) had been awarded the Military Cross and Sergeant Ern Prentice (337 Sgt Ernest Gordon Prentice, 6th Battalion) had received the Military Medal. (Ern's World War 1 medals were later destroyed in a house fire in Rushworth, and he sought replacements from the Defence Department)

News of these awards counterbalanced the constant stream of bad news being reported in the papers, such as local men being wounded and killed as a result of the war.

Reference: Murchison Advertiser 25.05.1917; research by Tracey Bons

54 THE ROLE OF THE STRETCHER BEARER

Seeing the Mel Gibson-directed movie "Hacksaw Ridge" recently brought into sharp focus the unenviable role of medical staff in front line fighting. The brother of Cyril Brown of Rushworth wrote home in early 1917, describing this work in some detail. His letter was published in the "Rushworth Chronicle".

Writing about his first experience on the front line, he said "We arrived at this place, the Advanced Dressing Station…after a very long march over a road torn up with shell fire. We were all very tired when we got here. I was standing in our cookhouse, waiting for some tea, when I had my first experience of shell fire…I did not feel frightened when the first shell came over (Ed. - which incidentally killed four men), but when the other three came along I felt a shivery feeling running down my spine."

Respect for the Red Cross

It was somewhat reassuring that there was almost universal respect for the Red Cross, despite the hostilities. "It is funny to see the men scatter when they hear the shells coming over. "Fritz" never puts any into our dressing station (we have a big red cross flag up) but he puts them too near to be pleasant – so near as to splash mud on our huts.

"Although we growl about the mud so much, it has saved hundreds of lives, for it causes many of Fritz's shells to "dud" – that is, they do not explode, and even when they do explode, they sink so far into the mud that they do very little harm except throw a lot of mud about."

Stretcher Bearing Under Fire

Going out under fire to bring in wounded men was a hazardous business. "It was very hard work, especially at night. We would get off the track and go up to our knees in mud. We could not show a light because Fritz would snipe us with "coal-boxes" (Ed. - howitzer shells) if we did."

Returning from delivering a wounded man to a dressing station one night, "two large shells burst in the direction of our dugout, about 100 yards away. When we got there, we found that they had blown up our dugout, killed the cook, and wounded three others…I was binding up a chap that had been slightly wounded when two more shells burst a few yards away from us.

A Rapid Exit

"The concussion knocked me flat for a few seconds and I did not wait for any more." In a scene reminiscent of "Hacksaw Ridge", "I put the wounded man on my back and (we) "got" for our lives. It was pitch dark and we were falling down shell holes. I never had such a rough journey."

The role of the stretcher bearers as first responders to the wounded and injured was absolutely vital. When they were in No-Man's Land, they did not have the protection of the Red Cross flag. Many risked their lives on a regular basis to save the lives of others, often with little or no recognition.

Reference: Rushworth Chronicle 4.3.1917

55 COSTLY VICTORY AT MESSINES

Australian troops were heavily engaged in the battle of Messines, Belgium, which took place in June 1917. Allied miners had spent many months digging tunnels under the German lines, and placing explosives there. After a preliminary bombardment by artillery for days beforehand, nineteen massive

explosions were detonated on 7 June. A "successful" infantry assault ensued. However, the Australians suffered nearly 14,000 casualties.

Private Jim Arthur (1788 Pte Frederick James Arthur, 37th Battalion) of Rushworth was in an assault battalion which contained many Goulburn Valley boys. It was the first major assault the 37th Battalion had been engaged in during the war.

A Grieving Widow

Jim was hardly one of the "boys". He was 41 when he had enlisted the year before. He had listed his occupation as a "Groom" – presumably for horses – and his brother Albert was also living in Rushworth.

When Jim enlisted, he nominated his "best friend" Katherine Price as his next-of-kin. He and Katherine made the difficult decision to get married between then and when he went overseas, knowing what the potential risks were.

Towards the end of June 1917, Katherine received the fateful news that Jim had died of wounds received at the battle of Messines. He was wounded in the leg, neck and back on the second day of the battle, before being transported to the 53rd Casualty Clearing Station in French Flanders, where he died the next day.

The Cost of War

Rushworth received another stark reminder of the cost of war when Bert Mason (137 Pte Herbert Samuel Mason, 8th Light Horse) arrived home to a hero's welcome. Bert had been in the infamous charge at The Nek (at Gallipoli) nearly two years before, where the 8th and 10th Light Horse Regiments had been decimated. It had taken all that time for him to recuperate enough to return home.

The crowd waiting to meet Bert at the station had the foreknowledge that he had suffered terribly. Whether it prepared them for the shock of seeing him with one leg missing, a "right arm almost useless" and looking "a little war weary", is another thing. The local community tried to make the occasion an uplifting one, with the town band greeting "the arrival of the train with patriotic airs…". After speeches, including one from Bert, the "Band then led the way to the rotunda where, prior to dispersing, a couple of tunes were played."

A Local Tragedy

As if there was not enough bad news coming from overseas, Rushworth was rocked by the death of George Coutts in an accident at the railway station. An Englishman, George was also a Gallipoli veteran (No 2203, 6th Battalion), who had been discharged because of rheumatic fever. At the time of the accident, he was working as a porter at the station.

The railway station was a potentially dangerous place. Only a few years earlier, teenager Ray Muhlhan, whose father was editor of the Rushworth Chronicle, was killed when he was crushed in the railway yards in another shocking accident.

References: Murchison Advertiser 25.5.17, 1.6.17 and 29.6.17

56 RUSHWORTH STATE SCHOOL CONCERT

In late June 1917, the staff and students from Rushworth State School presented a public concert in the Shire Hall. Ostensibly, this was to raise funds for the British Red Cross, which benefitted to the

tune of 20 pounds ($40). However, one suspects that the unspoken motive was to provide some entertainment, and an escape from the pressing issues of those dark days.

The staff and students were praised by the local papers, which said "the entertainment throughout was an interesting and enjoyable one, and the manner in which the scholars, from the smallest to the largest, acquitted themselves calls for unstinted praise to the teachers and all others interested for the pains taken to train the children for their various parts."

Patriotic Themes

At a time of war, it was not surprising that patriotic themes permeated the concert. Prior to the performances by the school children, the Rushworth Brass Band "played some inspiriting music in the front of the hall". This was followed by the students singing the national anthem, which was then "God Save the King".

Various other performances during the concert reflected the theme. For example, "A patriotic song "Hello there, Little Tommy Atkins" (Ed – Tommy Atkins, or "Tommy" was slang for a common British soldier) was splendidly rendered by the 5th grade girls and a Boy Scout" and "A solo and chorus, "Australia", by Bert Hawking and the Scout boys, was a good item…"

A Range of Talents

Performances during the evening reflected a wide range of talents that you would probably expect in an era when there was no electronic media, and people had to make their own entertainment. There were short plays, recitations, singing, instrumental interludes and comedy.

Henry Abikhair was "deservedly encored" for his recitation, "The Coster". Coster (or costermonger) is a term no longer current, but basically means a travelling fruit and vegetable salesman, or hawker. Henry's father Abraham had filled this role around Rushworth until just before the war, travelling around with horse and wagon before setting up a permanent shop in Rushworth in 1914. Henry himself later opened a fruit and vegetable shop in Rushworth.

It seems that the concert, involving so many students, was a great success. The paper reported that "One and all departed well satisfied with the concert."

Bad News Continues

Meanwhile, Mrs Mary Barry of Rushworth was advised that her estranged husband Patrick (2272 Arthur Patrick Barry, 42nd Battalion) had been killed at Messines. Patrick was 44, and he and Mary had two children, Helen and Jack. (Incidentally, Jack later played with Henry Abikhair in some of the great Rushworth football teams of the 1930s.) On the day of his death, Patrick's unit had been "subjected to exceptionally heavy shelling." Twelve men were killed and 58 wounded in the barrage.

Private A W Wall (6397 Albert Walter Wall, 21st Battalion) was reported as being in Southwark Military Hospital with severe illness, while Private S R Risstrom (1643 Stanley Robert Risstrom, 3rd Pioneers) had been gassed.

Reference: Murchison Advertiser, July 1917; Bons Tracey, *Rushworth Businesses and Their Owners – Gold Rush to Great War*; AWM & NAA websites.

57 1000 DAYS OF SERVICE

During July 1917, the Defence Department published a list of men and women who had already served for one thousand days. To feature on the list, a person must have enlisted before the middle of October 1914.

Given the extremely high attrition rate through death, wounds, injury and illness, clocking up 1000 days of service was a remarkable achievement. When we see the potentially devastating mental impact of relatively short rotations in battle zones today, it is hard to comprehend what these veterans must have experienced.

Five locals, "all lads who enlisted from Rushworth" in August-September 1914, were on the list, including a Light Horseman, an infantry sergeant, an engineer and two artillery gunners/drivers. They all served at Gallipoli then, amazingly, all of them continued to serve until the end of the war. Each suffered from various afflictions, and some were wounded or gassed, but they all made it home.

Service in the Middle East

Serving in the Light Horse, Tremayne Primrose (Trooper Edwin Gerald Tremayne Primrose, 4th Light Horse Regiment) survived Gallipoli (where his unit fought as infantry) and all the big battles as the Allies forced the Turks northwards in the Middle East. He also spent time with the Camel Corps.

A public service clerk in civilian life (whose father was the Commercial Bank manager in Rushworth), Tremayne's skills were utilised as a pay clerk in the army.

With the Big Guns

With the increasing mechanisation of war, more men were needed for specialist units such as the artillery. Gunners Ern Chambers and Sid Morris (2424 Garnett Ernest Chambers and 1561 Sidney John Morris) both served with the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade. Ern, who was born in Rushworth, also served in the Signals.

Sid, an Englishman who was working as a farm labourer when he enlisted, went onto a Closer Settlement block at Stanhope after the war, where he died prematurely in 1936. Cruelly, the Repatriation Department denied his wife Sarah certain benefits because his death was deemed "not related to war service".

In Support

A carpenter by trade, Frank Guy (203 Francis Xavier Guy, 2nd Field Company Engineers) worked as a sapper with the Engineers in support of the infantry and other units. The work was invariably hard and dirty, and often had to be performed under enemy fire.

Like many Australian troops who went to England, he married an Englishwoman. He had spent a lot of time in England after being sent there from Gallipoli to recuperate.

Providing Grunt

Although not listed on the Rushworth war memorial, infantryman Frank Calley (402 Sergeant Francis Alexander Calley, 59th Battalion) was mentioned as one of the men with Rushworth connections to have served 1000 days. Frank had enlisted in Rushworth.

Originally in the 7th Battalion, he served with many Rushworth boys. Survivors from Gallipoli were split up, much to their great chagrin, to form the basis of new battalions to go to France in 1916. Frank

went into the 59th where he and other 7th Battalion "originals" used their experience to teach the new chums.

References: Murchison Advertiser 20.7.1917; AWM and NAA websites

58 MEETING THE KING

In August 1917, the rector from St Paul's Anglican church in Rushworth attended Buckingham Palace, where he met the King and was presented with the CMG (Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George). At the time, Reverend Fred Wray was a Chaplain with the AIF. He received his award for his work in the field in Gallipoli, where he was also Mentioned in Despatches.

Fred Wray had a long history of voluntary military service for Australia. He had earlier gone to the South African (Boer) War as a Chaplain, and had served in the militia in the intervening years. All of this service resulted in him eventually being awarded the Volunteer Officers Distinction (VD). A minimum of 20 years' service was a prerequisite for this award.

Coming to Rushworth

The Reverend and Mrs Wray (who we met in an earlier Anzac Tales as President of the Red Cross) came to Rushworth in 1913. Fred was nominally the rector at St Paul's until 1920, although this was interrupted by his service with the AIF from late 1914 through to 1919.

A big, strong, robust sort of bloke, Fred had been a keen footballer, shooter and rower in his younger days. He had been captain of the Foundry United Football Club in Castlemaine for a time back in the 1880s and '90s. The Castlemaine Mail (16/10/1917) reported that "he is a clergyman, but not of the effeminate, namby-pamby, afternoon tea order. He is one of the manliest and most popular men the Castlemaine district has produced. Ask any adult Castlemaine native."

Role of the Chaplain

At Gallipoli, Fred was right in the front line, ignoring orders that non-combatants should not go ashore. As well as ministering to the men, he assisted medical staff, conducted funerals, helped dig and re-fill graves, recorded details of deaths, compiled lists of personal possessions for their return to families and wrote to the bereaved families.

Like many of the Australian troops, Fred got sick with enteritis while serving at Gallipoli. He was sent to hospital in Malta, then on to England before being repatriated to Australia. Back in Egypt in March 1916, he was again Mentioned in Despatches for his work with the 13th Battalion before they were sent to France in June. He worked with the 4th Brigade on the Western Front.

