

GREAT DEBATES: ARGUMENTS AGAINST CONSCRIPTION

CHARACTER PROFILE

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Private Albert Robert **Blackmore**



Great Debates: Conscription

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Source Analysis Worksheet

Source	What is the source? Who created it?	What information does the source provide?	What argument does this provide your character?	What questions are you left asking?

Biography

Private Albert Robert **Blackmore**



“When I began to think about the matter the other day I was surprised to discover my own attitude.”

Conscription was too late for Private Blackmore, Australians at War, accessed 2 September 2015,

http://www.australiansatwar.gov.au/stories/stories_ID=25_war=W1.html

It is early December 1917. Private Albert Blackmore, a well-educated teacher from Tasmania, is serving with the 12th Infantry Battalion on the **Western Front**. He had enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in 1916, embarking for the war on 8 August from Hobart.

Albert is an author, having written a book of poems, *Shade & Echo*, which has been published. He also has a keen interest in politics, particularly **conscription**.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Billy Hughes determined it necessary to introduce a referendum on conscription. Falling enlistments and rising casualties, particularly from the fighting on the Western Front, have led to a shortage of reinforcements for the AIF. Hughes has announced the referendum for 20 December. Australians will vote on whether conscripts should be sent to fight overseas.

This is not the first time Hughes has called for a referendum on the issue of conscription. A previous vote was held on 28 October 1916. The referendum was defeated: 49% voted for the proposal, 51% were against. Only a narrow majority of soldiers serving in the AIF voted in favour of compulsory overseas service.

On 29 November 1917, Albert wrote a letter about the coming **referendum** to his sister, Suzannah, in Australia. He wrote that it was too late for conscription, and that if he were to vote in favour, he would only do so on principle.

The United States has entered the war and is mobilising its forces. The Americans are able to supply more men for the war effort in a shorter period of time than Australia possibly could through conscription.

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To Win the War.

The Effect of Conscription.

Conscription in Australia cannot alter the result of the war.

If Conscription was necessary, Canada, whose population is 3,000,000 more than Australia and is within four days' sail of the frontier, would have adopted it.

If what Mr. Hughes says is correct, why has Russia twenty million men of military age who are not serving?

The enemy is in Russia!

Conscription in Australia will make it easy for other races to capture our industries, and the wives and daughters of the absent conscript will be forced to beg bread from an alien race.

Conscription will make it possible for the Military Authorities to pay the conscript what wages they think fit.

The British conscript gets one shilling (1s.) a day.

Vote "NO CONSCRIPTION."

Compiled and issued by Literature Committee of Queensland Anti-conscription Campaign Committee.
E. H. LANE, Chairman.
GUTHBERT BUTLER, Secretary.
Committee: J. A. Fihelly, J. McDonald, J. S. Collings, J. Haulon, T. H. Sewell.

Authorised by Lewis M'Donald, Hon. Sec. A.C.C. Committee, Elizabeth Street, Brisbane, and printed by W. M'Cosker for the Worker Newspaper Proprietary, Ltd., Elizabeth St., Brisbane.



Source 1.2

“Then America was neutral and Russia an active ally and we had reason to believe that if the Empire mustered its utmost force we could completely smash Germany’s military machine,” he wrote. “Today there are not, I think, many soldiers who believe that the war will end by crushing defeats in the field. The view now commonly expressed is that war in the air and the shrinkage of food supplies will be the decisive factor. As the enclosed slip shows, military experts are openly questioning the ability of our battering ram tactics. There are, at least, were, sound reasons for conscription but I do not think true the assertion that it will make our lot lighter. The more quickly our battalions are filled the more stunts [battles] we shall do.

“As for the argument that we must do our utmost while America is getting ready, I confess I don’t understand it. Troops can reach here from America in a few days; it took us several weeks. Or is it supposed that an unwilling Australian conscript needs less training than a Yankee? It is all too true, I fear, that the next three or four months will be a period to test our endurance and power more severely perhaps than they have even yet been tested. It seems reasonable to suppose that Germany will make one great final effort before America can throw her full weight into the balance. “Well, what can the referendum do? Can it give us a single man more in the trenches within that period? Later? Yes, later there are America’s millions. Do you think a few paltry thousand unwarlike Australians will really matter then? Conscription is too late. If I should end by voting for it, it will be purely for its moral effect – now that the beastly question has been raised again. But it is my present judgement that if Australia makes this sacrifice now she will make it to little purpose. And she has done well. Already we have lost more men than the whole Empire did in the South African War – when according to the Jingoists “all the world wondered” at our mighty army. I would vote gladly enough for conscription if it would end the war by a day or send back to Australia the men who have been in it all through; but it will do neither.