Promotion

By the end of 1916, Fred was in London, working in an administrative position. Early in 1917 he was promoted to Senior Chaplain, head of all the Australian chaplains working in Europe, of which there were nearly 100 at any one time. This position had a nominal army rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Preaching at Westminster Abbey

In August 1917, in what must surely have been one of the highlights of a decorated career, Reverend Wray conducted the service at Westminster Abbey in front of a congregation of around 2000 souls. Nearing the end of his war service, he was also awarded a CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in June 1919, making him one of the most decorated men to have enlisted from Rushworth.

References: Australian Dictionary of Biography – Volume 12 (MUP 1990); local papers

59 HOME TOWN TENSIONS

In August 1917, there was clearly some war-related tension in the town of Rushworth, which occasionally erupted into violence. Bruce Ayers and George McLeod had a punch-up outside Wilson's store in High Street that ended up with them both fronting the Rushworth court. The dispute was sparked by the issue of conscription. After hearing claim and counter-claim, the magistrate threw out the case. He considered that both parties were equally to blame.

A similar incident had occurred in High Street some weeks earlier, which also had a court sequel. Thomas Coyle and Edwin Muhlhan (a returned serviceman who we met in earlier Anzac Tales) charged each other with unlawful assault. The two were business rivals in the stock and station agency business. This may have been the motivation for the fracas, but one wonders whether the short fuse Eddie displayed in this incident was related to his war service. The fact that he wore his uniform to court indicates that he was keen to bring his recent service to the attention of the magistrate. Again, both cases were thrown out of court.

Gal Comes Home - Twice

Meanwhile, young Gal Stewart (2384 Corporal Galloway Stewart, 4th Light Horse) returned home from the Middle East, where he had succumbed to heart problems. Gal was the son of Rushworth solicitor J Burt Stewart (owner of the Glasgow Buildings) and Grace (nee Semmens), the secretary of the Red Cross.

Only 18 when he enlisted at the end of 1915, Gal fought against the Turks as the allied forces pushed them northwards from the Sinai. He was afforded the usual community welcome at the Rushworth railway station, with the band playing before leading a procession up to the rotunda.

Incidentally, Gal also served in the second world war, where unfortunately he became a POW after the fall of Singapore in 1942. He remained a POW for the duration of the war. Old J B Stewart lived just long enough to see his son return home for what must have been a poignant reunion.

War News Filters Through

The usual run of news about local men continued to filter through from overseas. Gunner/Driver Ern Chambers, who had recently joined the ranks of men with 1000 days of service, was wounded.

Reg Luxon (1227 Reginald Harold Luxon, 38th Battalion) was promoted to Temporary Sergeant after his predecessor in the position had been killed in action. Before the war, Reg had worked as a bank clerk for the Bank of Victoria in Murchison and Tatura. His father was the manager at the Sale branch.

Private Viv O'Sullivan (4560 Vivian Francis O'Sullivan, 7th Battalion) was reported seriously ill. Like Reg, Viv had been a bank clerk. It seems that the serious illness did not slow him down too much. While in England recuperating, he managed to contract syphilis.

Richard Geyle (1942 Air Mechanic Richard Cornish Geyle, Australian Flying Corps) was given a send-off in Rushworth. His occupation had been "coachbuilder". You could imagine that his skills in that craft would have been very useful in the AFC.

References: Murchison Advertiser, August 1917; AWM & NAA websites

60 MEMORIAL AND INTERCESSORY SERVICE

In September 1917, the community of Rushworth decided to hold a memorial and intercessory service. The memorial aspect of the service was "in memory of those who have made the supreme sacrifice for their country, and an intercessory (Ed. praying on behalf of others) for the brave fellows who are passing through the dangers and trials of war."

The ecumenical service was to have been held out of doors, but as the weather deteriorated, it was moved into the Shire Hall. With the Rushworth Brass Band providing the music, proceedings began with the National Anthem. This was followed by speeches, prayers and hymns.

First Suggestions of a War Memorial

Mr Campbell gave an impassioned speech about those who had died at war, which dwelt on the need to "establish a memorial to those men which would stand for all time as a mark of recognition for the great sacrifice they had made in giving their lives in this great struggle for (that) which they valued and prized even above life itself – their country's honour."

He went on to say that "such a memorial would be a fitting one, but first of all the memorial must begin in the hearts and minds of the men and women, and the best possible monument they could establish would be the memorial of individual strength of character, and the proof that they had learnt their lesson by the experience of this great war…the memorial of pure life."

Fire Brigade Roll of Honour

With what in hindsight seems to have been a premature move, the Rushworth Fire Brigade chose this function to unveil a roll of honour of its members who had "gone to the front". By that stage of the war, 24 members of the brigade had already enlisted. Two of these men had lost their lives, and "there were not more than four who had gone through unscathed."

Mr Muhlhan, speaking in the absence of the President of the Fire Brigade (Dr Heily), echoed the words of the chief officer of the fire service by stating that "there was no better stamp of men in the country than the members of the fire brigades" who "had done their bit to uphold the empire."

Military Medal

One of the members of the Fire Brigade who we met in an earlier Anzac Tales (Will Brown) had won the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery in action during a raid on the German trenches on Christmas night, 1916. This was mentioned by one of the speakers, who said it was "something they could be proud of."

It was suggested that if every organisation had "given their quota" in the same way that the Fire Brigade had done, then there would be no problem in getting enough recruits for the army.

No Denominations Over There

Lt Holder, who was the recruiting officer for the area, reflected on a similar service that he had attended when serving in Egypt. He noted "there were no denominations over there". It was clearly a refreshing change for all denominations to be represented at this service in Rushworth, united in a common cause.

Reference: Murchison Advertiser 28.9.1917

61 BLACK DAYS FOR MURCHISON

One hundred years ago, news filtered through to the local area that Alfred George "Boy" Hammond, who we met in earlier ANZAC Tales, had died of shrapnel wounds. "Boy" had enlisted, with his parents' consent, as soon as he had completed a science degree at Melbourne University.

Less than a week before being wounded, "Boy" had signed a will which left everything to his sister Edith. Perhaps he had some sort of premonition that he would be killed. He was "caught by a piece of shrapnel whilst he was unearthing two of his mates who had been buried…" by an exploding shell.

His death came just before the Allied forces launched a series of battles that became known as the Third Battle of Ypres. Ypres was a city in Belgian Flanders, and the battles around Ypres would cause a huge amount of grief in Murchison.

Third Battle of Ypres

Running over a period of 8 weeks, the Third Battle of Ypres cost about 38,000 Australian casualties. Australians were heavily engaged at Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Broodseinde, Poelcapelle and Passchendaele.

Jim Murray of Murchison (1782 Trooper James Murray, 1st Anzac Light Horse Regiment) was killed at the Battle of Menin Road. Part of a machine gun section, Jim and two of his mates were killed when a high explosive shell hit their position on what was known as ANZAC Ridge.

Jim was part of a big Murchison family of eight children, and prior to the war was "an enthusiastic sportsman. He was a prominent member of the Murchison Football Club." Just prior to his death, his sister Mary Ellen, or "Nellie" had enlisted in the AIF as a nurse, and was en route to Egypt when he was killed.

Nursing at Salonika

Staff Nurse Nellie Murray was given a huge send-off in Murchison, organised by the local Red Cross. Over 100 women and some men had attended the function, at which Nellie was presented with a gold watch and a cheque.

Nellie had trained at Mooroopna Base Hospital, and was still working there when she enlisted. She served in Egypt for eight months before going to Salonika (now Thessalonika, in Greece). In this obscure theatre of the war, Allied troops fought against Germans and Bulgarians. Australian troops were not involved. It was disappointing for some of the Australian nurses there that they were not looking after Australian casualties, but they had no control over their destiny.

Nellie went to England five months after the end of the war. She was repatriated to Australia in September 1919, and finally discharged from the AIF in February 1920.

Death in Melbourne

In September 1917, Frank Tilson (1386 Bombardier Arthur Francis Tilson) of Murchison died in a Melbourne hospital after a series of brain operations. Frank and his three brothers, Jim, Fred and Charlie, had all enlisted for the war, but Frank's health precluded him from serving overseas. He served at the fort at Queenscliff, and also on Thursday Island (probably at Green Hill fort).

References: Murchison Advertiser, NAA and AWM websites

62 POLYGON WOOD

As part of a series of battles later called the Third Battle of Ypres, the Australians fought in the battle of Polygon Wood in late September 1917. This followed on from the success of the Battle of Menin Road a week earlier, and involved two Australian divisions – over 20,000 men.

With very effective use of a "creeping" barrage provided by the artillery, the Australians were able to achieve their objectives (claiming about 15 square kilometres of territory), albeit with the loss of nearly 6,000 casualties. Concrete "pillboxes", which housed German machine gun posts, were a major obstacle that had to be overcome by the advancing troops.

Another Murchison Fatality

On the back of news of the recent deaths of three Murchison district men, another was lost during the Battle of Polygon Wood. Private James King (No 3831, 59th Battalion) had declared when he enlisted that "Having had a lot of practice, I am a good rifle shot." His initial medical examination was by Dr W G Brunskill in Murchison, before he formally enlisted in Melbourne in July 1915.

A 35 year-old widower with two children (who became his beneficiaries), James was an engine driver when he enlisted. Originally from Heyfield, he had been working in Murchison for some months, where he had a family connection with the Tuhans.

James' baptism of fire came in the terrible battle of Fromelles in mid-1916, where he was wounded in both thighs. However, he recovered sufficiently to be back with his unit by the end of that year.

James disappeared without trace in the fighting at Polygon Wood, so has no burial place. His name is simply listed on the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres, along with over 6000 of his compatriots who shared his fate in Belgium.

Murchison State School Honour Board

Like the Rushworth Fire Brigade, Murchison State School committee decided, at this seemingly early stage, to unveil an honour board recognising the service of past staff and students of the school.

Perhaps the Rushworth move, and/or the fact that Murchison had just gone through a horror stretch of war news, may have contributed to the urgency of doing so. There was no way of knowing when the war was going to end.

By this time, more than 100 former students had already enlisted for service. The Hon Hugh McKenzie, Minister for Railways and Water Supply in a former government, and once a pupil of the school, performed the duty of unveiling the roll.

Council Discusses Conscription

Meanwhile, the monthly meeting of the Shire of Waranga voted 6-3 not to support moves by another municipality to seek a second referendum on conscription. Councillors Gunn, Ingram and McCrae pushed to support the initiative, but in an increasingly anti-war environment, Councillors McKee, Cochrane, Ryan, Sexton, Williams and Furphy voted against.

The decision mattered little, as the Federal government later decided to go ahead with another referendum in December 1917.

References: Murchison Advertiser, Oct-Nov 1917; NAA and AWM websites; Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Battles*

63 BATTLE OF BROODSEINDE

Tragedy awaited the Rushworth and district community as Australian troops were deployed in the battle of Broodseinde in early October 1917. Broodseinde was the third of a series of battles that was later broadly referred to as the Third Battle of Ypres.

Three local boys were killed on the day of the battle, in which the Australians and New Zealanders attacked along a 4.5 km front. By the standards of the day, the assault was deemed successful in that it achieved its objective of land taken from the Germans. However, the Anzac troops suffered over 8000 casualties in the process.

Sadly, none of the remains of any of the three local men were located after the war. As a result, all three names are simply listed on the Menin Gate, a memorial to the missing at Ypres, in Belgium.

A Court of Inquiry

Nearly two months after the battle, a court of inquiry determined that Perc Davies (4164 Private Percival Davies, 6th Battalion) had been killed. The Davies family had moved to Murchison around 1900, and had property on River Road.

Perc had arrived in France in April 1916, but was out of action over the bitter winter of 1916-17 with pneumonia. He finally got back to France in June 1917, before going missing at Broodseinde.

Red Cross officials interviewed surviving soldiers from the same unit to see if they knew what had happened to him. The feedback on Percy was all bad – "The Germans opened up a heavy barrage on us…"; he was "killed by a shell with several others. There would not have been much to bury."

A Grieving Family and Fiance

Jim Casey (1625 Private James Casey, 38th Battalion) was the fourth of twelve children of Patrick and Susannah. Although his parents had moved to Barham by the time he enlisted, Jim still had strong links to Rushworth through the marriage of some of his sisters into the Lambden and Barlow families.

Jim had obviously got engaged before he left for war, as a poignant notice appeared in the paper after his death, which ended "loved fiancé of May Shanhan, "Glenvale", Barham".

A fellow digger told the Red Cross that there were four men in a trench when "a shell came (over) and buried them. When they were dug out they were all dead, but without wounds…must have been killed by the concussion."

An Experienced Soldier

Of the three locals who gave their lives at Broodseinde, Jack Stanley (735 Corporal John Stanley, 21st Battalion) was the most experienced soldier. He had done an apprenticeship as a coach painter with Miller & Miller in Echuca, but enlisted from Rushworth in January 1915.

He had survived Gallipoli, the torpedoing of his troopship (the "Southland") in the Mediterranean Sea, and service in France in 1916 and 1917 before meeting his fate at Broodseinde. Ten days after the battle, his remains were found by a signalman repairing telephone lines. Despite him collecting the dog tags and reporting the position, the remains were never recovered for a proper burial.

References: Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The Encyclopedia of Australia's Battles*; Ancestry, NAA and AWM websites; Murchison Advertiser

64 THE MUD OF PASSCHENDAELE

Just over a week after the battle at Broodseinde, Australian troops were engaged in two more battles as the autumn weather started to deteriorate in mid-October 1917. Unlike the earlier battles which were part of the Third Battle of Ypres, heavy rain turned the battlefields at Poelcappelle and Passchendaele into quagmires.

Much to the chagrin of many Australians, the assaults were ordered to continue despite the appalling conditions. Failure was inevitable, and made more so by ineffective artillery support. Passchendaele alone cost the Australians and New Zealanders another 7000 casualties – in one day - and effectively marked the end of fighting for them before the onset of winter.

Cousins-in-Arms

Andy Strawhorn (1667 Private Andrew Strawhorn) from Wanalta, and his cousin Jack McLean (2368 Lance Corporal John McLean) from Shepparton (no relation to the local McLeans) were in the lead battalion (the 37th), as were many Goulburn Valley boys. Both were killed on the morning of the Passchendaele action.

Before enlisting, Andy had been working on his recently deceased Uncle Robert's farm, "Janefield", on Old Corop Road, now owned by Brendan and Sue Barlow. Members of the Strawhorn family had selected the land in 1872, where Andy's grandfather, also Andrew, was a breeder of fine Clydesdales. The mud and blood of Passchendaele were a far cry from the gentle farming life Andy had pursued before his enlistment.

A Remarkable Coincidence

Andy Strawhorn was a great mate of John Sutton Laurie (or "Jack", who we met in earlier Anzac Tales), and whose property was also on Old Corop Road. Initially, Jack was also in the 37th Battalion, but later joined his cousin Andy Lawrie in the 5th. In his writing, Jack spoke very highly of Andy Strawhorn.

When Irene Finch (nee Laurie) visited the Western Front in recent years, her Belgian tour guide showed her around Tyne Cot Cemetery, where many of the 37th Battalion victims of Passchendaele are buried. She was shown the graves of two unrelated diggers who had interesting stories. Irene then looked at the grave in between them, and saw it was that of Andy Strawhorn.

A War Memorial Anomaly

The Rushworth war memorial lists F Hilburn in the 'In Memoriam' section, and A and F Hilburn in the roll of men who enlisted. First cousins, the Hilburn boys were grandsons of the late Stephen Hilburn, who arrived on the Rushworth goldfields from the USA in 1858.

Both boys enlisted for the war, but Franklin was a late enlistment, died just after the war, and is buried in the Rushworth cemetery. The parents of Arthur (3076 Pte Arthur William Hilburn, 39th Battalion) had died when he was young, and he was raised by his aunt and uncle. He attended Moora South SS, then went to Numurkah with them in 1914/5 before enlisting in 1917.

Arthur was badly wounded in the back and chest in the same battle that claimed Andy Strawhorn and Jack McLean, and died six days later.

References: Correspondence from Irene Finch; Strawhorn family history; Ancestry, NAA and AWM websites

65 A STIRRING 'CAVALRY' CHARGE

Most people are aware of the mounted charge by two regiments of the Australian Light Horse – the 4th and the 12th – at Beersheba on 31 October 1917. Decisive action was needed to enable the allied forces take the all-important wells at the desert oasis before nightfall.

The Australians did not carry sabres like standard cavalry, so drew their bayonets as they charged down the sloping ground towards the Turkish defensive positions, the town and its vital water supply.

History tells us that the charge, in conjunction with supporting units, was successful. Beersheba was captured with minimal losses. It was the beginning of the end for a resolute Turkish line of defence that extended 45 km east, from the coast at Gaza, to Beersheba in the desert.

The Bush Poet's Wild Ride

Ted Harrington, who later became a well-known Australian poet and writer (and featured in an earlier Anzac Tales), was a Trooper in the 4th Light Horse. He took part in the charge, in which the 4th dismounted after they had jumped the defensive trenches, and took on the Turkish defenders. The 12th Regiment continued on and took the town.

Ted took part in the 1918 battles that ultimately led to the taking of Damascus, and the end of the war in the Middle East. Health-wise, he paid a price. Someone who met him at a pub in 1962, not long before his death in 1966, said "He looked spry enough, but the dreadful cough was with him then. A tiny man with a coat too long and legs so short, but one could see him with emu feather jauntily in his hat and those legs in breeches, a light horseman of the AIF, who once fought at Beersheba."

A Letter to "My Dear Father"

Towards the end of November 1917, Bill West (2649 Trooper William West, 1st Light Horse) wrote home and described his involvement in the battle of Beersheba, and a subsequent action in which he was awarded a Military Medal.

What is easily forgotten about Beersheba is that many other units were involved in its capture. The artillery, for example, provided great support to the charge by helping to knock out Turkish artillery which could have compromised the mounted attack.

Other units, including Bill's, were pressing the Turkish defenders. The 1st Light Horse attacked a strong Turkish redoubt (defensive post) between it and the town, taking it about 4 pm (shortly before the charge). Bill and his mates then "rode up to within about 3 miles of the town, dismounted, and charged the rest of the way with fixed bayonets."

A Great Sight

"This was, I reckon, a great sight – there were four lines of us and the Turks simply poured the shells in on us as well as machine gun and rifle fire, but we still advanced. It was like a regimental parade…not a man seemed to take any notice of the fire. It is these sort(s) of advances that tell on the enemy." No glory like the 4th and 12th, but still a job well done.

References: Australian Dictionary of Biography; letter from Bill West to his father, courtesy of Len Armstrong

66 A HERO RETURNS

In November 1917, Lieutenant Frank McNamara made a welcome return to Rushworth. Frank had been awarded a Victoria Cross for an action which had occurred 8 months earlier in the Middle East. The return was tinged with some sadness, because the train that Frank returned on also carried the body of Ben Jones (609 Private Benjamin Jones, 37th Battalion). As a result, the welcome at the station was suitably circumspect.

Ben had been repatriated from overseas because of illness earlier in the year, and had died in the Caulfield Military Hospital. He is buried under the big pine trees on the eastern side of the Rushworth cemetery.

Criterion Hotel Banquet

Frank McNamara was feted that evening with a banquet at the Criterion Hotel. The local member, Mr Gordon MLA, attended the evening, noting in his speech that Frank's was the third VC won by men from the Waranga electorate (the others being those of Tubb and Burton).

Eddie Muhlhan, a returned soldier from Rushworth, had served under Major Tubb in the 7th Battalion, was in the same platoon as Corporal Burton and had gone to school with McNamara, so knew all three VC winners very well.

Numerous other speakers added their congratulations. Burt Stewart was his at his loquacious best as he proudly announced that "Captain McNamara reflected lustre on the little town of Rushworth."

A Modest Response

Frank McNamara was modest and unassuming in his response, praising the town of Rushworth for its contribution to the war effort. "He felt it a great honour to be seated there that night in the company of so many people of his native town."

He then regaled the company with stories of the work done by the Australian Flying Corps in Palestine. Their work included being the "eyes of the army", as well as bombing, directing artillery fire, photography, harassing of enemy troops and many other duties.

Frank highlighted the significant role played by the Light Horse, noting the recent victory at Beersheba. "That last action of theirs, he would have loved to have witnessed from the air."

Flower Day at Rushworth SS

The following day, Frank was the guest of honour at the school Flower Day, held by the staff and children "on behalf of the Patriotic Funds." 40 pounds ($80) was raised from the stalls and activities.

During the afternoon, a photographic portrait of the VC winner was unveiled by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Semmens, who also had strong Rushworth connections. He had been the first commander of the 6th Battalion, AIF.

Cool Calculation

Lt Col Semmens recounted a brief history of the Victoria Cross. He then went on to muse that "in most instances, the Victoria Cross was won by a soldier who, in a moment or two of madness performed some amazing feat in face of death, and then, afterwards, could not remember what he had done. In this incidence, however, the deed had been one of cool calculation."

Again, Frank McNamara responded with great humility, urging the "boys and girls to make the very best of their opportunity while at school."

Reference: Murchison Advertiser 9/11/1917

67 PASSCHENDAELE CLAIMS ANOTHER VICTIM

A recent Anzac Tales told the story of the local men who were lost at the disastrous, muddy battle of Passchendaele on 12 October 1917. Further research has identified another Rushworth lad who lost his life in the battle. For some unaccountable reason, he is not listed on the Rushworth war memorial as being killed in action.

Donald McLeod (1873 Private Donald McLeod, 37th Battalion) was in the lead battalion assaulting the German lines, along with many boys from the Goulburn Valley. After the battle, he was listed as missing in action.

Court of Inquiry

It was over six months after Passchendaele that a court of inquiry was finally held into Don's presumed death on that fateful morning. This was probably held in response to a request for information from his brother James (1787 Private James McLeod, 7th Battalion), who was also serving overseas at the time.

At Passchendaele, the Australians were sitting ducks as they floundered in the mud, vainly trying to reach the German lines. Tragically, one of Don's mates claimed to have seen him "blown to pieces" by an exploding shell. When the Defence Department passed the news on to James, they censored this response, only saying that he had been killed by artillery fire.

Nuggetty Gully

The name Donald ran through at least four consecutive generations of the McLeod family. Don's grandfather (also Donald) had emigrated to Australia from Scotland. He was engaged in mining pursuits at Costerfield, then Rushworth, where the family lived at Nuggetty Gully.

Donald Senior married Isabella Marshall in Heathcote in 1864, and their son Donald (our soldier's father) was born at Costerfield in 1869. He in turn married Mary Shewan, and their six children were all born in Rushworth in the 1890s and early 1900s. Donald the soldier was their third son.

Because Donald's remains were never located, his name is simply listed on the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium, which contains a staggering 55,000 names. Over 6000 Australians are listed there.

Another Rushworth Nurse Enlists

Constance Brocklebank, who was born in Rushworth in the 1880s, enlisted for service as a nurse in late 1917, embarking for overseas at the end of November. She was 29.

All of Constance's overseas war service was in India, where she served in three different hospitals in the Bombay (now Mumbai) and Poona (Pune) areas. This might seem strange, given that there were no Australian troops serving anywhere in the vicinity. However, the resources of the Australian Army Nursing Services (AANS) were deployed at the behest of the British.

In 1918, there were 320 AANS nurses working in India. Nearly twice that number served there during the course of the war. They cared for British and Indian troops, as well as Turkish prisoners of war.

The casualties came from fighting in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq and Kuwait), an almost unheard-of theatre of the war.

Constance married into the Heily family in 1920, after she had returned from the war and received her discharge in mid-1919.

References: Ancestry, AWM & NAA websites

68 A FIERY DEBATE ON CONSCRIPTION

As 1917 drew to a close, and recruitment of volunteers for the war was stalling, Australians voted in a second referendum on conscription on 20 December. In the lead-up to the referendum, great debate raged in Rushworth, with many public meetings being held in the Shire Hall.

Two days after the poll, but before the results were announced, acts of "incendiarism" (i.e. arson) took place near Rushworth. It appeared that the properties of prominent proponents of the "Yes" campaign were specifically targetted.

Saturday Night Fires

Around 10.00 on a Saturday night (22.12.1917), seven fires were lit on the adjoining properties of Messrs Cattlin (grazier), Taylor (bank manager), Stewart (farmer) and the stock agents, Weir and Coyle. It was claimed threats had earlier been made against these people, who had "used their motor cars in the interests of a "Yes" vote" i.e. they had displayed signage on their vehicles.

The fires, which were extinguished after "strenuous effort", put Rushworth in the news right around Australia. Police headquarters in Melbourne was contacted, and there was a stir on Christmas Day when Detective Brophy, Constable Downes and two blacktrackers, "Grouchy" and "Frank" arrived in town to investigate.

Although it was contended in the papers that "it is possible that several arrests will be made shortly", research has not to date indicated that any charges were ever laid over the arson.

The "Larrikin Element" in Rushworth

"The Age" and other newspapers (which were almost universally pro-conscription) postulated that "It is known that amongst the larrikin element in the Rushworth district, there is a strong IWW feeling." The IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) was formed in the US in 1905, and had ties to radical socialist and anarchist labour movements. Papers also reported "several enemy subjects are residing" in the area, and cast aspersions on the local anti-conscription movement.

These views were strongly countered in letters to the editors of various papers by the Chairman (W Curtis) and Secretary (S Peel) of the Rushworth Anti-Conscription Committee. They contended that "by cowardly inference, a stigma and cloak of suspicion has been insidiously placed on citizens of Rushworth which will take many years to wipe out."

No Vote Prevails Again

As it turned out, the "No" vote prevailed in the referendum, with a bigger overall margin than in the 1916 referendum. A majority of people in Rushworth voted "No" at the Shire Hall, while other polling booths in the electorate were at Carag Carag, Colbinabbin East, Cornella East, Murchison, Murchison East, Wanalta, Waranga Basin and Whroo.