“Again, the more one sees of militarism the more one hates, fears and distrusts it. Voluntary as it is, our army is steadily and surely undergoing the process of Tommification. I confess the idea of being confused with conscripts is much more repugnant than it was a year ago. It is something to retain – not liberty, we lost that when we enlisted – but the last faint rays of its halo. Defeat is the one curse worse than conscription.

“Well, I’ve inflicted an awful lot of stuff on you. My apologies; but writing helps one untangle one’s ideas. When I began to think about the matter the other day I was surprised to discover my own attitude.”

A letter from Private Blackmore to his sister, written on 29 November 1917.

Conscription was too late for Private Blackmore, Australians at War, Department of Veterans’ Affairs, accessed 2 September 2015, http://www.australiansatwar.gov.au/stories/stories_ID=25_war=W1.html

Source 1.3

An extract from Private Albert Blackmore's service record.

National Archives of Australia, NAA: B2455, BLACKMORE A (pages 7-9)
<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=3088691>

Think about how Private Blackmore's service experience might have influenced his thinking on conscription.

(SERVICE AND CASUALTY FORM Part II)
 8990
 Name: **Blackmore, Albert Robert**

Date	Place	Description of Event	Grade	Remarks	Source
3/11/16	OG 2nd	Embarked	Private		5/8/16
3/11/16	OG 2nd	Discharged	Private		20/9/16
3/11/16	OG 2nd	Proceeded overseas per S.O. Report			
3/11/16	OG 2nd	Wounded in action			15/11/16
3/11/16	OG 2nd	Wounded in action			20/11/16
3/11/16	OG 2nd	Struck off strength			2/10/16
3/11/16	OG 2nd	Case - No strength			1/10/16
5/8/17	OG 1st	Wounded in action 1st Division			8/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	S.O. sent admitted			1/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	1st Div			1/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	2nd Div			1/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Transferred to England			1/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	So far as concerned for England			1/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	2nd Div			1/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Admitted C.S. 2nd Class			15/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Transferred to 2nd Div			15/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Paris			15/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	W/I from Abdn. Deps London			15/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Report to Depot Plymouth 15/8/17			15/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Proceeding overseas France via			15/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Paris Depot			15/8/17
5/8/17	OG 1st	Embarked in an infantry			15/8/17

19.17/8/17	1st AHD	Proceeded to unit			17/8/17
20.22/8/17	1st AHD	Rejoined from hospital			17/8/17
21.2/8/17	1st AHD	Wounded in action 1st Division			17/8/17
22.10/17	1st AHD	Struck off strength			17/8/17
23.10/17	1st AHD	Admitted 2nd Class			17/8/17
24.4/10/17	1st AHD	W.O. sent admitted			4/10/17
25.4/10/17	1st AHD	to England			4/10/17
26.8/10/17	1st AHD	Embarked for England			8/10/17
27.8/10/17	1st AHD	Admitted 2nd Class			8/10/17
28.10/17	1st AHD	Colchester			8/10/17