The result of the referendum was perhaps surprising, given the ambiguous wording of the question, and the fact that the Federal government, most State governments, the press and most of the Protestant churches openly supported conscription.

In Rushworth, the “No” vote was endorsed by a number of returned servicemen. Clearly, they did not want others to have to experience the hell they had been through. The year ended with deep divisions existing amongst the populace of Rushworth and district.

Reference: Launceston Examiner 1.1.1918, Murchison Advertiser 18.1.1918

SECTION 4 – 1918

COMPRISING ARTICLES 69-92 PUBLISHED IN THE WARANGA NEWS DURING 2018

69 THE WAR GRINDS ON

With the success of the "No" vote in the second referendum on conscription held in late December 1917, there were lingering tensions in the town of Rushworth. The Hughes government had called the second referendum because voluntary enlistments were failing to cover the horrendous losses of men on the Western Front.

The people of Rushworth and district probably did not have much to be optimistic about as the new year began. There was no end to the war in sight. The "Bendigonian" newspaper listed the names of many northern Victorian men who had been killed in the previous year. Nine of those men listed had connections with the former Shire of Waranga, while several others were overlooked by the paper.

Captain Courageous

One of the men not listed by the "Bendigonian" was a man with strong Rushworth connections. The reason for his non-inclusion may have been that by the time he enlisted, he had moved to Western Australia.

Captain James Rodsted was born in Rushworth in 1879, and attended the State School. When he joined up in WA, he served in the 10th Light Horse Regiment, which on 31 October 1917 was part of the force trying to capture Beersheba. Rodsted was badly wounded on the day of the famous charge by two other Light Horse Regiments. There were conflicting reports as to whether his wounds were caused by shrapnel or machine gun fire. He subsequently died of his wounds a week later, at the No 14 Australian General Hospital at Abbassia, Cairo.

Goulburn Weir Sports Club

On New Year's Day 1918, the Goulburn Weir Sports Club held a carnival, with over 1500 attendees, including many from Murchison and Rushworth. It was an opportunity for people to forget about the pressing issues of the day, at least for a few hours.

Main sporting events were running (100 & 220 yards) and woodchop (best time to get through a 13 inch log was 48.4 seconds), with many minor events also being held. Rushworth Brass Band provided music during the day, while the crowd enjoyed the merry-go-round, sideshows, wheels of fortune and refreshment booths. Patrons could also avail themselves of a cruise on the weir in "Mr McLeod's motor launch".

In the evening, 70 couples attended the grand ball at the Goulburn Weir Hall. Music was provided by Alf Salas, while James Miller proved to be a competent MC. Profits from the whole day were shared equally between Mooroopna Hospital, Patriotic Funds and the Sports Club.

Roll of Volunteers Unveiled

A few days before the carnival, a marble tablet was unveiled in the gardens at the weir, containing the names of 20 local lads (Goulburn Weir and South Murchison) who had enlisted and gone to the war. Five of them had already lost their lives overseas.

The unveiling was yet another example of the strong desire of local communities to solemnly recognise those who had gone overseas to serve their country. So pressing was the perceived need, it could not wait until the war ended. Most memorials of this type were upgraded later, when the war finally ended in November 1918.

References: "Bendigonian" 3/1/1918, "Murchison Advertiser" 4/1/18, "The Argus" 19/1/18

70 VETERAN'S FATHER DIES

Shortly after Frank McNamara VC had returned to Rushworth in late 1917, his father William died in Castlemaine in February 1918. It was fortunate that father and son had the opportunity to spend time with each other before he died. Prior to that, Frank had been overseas for 18 months.

Born in Axedale in 1863, William was a public servant. During his time in Rushworth, he served as District Officer with the Forestry Department. By the time he retired, he was living in Melbourne and was Chief Inspector for the Victorian Wheat Commission.

Australian Natives' Association

William joined the Rushworth branch of the Australian Natives' Association (ANA) in 1898 and became the President of the local branch two years later. At the time, the ANA was vocal in supporting political moves towards Federation of the Australian colonies. William must have been well respected in the organisation as he became Chief (i.e. State) President of the ANA in 1912.

The ANA was vocal in supporting the war effort, and other patriotic causes. In a sign of the times, membership was restricted to white males who were born in Australia. Around the turn of the century, the number of people born in Australia passed the number who had come from overseas.

Letter from England

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Roberts from Wanalta received a fascinating letter from her grandson Ernest (2477 Pte Ernest William Tye, 14th Battalion). Ernest was born in Rushworth before his parents moved to Kangaroo Flat.

It seems that Ernest's letter may have escaped the censors, because he provided graphic details of two months he had spent in France, prior to being gassed and sent back to England.

Ernest had been on the troopship "Ballarat" when it was torpedoed in the Atlantic on Anzac Day 1917. He survived, and went into further training in England before being shipped to France.

Baptism of Fire

"When we arrived within three miles of Ypres we knew there was a war on, for Fritz (the Germans) came over (in planes) and dropped some bombs quite close to our camp."

Three days later, they "got ready to go into the lines. We had to say goodbye to our packs and get into fighting order. When we went into action we were loaded up with 120 rounds of munition (sic), 5 mill (sic) grenades, a pick and shovel and enough rations for two days."

"The march up the duckboards was a thing I won't forget in a hurry. Imagine eight miles in shell-torn country, pitch blackness, and nothing but the flash of guns and Fritz's shells to guide us. It all seems like a dream." This was the forerunner to the Battle of Polygon Wood, which Ernest survived unscathed.

Coincidences

Unusual coincidences can happen to people at war, and Ernest was no exception. "Strange how I first embarked on 25.9.16; went into my first battle on 25.9.17; was left at Durban with meningitis 18.10.16, and was gassed 18.10.17. The sister that nursed me at Durban with meningitis also nursed me at Berrington War Hospital when I was gassed."

Reference: Murchison Advertiser, February 1918

71 MARRIED IN ENGLAND

Like a number of the men listed on the Rushworth war memorial, Ern Prentice (No 337, 2nd Corporal Ernest Gordon Prentice, Australian Provost Corps) was married while overseas. In February 1918, Ern married Eileen Griffin, an Irish lass from Cork, in the south-eastern English city of Folkstone. Folkstone was an English channel port, so many troops passed through on the way to and from France.

When Ern enlisted at Richmond in August 1914, war had only just been declared. He was one of the first men with Rushworth connections to enlist. At the time of his enlistment, he gave his occupation as wood carter, although he had been "lately employed in Melbourne".

Post-war, Ern and Eileen came back to Rushworth, where they lived up until World War 2. They had seven children, suffering a traumatic experience when their Murchison Road house burnt down in 1932.

Anzac Veteran

Initially attached to the 6th Battalion, Ern was in the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915. He was one of many who was re-landed on the southern tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula (Cape Helles) less than two weeks later. Miraculously he escaped almost unscathed from the two landings, despite the fact that his unit suffered horrendous casualties.

In a letter to his brother in Rushworth, Ern said "it will give you some idea of things when I state that they could only muster thirteen (i.e. original members of his company of 100 odd), and I was one of them." This was when they were relieved in October, and had a short spell on the nearby island of Lemnos.

Self-Inflicted Wound

In another letter, Ern cited an example of a self-inflicted wound amongst his fellow soldiers. This flies in the face of the image of the laconic, bronzed, fearless, ready-made soldier that many histories would suggest that typified the Aussie digger.

Three nights after landing on Gallipoli, where his battalion had experienced its baptism of fire, Ern and four of his mates were "just going to sleep, when one fellow shot himself through the foot…This fellow said that he was cleaning his gun, but he had his boot off, and there is a lot of that sort of thing around here."

On to France and an MM

After surviving Gallipoli, Ern went on to France with his battalion. Since Gallipoli, he had been "connected with the signalling staff and could give some of the Rushworth post office chaps a go on telegraphy." It was in this capacity that Ern and a mate both won Military Medals at Pozieres in August 1916. Vital lines were continually being cut by shell fire, which they went out to repair.

In part, the citation reads “Notwithstanding the heavy shelling, these two men maintained communication so well that it was not necessary to use a runner. The maintenance of the line was of the utmost importance as it was the only means of communication to the various Brigades and the Artillery.”

To England

Soon after Pozieres, Ern suffered acute appendicitis, and was transferred to England. He did not rejoin his unit in France, instead transferring to the Military Police. At some point during his time in England, he met Eileen, and their romance blossomed.

References: AWM, NAA and Trove websites, Murchison Advertiser

72 MURCHISON RED CROSS CARNIVAL

In early 1918, the Murchison Red Cross held its third annual carnival. In many ways, there were much stronger links between Murchison and Rushworth in those days, and it was taken for granted that there would be strong participation in the carnival by the Rushworth community.

A special train was organised for the day, and it arrived “from Rushworth, carrying a full complement of passengers…and the already large crowd that had assembled in Stephenson Street was thus considerably added to.”

Rushworth Brass Band was a regular fixture at events like this in Murchison. The band led the street parade, which kicked off the carnival, and stretched for over quarter of a mile (400 metres). Entries ranged “from the gorgeous and beautiful to the humorous and ridiculous.”

A Full Program

“When the huge throng of sight-seers arrived at the ground the first thing to strike the eye was the many gaily decorated stalls and sideshows…that had been erected by the enthusiastic committee. Substantially erected and decorated with greenery, flowers and bunting, and laden with wares of every conceivable variety, the stalls were a source of much admiration by the public.”

Incorporated into the afternoon were sporting events including running, bike riding and horse events, as well as a number of novelty events (including one interestingly called “Decapitating the Kaiser”). In the evening, there was a concert performed by the Tatura Pierrots, then anyone with any energy left could attend the dance and supper.

Generous Benefactors

Mr and Mrs Falkiner, of “Noorilim”, were extremely generous patrons of the carnival. Several weeks before the carnival, Norman Falkiner “presented the committee with a valuable thoroughbred brood mare” to be raffled. The committee was expecting to raise 300 pounds ($600) from that source alone.

On the day of the carnival, Mrs Falkiner was invited to officiate at the opening ceremony. While doing so, she handed over a cheque for 100 pounds ($200) as a donation. To give some idea of impact of these two contributions, the entire carnival had generated a profit of 330 pounds ($660) the year before. The committee was already well ahead of that in 1918, before the carnival even commenced.

Praise for the Red Cross

There was plenty of praise for the great work of the Red Cross, headed by Mrs Heazlewood. The local MP, Mr Gordon, “commended the residents of the district for their sustained efforts on behalf of so

laudable an institution as the Red Cross Society." He said the local branch of the society was one of the most active in his electorate, and was punching well above its weight compared to some much larger towns.

Mrs Falkiner referred to the Red Cross as being "perhaps the most humanitarian institution in connection with the war." She probably summed up the thoughts of all present when she "trusted that this terrible war will soon be brought to a successful conclusion."

Thanks to her and her husband's contributions, the profit from the carnival was expected to be well over double the amount raised in 1917.

Reference: Murchison Advertiser 1.3.1918

73 CRUNCH TIME

Towards the end of March 1918, the war had reached a crucial juncture. Russia was out of the war, which meant that many German troops were released from the Eastern Front. Ludendorff, the German commander, launched a huge offensive against the Allied forces on the Western Front, with a view to ending the war. He very nearly succeeded.

Australian troops, who were in a relatively quiet sector near Messines at the time, were not affected by the initial offensive. However, they were rushed to plug gaps in places where the Germans threatened to overrun the defenders. Battles at places like Hebuterne, Dernancourt and Morlancourt lack prominence in Australian military history, but were vital in checking the German advance.

Letter Home

Around this time, Andy Lawrie wrote home from France to Cis Hammond. His only reference to the fighting mentioned above was that "Things are pretty lively over here now…". Playing down the seriousness of their situation was common for soldiers writing home, so as not to cause further worry for family and friends.

His cousin, Jack Laurie, (first cousin, but different spelling of the surname, who later married Cis' sister Rose) had just been invalided back to Australia, and had visited Rushworth. "…I'll bet he was pleased at getting back too. I wouldn't mind at all if I was getting back too…we still hope the war will end this year, and we will all be back by Xmas."

Most of the rest of Andy's letter was about what was happening at home. The yearning to return must have been almost overwhelming.

Welcome Home

Jack Laurie was tended a welcome home at the Moora Presbyterian church near the end of February. The church was "tastefully and appropriately decorated for the occasion with numerous flags and flowers."

After singing the National Anthem, and hearing a speech from J Burt Stewart, the evening continued with a program of musical items and recitations. At the end of the night, Jack was presented with a gold watch chain by the Rev Mr Campbell. The evening concluded with the singing of "God Bless Our Splendid Men" to the tune of the National Anthem.

Paying a High Price

Although Jack could be regarded as luckier than some, in that he came home early, he paid a high price for his war service. Arriving in France in late 1916, he endured the terrible 1916-17 winter. Hospitalised with illness in March 1917, he then received a facial wound, probably from shrapnel, at the second battle of Bullecourt in May. After recovering in England, he was back in France by September, before being wounded at Ypres, this time a serious chest wound that ended his war. This came the day after his good mate Andy Strawhorn was killed.

Jack was only 43 when he died at the Caulfield Military Hospital at the end of 1929. Like many Australians who died prematurely in the 1920s, Jack's early death was clearly related to his war service. But we tend not to give the same reverence to the memory of these men and women as those who died overseas.

References: Finch, Irene, Somewhere in France (2014), Murchison Advertiser 1.3.18, NAA website

74 KILLED AT VILLERS BRETONNEUX

After the Germans launched their massive offensive on 21 March 1918, Australians were thrust into action to hold the line, and help prevent the Germans from taking the strategic city of Amiens. In the process, Tom LeRoy (No 2412 Corporal Thomas LeRoy, 46th Battalion) was killed in action near Villers Bretonneux on 5 April. This was not the famous battle at Villers Bretonneux in which the Australians gained great acclaim and the perpetual gratitude of the local French people. That came a little later, on Anzac Day 1918.

Tom's brother Alfred, (No 207, Private Alfred LeRoy, 60th Battalion) had been killed nearly two years earlier at Fromelles. The second LeRoy death must have been a hammer blow for their widowed mother, Jane.

The LeRoys of Whroo

The grandparents of the LeRoy brothers came to Australia from the Channel Islands (in the English Channel, but closer to France) in the mid-1850s. Alfred and Maria were married at the Wesleyan chapel in Collingwood in 1858, and produced ten children over the next 16 years.

Their third son, Thomas, was born at Rushworth in 1862. He married Jane Pope at Whroo in 1885. They in turn had a large family of five boys and four girls, including the two soldiers mentioned above. Thomas Senior died at Whroo in 1905 when he was only 43, after which Jane and her young children moved to the city.

From the Middle East to France

Thomas Junior, a miner at Whroo, enlisted in Melbourne in May 1915, just after reports of the landing at Gallipoli were being published in the Australian press. He was assigned to the 14th Battalion, and his group of reinforcements joined the 14th on the island of Mudros at the end of October. It is unclear whether Tom saw action on Gallipoli before the December withdrawal.

Tom stayed in the Middle East until June, during which time he transferred to the 46th Battalion. He was in France with his new battalion for a few months before having some leave in London in December. Like many Australian troops on furlough, Tom overstayed his leave, and was arrested two days later. A further complication was that he had contracted a sexually transmitted infection, also a common occurrence among Australian soldiers.

Back to France

After some months in recovery, Tom went back to France, where he was badly wounded in June. The wounds to his right leg and a shoulder meant that he was transferred back to England for an extended period of recuperation.

Towards the end of his recovery, Tom had another furlough in London. Clearly, he did not learn from his previous experience in London. Eventually he got back to France in January 1918. He spent some weeks with the engineers, probably strengthening defensive positions before the German offensive.

By the time the offensive began in late March, Tom was back with his battalion. They were thrown into the fray near Villers Bretonneux in a desperate attempt to halt the advancing Germans.

Surprisingly, Tom is not mentioned on the Rushworth war memorial, and Alf is listed among those who enlisted, but not among those who died overseas.

References: Ancestry, AWM and NAA websites

75 A LETTER FROM THE HOLY LAND

In April 1918, the former publican of the Exchange Hotel in Rushworth (which was on the block now occupied by the Shire service centre) received a letter from his brother, Will Kearney (No 3431 Private W F Kearney, 8th Light Horse). Will was serving in Palestine, near Jerusalem. At this stage of the war in the Middle East, the Allied forces were pushing the Turks back, with a view to capturing Damascus.

There were plenty of other local boys with the Light Horse. In his letter, Will mentioned George Geisler, Charlie McConville, Hughie Cameron, Alf Perry, Billy Baker, "Eggy" Smith and Vic Hicks, all of whom were in either the 8th or 9th Regiment.

Observations of Farming

Like many soldier correspondents, Will barely mentioned the war in his letter. He preferred to give commentary on the way of life he was observing as his unit moved around.

"They shepherd their flocks in the daytime and keep them inside at night. Their cows, donkeys &c. have free access into all the houses…You'll see them early in the morning leading the old donkey out of the front door and loading him up."

When ploughing with "just a forked stick with a steel spike on the end", the locals used "all sorts of teams – a camel, donkey, mule, but mostly a pair of cows. They work the cows all day then milk them at night."

Role of Women and Children

Will observed that "The women and girls do most of the work, and it is marvellous the loads they can carry on their heads. They go out cutting firewood off the prickly hedges…and you will see little girls with a thundering great basket on their heads, full of firewood…The men always ride out to work on the donkeys – the women walk and hump a load home."

The children sold oranges and vegetables to the troops, and "a surprising thing is how they know the value of money – little toddlers will sell oranges and make bargains as good as any of the Australian newsboys."

Extremes of Weather

Will was struck by the extreme variation in temperatures that they were experiencing. "I soon woke up to the fact that it can be just as cold here as it is hot".

"While we were up at the "stoush" (i.e. in the fighting) there was a fall of snow, the first I ever saw – fancy coming (all this way) to see snow. It was very light, and melted almost as soon as it had fallen…"

Tourism Opportunities

As most young Australians serving in the Middle East had at least some connection to a Christian church, they were aware of the historical significance of the ground they were on. "Nearly all the places here have a history, for this is the route that our Saviour travelled in the olden days."

Will's unit was close to Jerusalem, and he was hopeful of having the opportunity to visit the ancient city. "It would be very interesting to have a look through it."

References: Bons, Tracey, *Rushworth Businesses and Their Owners – Gold Rush to Great War*; Murchison Advertiser 19.4.1918

76 VICTORY AT VILLERS BRETONNEUX

On Anzac Day 1918, the Australians scored a stunning victory at Villers Bretonneux, earning respect from the locals that still carries great weight today. The main Australian war memorial on the Western Front is at the town.

The Germans had captured the town as part of their spring offensive the day before. In a pincer movement executed by two Australian brigades at night, the town was recaptured. The counter-offensive did much to blunt the German spring offensive.

Local men were heavily engaged in the re-taking of Villers Bretonneux. There were probably between 20 and 30 men from the former Shire of Waranga involved, especially from the 57th, 59th and 60th Battalions of the AIF.

A Catholic Soldier's Mother

About this time, a protest letter appeared in the "Advocate", written by an unnamed Rushworth woman, whose son was at the war. She wished to "indignantly protest against the vile calumnities and false statements that have been made, and are still going through the press, against his Grace the Archbishop of Melbourne, the Most Rev. Dr. Mannix, our dearly-loved and honoured leader…"

Attacks against Dr Mannix had arisen as a result of his vocal support for the "No" vote in the December 1917 referendum on conscription.

The writer felt that defamation of Dr Mannix would have a negative effect on further recruiting, going on to illustrate the extent of the sectarian divide. "Some of the leading citizens need to lay aside their yellow (orange?) goggles, and try green ones, which are more soothing to defective vision". This would allow them to "see things as they really are, not as what they seem"" i.e. there were plenty of Catholic men who had already enlisted. In fact, around 80,000 had done so by this stage of the war.

An Old Soldier Dies

Local papers recorded the death of one Charles Henry Davis (there were two in Rushworth at the time), a Rushworth gunsmith who was aged 89. Apparently, he was still active on the Rushworth rifle range until a couple of years before his death and was the club's "Armourer" as late as 1915. He advertised his business in the local papers well into his 70s, and may have continued his business later than that.

Charles would have been one of few, if not the only man from the local area who fought in what were termed the Maori (or Land) Wars back in the 1860s. He was one of around 2000 Australians, mainly Victorians, who went to fight in New Zealand. Mr Davis "carried a wound on top of his head as a memento of the fight."

Raising Funds for the War Effort

Mr P J Cooney, who was Head Teacher at Rushworth State School in 1918, was heavily involved in raising money for the latest War Loan. Largely by his efforts, 8290 pounds ($16580) had been raised locally, placing Rushworth far ahead of the efforts of many bigger towns.

Cooney had good reason to work so hard encouraging people to make the loans to the government. Two of his sons were serving in the AIF, and although another was discharged before he could serve, he joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1921.

References: Advocate 6.4.1918: Murchison Advertiser 5.4.1918 and 19.4.18; Kyabram Free Press 21.6.1918; Bons, Tracey, *Rushworth Businesses and Their Owners* (2016); Alan McLean's collection of obituaries

77 THE BATTLE OF ES SALT

During May 1918, many Australians in the Middle East were engaged in the battle for Es Salt (now in Jordan). After the initial attack took the town, things started to go awry. While the Turks poured in reinforcements, expected support from local Arabs failed to materialise. This resulted in Es Salt being re-taken by the Turks over the next few days.

In that fighting, an experienced soldier, No 373 Temporary Corporal William Baker, of the 9th Light Horse, was one of 50 Australians killed. The son of George and Sarah Baker, William was a young lad from Colbinabbin East who had been one of the first to enlist in late 1914, at the age of 21.

William is commemorated on the Jerusalem Memorial in modern-day Israel, indicating that his body was not recovered after the war.

Wounded and Taken Prisoner

Among the 37 Australian Light Horsemen missing after the Turkish counter-attack was "Eggie" Smith, of Rushworth (2347 Sgt Egbert Charles Smith, also of the 9th Light Horse Regiment).

"Eggie" was on his second tour of duty, having been taken off Gallipoli with enteric (typhoid) fever earlier in the war, and repatriated to Australia. When he recovered, he signed up again. Back in the

Middle East, Egbert fought in many of the battles through what is now Israel and Jordan, up until the battle of Es Salt.

Fighting a rearguard action, the 9th Light Horse tried to hold off the Turks while the other forces retreated. William Baker died in this action, while Egbert was badly wounded - shot through the jaw. The battle passed by him, and he lay out in the open – with hot days and bitterly cold nights – for the next three long days.

To Damascus and Aleppo

As the Turks moved back through the Es Salt battlefield, Egbert and other survivors of the battle were picked up and taken to Damascus, and later Aleppo (in modern day Syria), where they were held prisoner for the duration of the war in the Middle East.

Egbert had horrific facial injuries that necessitated multiple operations after he returned to Australia in December 1918. Part of one of his ribs was even used in one of the operations at Caulfield Military Hospital, in an attempt to reconstruct his shattered jaw.

Back to Rushworth

Egbert's father Fred was a bootmaker in Rushworth, and Egbert had worked with him prior to the war. When Egbert returned home, he resumed his trade with his father, and was a partner in a farm venture with two brothers, including Fred Jnr, who was a veteran of the Western Front.

After Egbert's sudden death in 1923 as the result of a haemorrhage, the Rushworth Chronicle reported that "another bright life has been cut off through the ravages of war."

Family members, particularly his parents, were devastated. To add to their shock and grief, the Government of the day cruelly "had the audacity to deny our ancestors the 20 pound burial subsidy for Uncle Egbert Charles Smith".

Egbert's death notice described him as "brave and true", and an 'In Memoriam' notice placed by his family seven years later said "in silence he suffered/till God took him home/to suffer no more."

References: Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The Encyclopedia of Australia's Battles*; Smith family history notes per favour Tracey Bons; AWM website

78 THE SIGNALLER'S LOT

You might expect that the role of army signallers would be less dangerous than that of front-line infantrymen. However, two Shire of Waranga boys, both signallers, were killed in the late spring/early summer (May-June 1918). Jim Day (6607 James Joseph Day, 5th Battalion) and Ernie Sheargold (6942 Ernest Francis Sheargold, 22nd Battalion) were both killed in this vital period when the Allied forces were trying to check the German spring offensive.

Front-line communications were often done by telephone. Troops communicated by phone with their superiors, who tended to be to the rear, in a command post. Telephones were essential, because the commanders could easily lose track of what was happening at the front line. However, the telephone

lines were often cut by artillery fire. One of the tasks of the signallers was to go out, often under fire, and repair the lines so communication could be maintained.

A Military Medal

Jim Day (from Angustown) had won a Military Medal east of Ypres, Belgium, in 1917 for just this type of work. He had done his signalling training at Broadmeadows with two of his mates from the Nagambie area. They had all joined up together, had consecutive regimental numbers and were in the same battalion. No. 6608 was Albert Bazeley, a Nagambie butcher, and 6609 was Daniel Linehan, who was a farmer like Jim.

Sadly, Daniel witnessed Jim's death. The battalion had just come out of the front line for a well-earned rest. Artillery targeted the back areas where there was any concentration of troops, and to disrupt transport and communication. Jim was lying on the grass reading a book when he was killed by shrapnel from an exploding shell.

Jim had been a member of the Bailieston Cricket Club and Nagambie Tennis Club, was interested in footy, and a "member of practically every public institution at the Goulburn Weir."

Just a Boy

Ernie enlisted when he was barely 18. A photo taken at the time makes him look much younger. His parents William and Mary Jane had moved to Footscray by the time he enlisted.