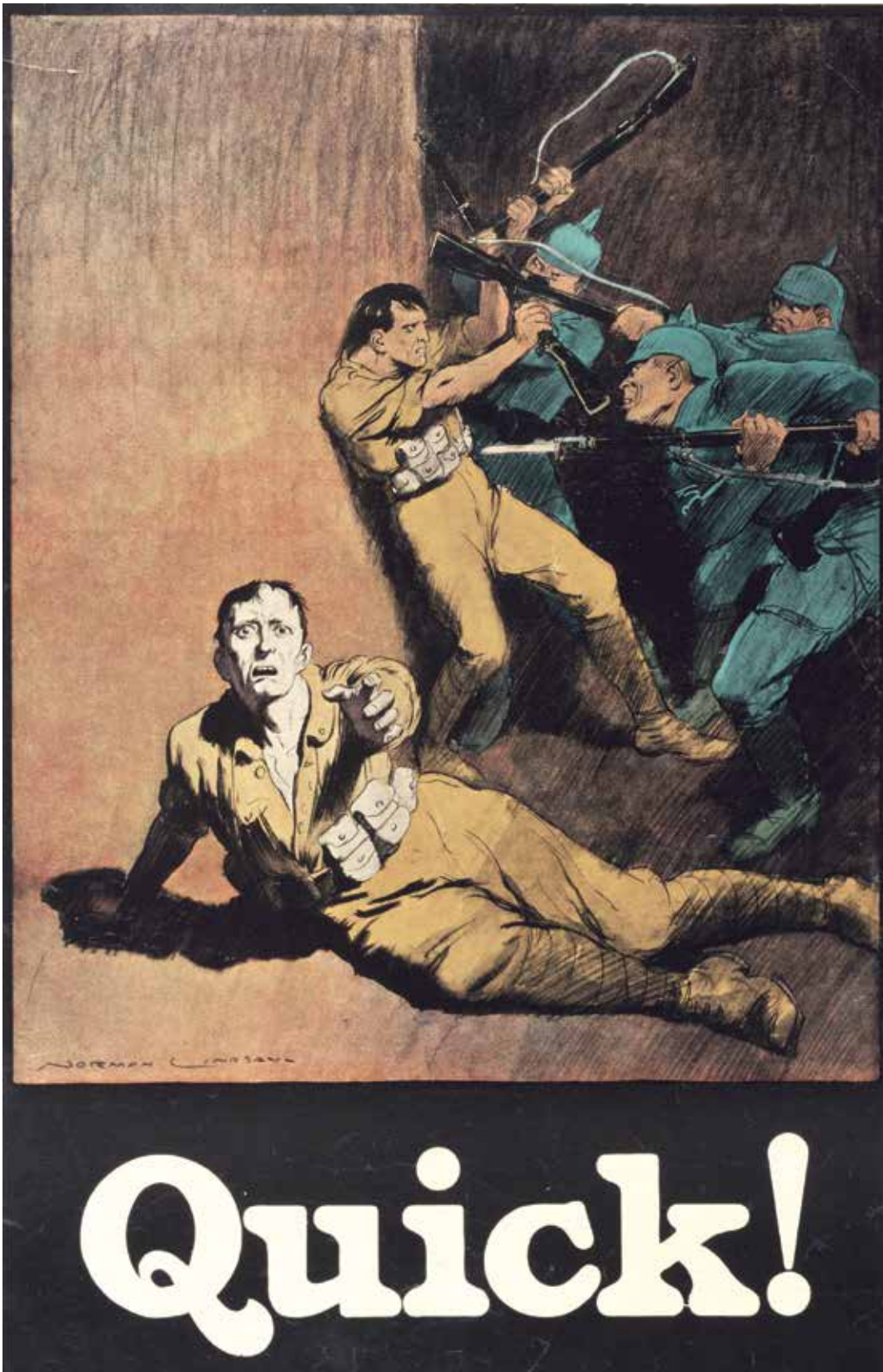
Date	Place	Description of Event	Grade	Remarks	Source
29.10/17	2nd AHD	Transferred to 2nd AHD			12/10/17
30.11/17	2nd AHD	Admitted 12/11/17			14/11/17
31.11/17	2nd AHD	Report to Depot			15/11/17
1.12/17	2nd AHD	Classified 2nd Class			24/11/17
2.12/17	2nd AHD	Classified 2nd Class			24/11/17
3.12/17	2nd AHD	Struck off strength			24/11/17
4.12/17	2nd AHD	Wounded in action			24/11/17
5.12/17	2nd AHD	Rejoined from hospital			24/11/17
6.12/17	2nd AHD	Proceeded overseas			24/11/17
7.12/17	2nd AHD	London Depot			24/11/17
8.12/17	2nd AHD	Embarked in an infantry			24/11/17
9.12/17	2nd AHD	Proceeded to unit			24/11/17
10.12/17	2nd AHD	Rejoined 2nd Division			24/11/17
11.12/17	2nd AHD	Wounded in action 2nd Division			24/11/17
12.12/17	2nd AHD	W.O. sent admitted			24/11/17
13.12/17	2nd AHD	to England			24/11/17
14.12/17	2nd AHD	Embarked for England			24/11/17
15.12/17	2nd AHD	Admitted S.O. 1st Class			24/11/17

(SERVICE AND CASUALTY FORM Part II)
 8990
 Name: **Blackmore, Albert Robert**

Date	Place	Description of Event	Grade	Remarks	Source
13/8/18	2nd AHD	Admitted 7/8/18			17/8/18
14/8/18	2nd AHD	Report to Depot			17/8/18
15/8/18	2nd AHD	Classified 2nd Class			17/8/18
16/8/18	2nd AHD	Struck off strength			17/8/18
17/8/18	2nd AHD	Wounded in action			17/8/18
18/8/18	2nd AHD	Rejoined from hospital			17/8/18
19/8/18	2nd AHD	Proceeded overseas			17/8/18
20/8/18	2nd AHD	London Depot			17/8/18
21/8/18	2nd AHD	Embarked in an infantry			17/8/18
22/8/18	2nd AHD	Proceeded to unit			17/8/18
23/8/18	2nd AHD	Rejoined 2nd Division			17/8/18
24/8/18	2nd AHD	Wounded in action 2nd Division			17/8/18
25/8/18	2nd AHD	W.O. sent admitted			17/8/18
26/8/18	2nd AHD	to England			17/8/18
27/8/18	2nd AHD	Embarked for England			17/8/18
28/8/18	2nd AHD	Admitted S.O. 1st Class			17/8/18