He was badly wounded by shrapnel in the abdomen and both arms. Taken to the 61st Casualty Clearing Station near Vignacourt, he lingered for two weeks before dying in early June 1918. His parents had to live with the fact that they had given their written authorisation for him to enlist. This was required for all men under 21.

Local Connections

Jim Day, in particular, had many local connections and both he and Ernie had brothers who were in the forces. Jim's brother Captain (later Major) William John Day was in the 8th Light Horse and fought at Gallipoli. Fortunately for him, he missed the terrible charge at The Nek because of illness. He was repatriated to Australia, but after recovering, returned overseas.

His senior officer in A Squadron of the 8th was Major Ernest Gregory of Murchison, who was killed at Gallipoli in June 1915. A fellow officer was 2nd Lieutenant Andy Crawford from Tatura, who was badly wounded at The Nek.

Ernie Sheargold, who was born in Rushworth, had a brother Fred who was also on active service when Ernie was killed.

References: AWM, NAA and Trove websites; Murchison Advertiser 24.5.18

79 CENTENARY FOR THE RSL

At the start of June 1918, the Shepparton Advertiser was reporting on the early progress being made by the recently formed Goulburn Valley branch of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League

of Australia (now better known as the Shepparton RSL). The Advertiser noted that "branches of the League had been formed at Rushworth and Nathalia and promised to be strong."

A couple of weeks earlier, local papers reported that "with the object of forming a branch of the Returned Soldiers' Association, a meeting of returned soldiers will be held at the Glasgow Buildings tomorrow (Saturday) evening at 8 o'clock." The meeting decided to set up a Rushworth branch, and in June a group of men, who had been nominated at the meeting, were making arrangements to formally set up the branch with the co-operation of the Shire of Waranga.

Support for Returned Men

Around the same time, an evening of entertainment for returned soldiers was organised and held at the Shire Hall in Rushworth. As well as the entertainment, the veterans were each given a medal to express the profound appreciation of the community for their service.

The following night, the school committee ran a dance at the Shire Hall, to raise funds to extend the honour board at the school, which had been rather prematurely erected in 1917.

The newly formed RS&SILA branches were starting to flex their political muscle in a whole range of areas, such as seeking preference for returned servicemen in employment matters. The first Minister for Repatriation had been appointed in 1917 as the country realised the massive task ahead of it, catering for the diverse needs of men and women as they tried to transition back to civilian life.

News From the Front

There was a constant stream of news from overseas about matters concerning the men and women from Rushworth and district who were serving. By this stage of the war, communications had been streamlined somewhat, and information was usually transmitted within two weeks of an event taking place.

Mr and Mrs Baldwin of Whroo were notified that their son James (3114 Private James Mathew Baldwin) had been wounded (gassed). The Baldwins had sent four sons off to war, one of whom (Alf) was killed at Gallipoli. These notifications usually came via telegram to the local post office.

Robert Pettifer (4751 L/C Robert Thomas Pettifer, 24th Battalion) and Henry Bailey (2031 Pte Henry William Clarence Bailey, 3rd Pioneers) had also been wounded, and their families notified. Robert, whose family was from Bailieston, had won a Military Medal in 1917 and soon after was promoted to Lance Corporal. Like the men mentioned in the previous Anzac Tales, Robert was a signaller. And like Jim Day, he had earned his medal (in his case at the battle of Bullecourt in 1917) by repairing telephone lines in the open, while under intense artillery bombardment.

Egbert Smith's parents received the news that he was missing, then later that he was a Turkish prisoner-of-war. His story was related in a recent Anzac Tales. He seems to be one of very few local men who became a POW during the First World War.

References: Shepparton Advertiser 3.6.1918; Murchison Advertiser 17.5.18, 31.5.18

80 MILITARY CROSS FOR LES MERKEL

In June 1918, it was announced that Captain Les Merkel had been awarded the Military Cross. Rather than being for a single act of bravery, Les received the award for sustained work during 1918 as an Acting Brigade Major and a General Staff Officer with the 5th Australian Division.

During this time, Les was badly wounded at Morlancourt. The severe gunshot wound to the lower right leg in July 1918 effectively ended his active service.

He had already been Mentioned in Dispatches for two separate actions in 1916. At Fromelles in July, "during the night, under intense fire, he supervised the digging of a new fire trench and the erection of bomb stops in the German lines". Later in the year, he "dug 50 yards of fire trench in No Man's Land, under heavy fire, when he knew we did not hold any enemy trenches in front of him."

German Ancestors

As you can probably guess from the fact that he shares a surname with the 2018 German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, Les was of German descent. His grandparents, Peter and Susanna arrived in Victoria, on the barque "Victoria" towards the end of 1854. The "Victoria" had come from Hamburg, Germany, with a ship load of German immigrants. More than half were single German men, probably intent on finding their fortunes on the Victorian goldfields.

Peter and Susan had already two children when they left Germany, and another was born on board. Appropriately, she was called Susanna Victoria Merkel. Sadly, they lost their second child soon after arrival in Australia. Many of the Merkels finished up in the Albury area, which is where Les' father Jacob was born in 1860.

Jacob married Maggie Griffin in 1890, and they moved to Rushworth from Brighton early in the 20th century. Jacob worked for the State Rivers as a Channel Inspector. Les was their only son, and eldest child.

Marriage Before Service Overseas

Les married his sweetheart, Wilhelmine Mary Bird from Pyramid Hill, in 1915, shortly before he embarked for his service overseas. Whether to get married at this time was a difficult decision that young couples had to carefully consider in those dark days. The risks related to going to war were great.

In a tragic twist of fate, Wilhelmine died at Pyramid Hill on 5 December 1918. Les was still overseas at the time, not arriving back in Australia until nearly a year later. In fact, the death of his wife possibly contributed to a decision to defer his return. Records show that he had seven months leave in England in 1919, for the purpose of obtaining engineering experience with the British Reinforced Concrete Co in Manchester.

Early Demise

Like several other soldiers mentioned in Anzac Tales, Les died very prematurely, in his case in 1922. He had come back to the local area, to be re-employed by the State Rivers and Water Supply

Commission. Prior to the war, Les had worked as a draftsman, surveyor and engineer with the Commission. On enlistment, he naturally went into an engineering unit, where his skills could be best utilised.

A local paper said "he had not been in the best of health since his return from the war". Les was buried in the Rushworth cemetery, as a member of the Rushworth Brass Band poignantly sounded the Last Post.

References: Ancestry, NAA, PROV and AWM websites; Shepparton Advertiser 14.8.1922

81 THE "ANZAC LINE"

In July 1918, one of the first acts of the newly formed Rushworth branch of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League (now the RSL) was to instigate the planting of commemorative trees at the Rushworth State School.

Each tree planted commemorated one of the "fallen soldiers of this district". By that stage of the war, there were already 25 trees to be planted along the "west side of the division fence". Presumably that means the fence between the school and the Rushworth cemetery.

Starting from what is now the Heily Street end of the fence, the soldiers commemorated were R Peart, F Cracknell, J Casey, J Johnson, R Bond, D O'Leary, J Rodsted, G Mapleback, E LaPeyre, J Miller, A Hilburn, C King, I Sheargold, J Turnbull, G Roulston, B Jones, A Baldwin, H Hicks, J Bren, D McLeod, W Baker, A LeRoy, J Considine, W Cameron and J Matheson.

A Team Effort

Prior to the commemoration, some of the schoolboys had dug the holes for the trees, which had been supplied by members of the Foresters' Lodge. A group of schoolgirls, under the tutelage of Miss Anderson, sang a number of patriotic songs while the trees were being planted.

It seems that the trees were actually planted by local women, perhaps relatives of the deceased soldiers. As the women performed this duty, Mr A Lambden "rendered appreciable assistance".

The school headmaster, Mr Cooney, who had sons serving overseas, suggested that "the trees be known as the Anzac Line" and promised that every care would be taken to ensure their growth. Over the years, with the expansion of the school buildings and facilities, and the effluxion of time, it seems that most of the trees, if not all, have gone.

Some Anomalies

The list of names is interesting in that there are quite a few anomalies when compared with the list of fallen soldiers on the Rushworth war memorial. For example, six of the names are either not mentioned on the war memorial roll of honour, or are listed as men who went to the war, but did not lose their lives overseas.

Although the newspaper report mentioned "fallen soldiers of this district", it is unclear as to the extent of the area they were talking about. It certainly excludes Murchison and Waranga, but it does include names of some, but not all of the men who had lived north, west and south of Rushworth.

The list does not include just men who went to Rushworth as students, as ten of the names are not listed on the school nominal roll of enlistees.

The criteria for inclusion of names seems to vary from memorial to memorial. There was no standard format that all areas tried to adhere to. It came down to what the relevant committee decided at the time.

Collecting for the French Red Cross

At the same time as these efforts were being made to commemorate those who had lost their lives, the women of Rushworth were still hard at work raising funds for what they deemed as worthy war-related causes. Mrs Muhlhan and Miss Walbran were door-knocking, collecting money to be sent directly to the French Red Cross, thus helping to cement the wonderful relationship that exists between Australia and France to this day.

Reference: Murchison Advertiser 5.7.18 and 12.7.18

82 A LETHAL PHASE

From the point of view of the Shire of Waranga enlistees, the war entered a lethal phase in August 1918. No local boys had been killed at the battle of Hamel in July, where the Australians scored a stunning victory against the Germans. The attack was planned in infinite detail by Monash, who had emerged as the most influential of the Australian commanders. Several battalions (the 21st, 23rd and 24th) which contained a substantial number of locals were heavily engaged.

As the allied forces started to press their advantage and go on the offensive following the battle of Amiens, casualties from Rushworth and district started to mount. Jack Barrow (6716 Pte John Barrow, 5th Battalion) and Cliff Burge (Lt Clifford Charles Burge, 24th Battalion) both died in the vicinity of Lihons between 10-13 August.

A Family Man

Jack Barrow had been a hairdresser in Rushworth for many years, and a respected member of the Rushworth Fire Brigade. At his farewell from Rushworth in 1914, organised by the Brigade, he was referred to as “an honorary member and timekeeper of the brigade.” When he joined up in mid-1916, he became the barber for B Company of the 5th Battalion.

In hindsight, it is hard to understand why Jack enlisted. He was 43 at the time, and his family had recently moved from Rushworth to Melbourne, where they lived in the inner suburb of Burnley. Jack and Lizzie Barrow had five small children – Gladys, Eliza, Ivy, Annie and Jack Jnr – yet Jack still felt the urge to enlist.

He was given a formal send-off in Rushworth, where he returned to visit old friends while on his final leave. The reception took place at the Cricketers’ Inn (now the bottom pub), where the host was Mr Darby. As was common for the day, only men attended the function, which was chaired by Mr E A Muhlhan, editor of the Rushworth Chronicle.

Pressure to Enlist

There was continued pressure for Australian men to enlist for service overseas, as war casualties mounted. When boys turned 18, they were required to enlist for home service, although they could not be forced to go overseas because of the "No" vote in the conscription referendums.

On 1 August, "I Lloyd, R McLeod, J Kinsman, A Jones, I Anderson, G Le Roy, A Johnson, G Akers, also any others who have attained the age of 18 years" were required to attend "at the drill hall, Rushworth…at 2 pm" to commence their compulsory home service. The newspaper article threatened prosecution for non-attenders.

At the same time, the town was farewelling Frank Hilburn and Jack Johansen. It was being proudly announced that the Echuca electorate, of which the Shire of Waranga was a part, had contributed more enlistments to the cause than any other country electorate in Victoria. All of these factors may have contributed to Jack's fateful decision to enlist.

The Fatal Bullet

Varying accounts were given of Jack's death on the first day of the battle of Lihons. It is clear that he was shot, but there was conjecture about whether the fatal bullet had come from a sniper or a machine gun. One account said he was "buried where he fell". Ultimately, his body was buried in the Rosieres Community Cemetery Extension, near Corbie. Cold comfort for Elizabeth, who was widowed with five young mouths to feed.

Reference: Murchison Advertiser 8.5.1914, 26.7.1918

83 PLANS FOR REPATRIATION

As service men and women started to come back to Australia, plans were being put into place for their repatriation. Having seen the difficulties faced by veterans of more recent conflicts overseas, one can imagine the enormity of the task of trying to repatriate hundreds of thousands of veterans from the First World War.

One of the initiatives in the local Rushworth area was the proposed formation of a Repatriation Committee. The prime mover behind this was the Repatriation Department (now Veterans' Affairs). Mr H J Hodgson was prominent locally, with the duties of the committee being geared towards raising money for veterans, collecting other assets on their behalf, providing voluntary services and assistance where necessary, helping returned men and women find employment and supervising the expenditure of any grants made to applicants.

Perhaps most importantly, the local committees were being urged to "keep in touch with soldiers and the dependants of soldiers for the purpose of advising and assisting them when necessary."

Welcome Home to Sergeant Hicks

One soldier who was going to be a potential beneficiary of the good works of a local committee and the Repatriation Department was Vic Hicks (No 169 Sgt Stephen Victor Hicks, 8th Light Horse). In August 1918, he was welcomed home at the Rushworth station.

A native of Carag Carag, Vic had been away for four years after enlisting very early in the war. Although he was physically largely unscathed, illness had forced his repatriation. Illness had also meant that he missed the infamous suicidal charge by the 8th Light Horse at The Nek, Gallipoli, in August 1915. He was in a hospital on the island of Malta at the time, recovering from a severe bout of diarrhoea.

One wonders how Vic would have felt when he returned to Gallipoli in October 1915 to find most of his mates dead or maimed, and what impact that had on him in later life. The reason given for his discharge in 1918 was "debility", which could have covered a multitude of things, including what we would now recognise as PTSD symptoms. Vic lived on well into the 1960s, so he had a long time to reflect on his years away at the war.

Death at Lihons

One soldier with Rushworth connections would have no need of the services of the Repatriation Committee. A few days after the death of Jack Barrow, that was outlined in the previous Anzac Tales, Cliff Burge (Lieutenant Clifford Charles Burge, 24th Battalion) was killed in the same area around Lihons. Cliff had gone to school in Rushworth, where his father Charles had been a storekeeper in High Street. The family had moved to Gardenvale (a Melbourne suburb) by the time Cliff enlisted. He was working as a public servant in the Immigration Department.

Cliff was a strapping six-footer who had progressed quickly through the ranks. Initially employed in non-combative units such as the Army Pay Corps, it seems that he made the fateful decision to request a transfer to the infantry in late 1917. He is buried at Villers-Bretonneux, after his remains were disinterred and moved from his battlefield burial site. This was a fairly common occurrence soon after the war, as war cemeteries were consolidated.

Reference: Euroa Advertiser 2.10.1918; NAA, AWM and Ancestry websites

84 A BLACK MONTH

As the allied forces tried to press home their advantage through August-September 1918, the Waranga area paid a huge price in terms of local men killed, wounded and injured. In a little over a month, another six men were destined to finish up on local honour boards, with their earthly remains on the other side of the world.

Battles at places such as Mont St Quentin, Peronne, the Hindenburg Outpost Line, St Quentin Canal (Bellicourt) and Montbrehain do not carry much resonance with the Australian public, although they should. They were costly in terms of personnel, but ultimately played an important part in forcing the end to German resistance.

A True Anzac Son

Thomas and Mary Jane Matthews, of Watson Street, Murchison, produced a son who could be described as a true Anzac – born and raised in Australia, and fighting under the New Zealand flag. When he enlisted in 1916, Dan (NZ44299 Pte Daniel Murray Matthews, 1st Battalion, Auckland Regiment) was working as a farm labourer at Gisborne, on the east coast of the North Island. He had been living in New Zealand for three years.

Daniel's departure for overseas service was delayed until a year after his enlistment, after he contracted a sexually transmitted disease. As a result, he spent over six months on Quarantine Island in Otago harbour, near Dunedin. Being on the south-east corner of the rugged South Island, one can imagine the winter spent in quarantine would not have been much fun. Eventually embarking in November 1917, Dan arrived at the front in 1918, where he served until he was killed at Gouzeaucourt in September.

Bailieston Connections

Captain William George Wilson MC (53rd Battalion) died at Bellicourt. "The Huns were counter-attacking at the time and made four counter-attacks in the morning. Wilson was killed in the first of these." Born at Bailieston, William was a school teacher when he enlisted. He and his wife Lilian had four children at the time.

Earlier in Anzac Tales, we met William's redoubtable sisters, Molly and Peggy, who both served overseas in the Australian Army Nursing Service. His brother Stuart (479 Lance Corporal Stuart Wilson, 9th Battalion) had been killed at the Gallipoli landing, so a second death must have been especially tragic for the Wilson family. One of the girls was nursing in France at the time, and heard the news through a random conversation while travelling on a train.

Permanently Unfit for Service?

Born at Corop West in 1893, Arthur Ristrom (yes, one S) was one of the rarer cases of men who went overseas twice during the war. Originally enlisting in 1915, Arthur (7073 Corporal Arthur Edward Ristrom, final unit 14th Battalion) embarked for Suez just before Christmas 1915. While in Egypt, serving with an artillery unit, he was found to be suffering from rheumatism and endocarditis. He was declared "permanently unfit for service", and sent back to Australia without seeing any action.

It is hard to imagine how Arthur got through his initial medical when it was clear that he had ongoing health issues. It is even harder to understand how he was accepted for service when he re-enlisted in October 1916, just five months after his discharge. Perhaps the demand for men was so great, his health issues were ignored.

Like William Wilson, Arthur was killed in the Bellicourt area. His widowed mother Euphemia ("Effie") and siblings were left to lament his loss. Effie lived in Moora Road, but moved to Beechworth in 1921.

References: AWM and NAA websites

85 THE CARNAGE CONTINUES

Harry Rich (No 1960 Private Harry Nelson Rich, 23rd Battalion) was killed at the start of September 1918 at the battle of Mont St Quentin. The Australian troops were trying to capture the Mont (French for mountain – although this one was only 100 metres high) which was an important part of the German defences in the area.

Harry was in the same battalion as Private Robert Mactier VC from Tatura, and was killed on the same day. They are buried within a few metres of each other at Hem Farm cemetery. Mactier's heroics

were a contributory factor in the success of the Australian troops in taking the Mont, and opening the way for victory at nearby Peronne over the next few days.

A native of Rushworth (i.e. born there), Harry had worked away from the town as a draper for some years prior to his enlistment. His parents Edwin and Annie still lived in Stanhope Road, from where Edwin ran a carrying business. In early 1917, Edwin wrote to the Defence Department seeking information when Harry was incorrectly reported in a newspaper as having been killed. He said "I feel very anxious about it."

Then, Harry's parents had to suffer the anguish of receiving a report – this time accurate - of him receiving a bad wound in the right arm at Passchendaele in October 1917. After eight months of treatment and recuperation in England, he was back with his unit in mid-1918. His younger brother Robert was also on active service at the time.

Death From the Air

Leo Byrne (No 2042 Corporal Lionel James Byrne, 37th Battalion) has the dubious distinction of being the last man on the Shire of Waranga honour roll at Rushworth to have been killed by enemy action in the war. Prior to the war, Leo had been a hairdresser in High Street, Rushworth. His mother, Selina Golden, ran a newsagency under the name of Golden & Byrne, and it seems that Leo had his barber's shop in the same establishment.

Throughout the war, the importance of air power had steadily grown until it had become an integral and deadly part of the armed forces. Leo's mate Walter Smith, from Upper Maffra (north Gippsland), reported later that Leo was "killed instantaneously by a bomb from a German aeroplane… At Peronne. We were in a tent together behind the lines, and I was hit myself by the same bomb…" The bomb killed four other diggers as well as Leo. Prior to going overseas, Leo had become engaged to Florrie Fitzpatrick, who was left to mourn his loss.

Costly Offensives

As previously stated in Anzac Tales, some of these later battles of the war were very costly. As the fighting changed from mostly static trench warfare to more fluid combat situations "Australian casualties during these battles were very high, and coupled with the drying up of reinforcements from Australia, the rejection of the proposal to introduce conscription and the granting of home leave to men who been serving since 1914 meant that by the end of the war the AIF was severely stretched to the limit." (Wikipedia)

Some AIF battalions were disbanded to add troops to other depleted units, much to the chagrin of some of their members - especially those with many years of proud service in one unit.

References: Wikipedia, AWM and NAA websites; Bons, Tracey, *Rushworth Businesses & Their Owners – Gold Rush to Great War.*

86 THE FINAL BATTLES

In early October 1918, Australian troops fought what was to be their final battle of the war on French soil, at Montbrehain. After this engagement, the Australians were withdrawn from the front for a

well-earned rest. They did not go back into the front line before the end of the war was declared just over a month later.

"Following the successful breaching of the main Hindenburg Line" by other Australian troops a few days earlier, the 6th Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division made the final assault on Montbrehain, which was deemed a "brilliant success". 400 Germans were taken prisoner, but it cost the Australians another 430 casualties – a huge number considering the small number of men engaged.

The 6th Brigade comprised four battalions of Australians – the 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th. These battalions contained a significant number of men who had enlisted from the former Shire of Waranga area.

In the Middle East

The situation in the Middle East, where many locals also served, was similar to that in France. The Turks were very much on the defensive, and the end of war in that theatre was in sight. After several successfully executed lead-up battles in September, the Australians were part of the larger Desert Mounted Corps (DMC) which captured Damascus from the Turks at the start of October 1918. Capitulation by the Turks was less than a month away.

Australian Light Horse Regiments had carved out a significant reputation for themselves in the Middle East, in spite of very challenging conditions and tough opposition. However, by the time Australian troops found themselves in this theatre of war again just over 20 years later – this time with a different foe - the Light Horse had become redundant.

Even though it included troops from several countries, the DMC was led by the Australian, General Sir Harry Chauvel. Chauvel had emerged as one of Australia's best commanders in the war.

Fundraising for the War

Even though there were signs that the war was drawing to a conclusion, continued efforts were made to raise funds to support the war effort. The seventh in a series of war loans was being promoted at the time, with Rushworth school headmaster Cooney playing an ongoing leading role in gaining support from local people.

The Shire of Waranga came under some pressure to contribute to the latest loan. Just days before the council meeting, a government official had been in Rushworth, expressing "disappointment that the council were so apathetic and were apparently taking no active part".

Mr Cooney attended the council meeting to make the case to the Councillors, which resulted in the council committing 2000 pounds ($4000) of ratepayers' money to the loan. The government was offering interest of 4%.

When the loan was promulgated, people in each municipality were given a target, presumably based on population. The people of the then Shire of Waranga were set the goal of raising 39,000 pounds ($78,000). Editor of the local papers, Les Muhlhan, suggested that councillors would have set a great example if they had personally subscribed to the loan, as well as committing council funds. He also gave credit where it was due, praising the sustained efforts of Mr Cooney.

References: Coulthard-Clark, Chris, *The Encyclopaedia of Australia's Battles* (p 164-5); Murchison Advertiser 18.10.1918

87 PREMATURE PEACE CELEBRATIONS

In mid-October 1918, three Victorian Railways employees sparked premature peace celebrations in Rushworth. The men were crewing a special stock train that had come from Seymour to Rushworth, and then went on to Colbinabbin. There had been "great rejoicings at Seymour throughout the night, consequent on news to hand that peace had been declared…"

In the weeks prior to this, Australian infantry had fought their last major battle of the war at Montbrehain and were having a well-earned rest. There had been mounting speculation that the end of the war was nigh, so it only took this spark for the town to erupt into celebration.

Bells Ringing

"Most people were putting in the last lap – that delightful few minutes preparatory to getting out of bed – when the violent ringing of the fire bell startled them into greater activity and caused a rush for the street in order to ascertain where the conflagration was."

Church bells were set ringing, flags hoisted up every available flagpole, and there were even some shots fired in the air. The latter may not have been appreciated by any returned service personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. School children were organised to do a march past, the Rushworth band play patriotic music and speeches were made from the rotunda.

Sports Afternoon

Although official notification had still not been received, the school children were given the afternoon off school. A sports carnival was hastily arranged which involved running races and novelty events (boot races, Siamese races and flag races) for the children, while the band continued to play from the rotunda.

A cash prize was collected from the crowd to stage a men's sprint race down High Street. This was won by B Stockdale, who received a purse of 15 shillings for his win. Runner-up, C Theobold earned 5 shillings for his effort.

By the end of the afternoon, it was clear that the celebrations were a little premature. Clarification was sought and received that although the signs were very encouraging, the end of the war had not been officially declared. This would come four weeks later.

War News

In the meantime, information continued to filter into the Waranga area about the fortunes of those who were serving the country. Privates J A Cameron, Roy Anderson and Rupert Johnson were all listed as wounded, according to the lists that were regularly published in the major city daily newspapers. Orlando Woodyatt, whose father was a policeman in Rushworth, had been gassed.

John Metcalf, who had been awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal earlier in the war, was injured, while Sergeant James Scott had died of illness. Similar to Dan Matthews, who was mentioned in a recent Anzac Tales, Scott was serving with the New Zealand forces. His parents lived in Rushworth. Scott was the last person listed on the Shire of Waranga Roll of Honour to die before Armistice Day – but of course many more died prematurely over the ensuing years. They do not tend get the same recognition, in spite of their sacrifices.

Troops were continuing to come home for two reasons – either they were being discharged because they were no longer physically capable of serving, or because they had been some of the first to enlist back in 1914. In mid-October, Sid Hunt and Rupert Brydon received rousing receptions when they returned to town.

References: Murchison Advertiser 18/10/1918

88 NURSING IN INDIA

As the war drew to a close, two nurses with Rushworth connections were working in India. When we think of Australians at the war, we generally think of Gallipoli, the Middle East or the Western Front. But Constance Brocklebank and Irene Walker were both posted to British hospitals in India, nursing mainly British and Indian troops who were fighting the Turks in what was then known as Mesopotamia (present day Iraq and Kuwait). There were few, if any, Australian troops in this war zone, but Australian nurses were made available to go anywhere that there were British war hospitals.