Albert Robert Blackmore

Source 1.4



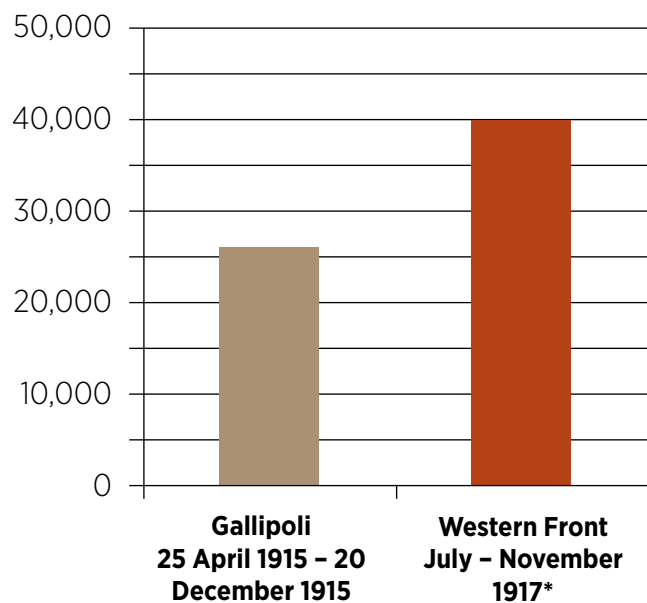
Quick!

AWM ART05294

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ARTV05294/>

Source 1.5

Casualties Comparison*



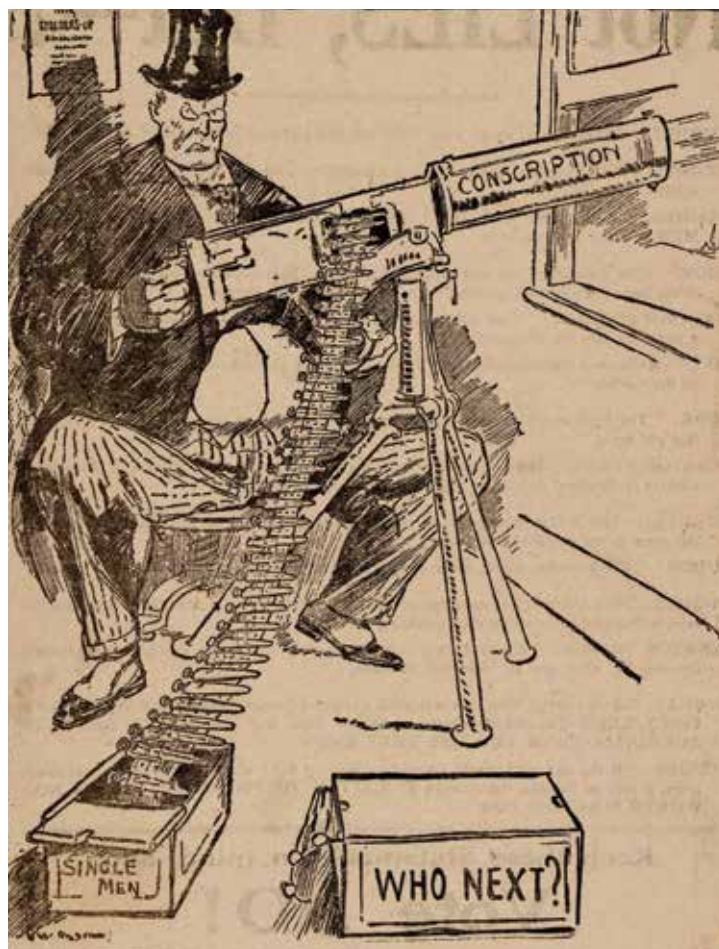
The heaviest Australian casualties were suffered in the fighting on the Western Front.

Based on *Campaign casualty statistics - First World War (Australia)*, Australian War Memorial, accessed 2 September 2015

* Approximate only

https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/statistics_table.asp#casualty

Source 1.6



AWM RC00339

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC00339/>

Glossary of terms

conscription	A policy that compels citizens of a nation into military service.
referendum	A public vote called by the government to approve a change to the Australian Constitution. The 1916 and 1917 referenda were in fact plebiscites. A plebiscite, also known as an advisory referendum, is used to decide a national question that does not affect the Constitution. It can be used to test whether the government has sufficient support from the people to go ahead with a proposed action.
Western Front	A series of trenches running from the Belgian coast to the Swiss border, separating the Allied and Central Powers in the First World War.