Just prior to the end of the war, Connie was in hospital herself, for an extended period of two and a half months. Her ill-health may have accounted for the fact that she was sent back to Australia relatively early compared to Irene, at the end of February 1919. She had done most of her nursing in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Poona.

Three Years in War Hospitals

Staff Nurse (later Sister) Irene Walker served in India for three years from 1916 to 1919, after embarking on the RMS “Mooltan” in August 1916. Her father, the Reverend John Rich Walker, was an Irishman who became the incumbent at St Paul’s Church of England in Rushworth for 20 years from 1892. Her parents had moved to Melbourne after the Reverend Walker retired in 1911. He died shortly afterwards in 1915, less than a year before Irene went to India.

Irene was born in Traralgon in 1890, and came to Rushworth with her parents as a two-year-old. The Rev Walker’s marriage had caused something of a sensation in Traralgon, as he was 46, and his wife Mary was only 22 at the time. Despite his advancing years, he was virile enough to sire another eight children after Irene, the last when he was 67. The last seven children were born in Rushworth.

Being in India for much longer than Connie, Irene served in many places – Bombay, Secunderabad, Deolali, Bangalore and right up on the north-west frontier at Rawalpindi, near the Afghanistan border. She also did a tour of duty on a hospital ship in the Persian Gulf. Her service continued well into 1919, by which time the Indian war hospitals would have been closing down. On her arrival back in Australia, she remained in the AANS until February 1920 before being discharged.

"Spanish" Flu

As if the world needed more bad news, the "Spanish" flu pandemic emerged in Europe towards the end of the Great War. In October 1918, Australia introduced a strict maritime quarantine system, which limited the introduction of the pandemic to this country. Ultimately, a case appeared in Melbourne in early 1919, and "Spanish" flu spread rapidly, causing an estimated 15,000 deaths.

Australia fared much better than Europe, which had just been battered by four years of intense warfare. There, it was estimated that the flu killed at least three times the estimated 18 million people who had lost their lives as a direct consequence of the war.

With so many Australian troops overseas at the time of the pandemic, it was impossible for all of them to avoid the ravages of the flu. Strangely, this flu seemed to have more effect on fit and healthy younger people than those that you might expect to be affected – the elderly and very young.

References: AWM, NAA and sundry other websites

89 PEACE AT LAST

On 11 November 1918, the first world war finally came to an end. It was a bittersweet moment in our history. On one hand, everyone could rejoice that the terrible struggle was over. However, this joy was tinged with great sadness. Nearly 40 men from the local area had lost their lives, while countless others had been maimed physically and mentally. Divisions within the community had been highlighted and accentuated by the conscription referendum campaigns.

It is almost impossible to imagine the impact on the former Shire of Waranga communities 100 years down the track. Perhaps if you think about the effects of just one road death in the area in the present day, where several other local young people are injured, then multiply that by 40 times, you start to realise how horrendous the after-effects would have been in the years following the war.

Author Ross McMullin wrote a wonderful book about the first commander of the 7th Battalion, which included many men from the local area. In his book about Harold "Pompey" Elliott, he said that "for thousands of Australians…this terrible war inflicted years of agony. It was a time of powerless waiting, inescapable tension, and overwhelming sorrow."

Celebrations in Rushworth

In many respects, the celebrations in Rushworth mirrored those that had prematurely taken place a few weeks before, when a false report had circulated that the war was over. Although an announcement was expected, news was not received in Rushworth until after midnight on November 11. This precipitated bell-ringing around the town, at churches, the school and the fire station. "A large crowd assembled at the rotunda; the band were soon in evidence; the National Anthem was sung; short addresses were delivered by Mr J B Stewart and Mr E Anderson, and there was general rejoicing."

The following day, bells were rung again, summoning the town residents to the rotunda, where Mr Stewart read out the terms of the armistice, and several speeches were made. Rushworth band played "patriotic airs" and the school children sang songs.

The afternoon was set aside for children's activities, including a picnic, sporting activities and other amusements. The latter included being "treated to motor rides by Messrs A Darby, W Davies, J Davies, J D Chandler, J Robinson, Muhlhan & Poulson, T Davies and others."

Later in the afternoon, thanksgiving services were held at all four churches.

Shire Hall Concert

A patriotic concert was held in the Rushworth Shire Hall in the evening after the announcement of the armistice. There were speeches and resolutions, interspersed with musical performances by the band and various individuals, and concluding with Auld Lang Syne and the National Anthem.

One of the most poignant resolutions was proposed by Reverend Johns. It was "That this meeting expresses appreciation of the sacrifices suffered and endured by the returned soldiers of Australia, and pledges itself towards their future welfare." The resolution was carried with acclamation.

It was customary for someone to respond to a resolution, and this task fell to Eddie Muhlhan, representing the returned soldiers. His story was documented in some of the very early stories in Anzac Tales. He used his response to urge the crowd to "remember the boys who have been left over there. I went away with five of the best fellows that ever breathed, but I was the only one to return." He then excused himself from continuing, because "his feelings would not allow him to proceed further."

References: Murchison Advertiser 15.11.1918; McMullin, Ross, *Pompey Elliott* (Scribe Publications 2002)

90 REFLECTIONS ON THE WAR

While the war officially ended on 11 November 1918, the ramifications were to last for generations. In the immediate aftermath, men and women were already starting to come home. The government had decreed before the war ended that those who were "original" Anzacs, i.e. enlisted in 1914, would be brought home first.

Towards the end of 1918, this included men like Sid Morris, Ern Chambers and Fred Downing, who all received rapturous welcomes at Waranga and Rushworth. The Rushworth Chronicle probably made a major faux pas when it stated that "Bombardier Morris had been fortunate throughout the war, and is returning as one of the Anzacs". It would be surprising if Sid saw himself as "fortunate" after the vicissitudes of the previous four years.

These early returnees were in the vanguard of hundreds of thousands of men and women who returned throughout 1919. Australia was faced with the massive task of trying to repatriate them all back into "normal" society.

The Broken Years

Bill Gammage published his seminal book, "The Broken Years", in 1974. On the sleeve it says "When the Great War started in 1914, most Australians believed in patriotism, military heroism and loyalty to the British Empire. But as the war dragged on, as the horrors intensified and the casualty lists grew,

patriotism gave way to cynicism and courage to despair. Basic changes had taken place in the minds of many fighting men and their lives were never the same again."

Bill's book, and Patsy Adam Smith's "The Anzacs", which followed shortly afterwards, drew on the diaries and letters of Australian service men and women. Both authors also interviewed many of the survivors of the war, a generation that was rapidly disappearing by the 1970s. After half a century of trying to forget, Australians started trying to embrace and understand the impact of this tragedy.

Individual Stories

Anzac Tales has taken its lead from Bill Gammage and Patsy Adam Smith by focussing on personal and family stories. These stories help you to realise that our heroes are not just those people who won a medal, got promoted to an important position, or lost their life as a result of their war service. You need to cast a much broader net than that.

All those who enlisted, or tried to enlist, need to be at the forefront of our minds. In some ways, this applies more to those who enlisted later in the war, because by then they really knew what they were getting themselves into. Anzac Tales has really only scratched the surface of their stories, and hopefully has encouraged readers to further explore their family and community history. There are scores of inspirational stories out there.

Credit Where it's Due

Sure, we need to pay homage to those who lost their lives, but this has generally been restricted to those who died during the war years. What the oft-quoted statistics don't reveal is the number of men and women who died prematurely as a result of their war service – the Jack Lauries, the Egbert Smiths, the Les Merkels. Surely their sacrifice was equally as great?

A huge proportion of the men and women who returned from the war had been wounded, gassed, suffered from all sorts of illness and been subjected to extreme psychological stress. Our hearts need to go out to them and their families.

91 MYTHS AND LEGENDS

In the century since the end of the Great War, all sorts of myths and legends have been perpetuated about Australian involvement in the war. By exploring the individual and community stories that have made up Anzac Tales, it is clear that many of the things that we have been led to believe are not based on fact. As the old saying goes, "Truth is the first casualty of war".

A fairly persistent myth is the view that "our nation is forged on the battlefield". This narrative runs along the lines that the only true way for a country's mettle to be tested is in war, and that once Australia had participated in the war it truly became a nation. Our national character was set in stone.

Clearly this is not true, as it ignores the achievements of tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal history and 140 years of successive waves of immigrants to 1918. It also ignores the contributions of that half of the population that did not have the opportunity to enlist – the women of Australia. And surely efforts and achievements in fields like education, health, industry and commerce, agriculture,

the environment, culture and spirituality, and how we relate to each other on a daily basis are more indicative of what Australia is about.

The ”Bronzed Anzac”

We also tend to hold onto the legend of “the bronzed Anzac”, the ready-made fighting man, an iconic figure forged by the hardships of the bush, who charged up the slopes in the “glorious” landing at Gallipoli.

The reality is that Australia is, and since 1788 always was, largely an urban-based population, mostly hugging the shores of our vast land. Our soldiers were more likely to be clerks and factory workers than farmers and miners. Australian soldiers did gain a solid reputation by the end of the war, on the back of years of experience. However, they also had plenty of shortcomings that tend to be glossed over or ignored.

There was nothing glorious about Gallipoli – we got our backsides badly kicked in an ill-conceived and poorly executed rout. Today, there is still probably undue emphasis on Gallipoli, although that view has been rightly challenged by the intense scrutiny of the war during the centenary years. Clearly, the main event took place on the Western Front.

A Fair System?

Reviewing the system of awards in the AIF, which was inherited from the British army, it is clear that there are many flaws in the system. 64 VCs were awarded during the war, and we tend to regard VC winners at the top of the pile. However, there does not seem to be a lot of consistency in why some people got awards, while others missed out. And there were no doubt hundreds of acts of bravery that were not witnessed by anyone, or that no-one thought to make a recommendation about, that were worthy of recognition.

Community

In local communities like Rushworth, nearly everyone was personally affected by what was happening overseas. There were also sustained efforts within our local communities to support those who had gone away, and to support the war effort in general. Women played a major role in this regard, and their contribution tends to be overlooked.

It is also clear that there was not universal support for the war. The support that was there declined over the course of the war as the realities kicked in. Not everyone rushed to enlist, and by 1918 less than 50% of eligible men had signed up. There was huge division over the two conscription referendums in 1916 and 1917, and these tensions lingered for years afterwards.

92 THE END

This is the final story in Anzac Tales, which started out four years ago as a way of commemorating the deeds and sacrifices of the men and women of the Rushworth area who went to the Great War, and also the communities that they left behind. It has been a journey of discovery, and a privilege to bring these stories to light, by sharing them with readers of the Waranga News.

After copious amounts of research, almost 50,000 words and nearly 100 stories, this journey has come to an end. It has been a labour of love and respect for those who have gone before us. It has also highlighted some salutary lessons with respect to war, and potential Australian involvement in future wars.

War is Hell

There is one clear and obvious conclusion that comes from trying to understand the involvement of Rushworth and district in the Great War. Fifty years earlier, at the end of the American civil war, a Union general (who was actually on the 'winning' side) concluded that "I am sick and tired of war. Its glory is all moonshine. War is hell". Nothing has changed to challenge that view.

It follows that we should be doing all we can to avoid our country going to war, unless the circumstances are absolutely extreme e.g. we are under direct attack. Since the second world war, there have been some dubious decisions made by politicians to involve us in wars where our involvement has really changed nothing in the world order. Remember the "weapons of mass destruction" justification for going to Iraq, for example. While alliances with major powers can be beneficial, we should really think it through clearly and independently before jumping in, at their behest, to situations that are usually none of our business.

Having seen the devastating impact of war – and in our case not even on our home soil – we need to be empathetic with the innocent people of Syria, Yemen and a dozen other countries where conflict still rages on a daily basis. We have so much to be grateful for that we live in peace in Australia.

At the Local Level

At the local level, it is easy to feel powerless to do anything to address world conflict. But it is possible to take a couple of decisions to improve things locally, which can have a ripple effect. One is to try to get on better terms with our neighbours by being more tolerant and understanding of difference e.g. refusing to use the term "blow-in", and treating new arrivals to the area with warmth and enthusiasm.

The other is to contribute to our privileged way of life by voluntarily working with community organisations. If the spirit of Anzac means anything, it means putting in and looking after those less fortunate than ourselves, and working towards continually improving the lot of those around us. Think global, act local.

Thankyou

A sincere thankyou to the Waranga News for providing the space for Anzac Tales over the last four years, and to Vicki Arnel and the proof readers for their contributions.

All the stories from Anzac Tales will be available free on line, in early 2019, for anyone who would like a copy. The compilation of stories will have a full biographical index, and will also made available to the RSL, Historical Society, libraries and the Australian War Memorial. To obtain a copy, please email boze24@hotmail.com with your request.

ANZAC TALES - BIOGRAPHICAL INDEX

Brackets = maiden name