“If Australia is good enough to live in, it is good enough to fight for. I hope to live in it again after the war.”

Benjamin Moy Ling c. 1917.
Foreword

The stories of Chinese Anzacs have tended to be untold within the larger story of the First World War. During the Anzac Centenary, there has been renewed interest in understanding the experiences of Australia’s diverse cultural groups during the First World War. Chinese Anzacs served in many roles and in many theatres of war.

The stories in this book shed light on individual wartime experiences, the challenges of being an Australian soldier of Chinese ancestry, as well as the challenges for such soldiers on return to civilian life. While the recruitment policies at the time were racially discriminatory, most Chinese-Australians who successfully enlisted completed their war service with the acceptance and respect of their fellow soldiers.

Post card sent by Thomas Hughes.
Image courtesy of Kevin Hughes

Note to reader:

The term 'Chinese Anzacs' used in this publication describes Australians with Chinese ancestry who served during the First World War.

This publication contains stories about war and wartime experiences which might be distressing to young readers. Readers should note that some of the stories contain language and perspectives that are considered inappropriate today.


The accompanying DVD documentary titled Chinese Anzacs, inside the front cover of this publication, includes interviews and family perspectives from some of the descendants of the Chinese Anzacs referred to in this publication.
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Men of the 2nd Division gaining trench experience near Bois Grenier in June 1916. AWM EZ00007
Chinese Anzacs

When the First World War began in 1914, many men and women from around Australia joined up. For the next four years Australians volunteered for service in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). They came from a range of cultural backgrounds. More than 200 of these are known to have been Chinese-Australians.

An obstacle to Chinese-Australians enlisting in the AIF was the Defence Act 1909, which did not allow those 'not substantially of European origin' to enlist for military service. This was despite the fact that almost all Chinese-Australian volunteers had been born in Australia.

The soldiers featured in this book each had different war experiences and identified differently with their Chinese-Australian heritage. Benjamin Moy Ling’s parents were both Chinese. He grew up as an Australian and dedicated much of his postwar life to supporting young Australian-born Chinese through his work with the Young Chinese League. As observed by military historian Dr David Holloway, Henry Langtip’s diary of his three years in the Australian Light Horse in the Middle East makes no mention of his Chinese heritage. After returning from war William Ah Chow took a playful approach to his ancestry, dressing up in traditional clothes to amuse visitors. Hunter Poon’s cricketing skills both before and after the war earned him respect from his local community. Thomas Hughes showed his patriotism when he had ‘Advance Australia’ tattooed on his arm before enlisting. Richard Wong overcame difficulties in order to enlist, but sadly did not survive the war.

Pre-war Immigration

Many Chinese Anzacs were descendants of gold rush immigrants. During the gold rushes of the 1850s, many men came from southern China to seek their fortune and later worked in diverse occupations such as labouring, market gardening, furniture making, hospitality and practising in Chinese medicine. Some settled permanently and contributed significantly to the development of Australia. They often lived and worked in close-knit communities that became known as Chinatowns.
The gold rushes gave rise to concerns about Chinese immigration to Australia. By 1901, all Australian colonies had passed legislation restricting Chinese immigration. An early piece of legislation passed by the new Federal Parliament was the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, which allowed the government to deny entry to people failing a dictation test in any European language chosen by the immigration officer. These restrictions were part of the *White Australia Policy*, which sought to ensure that the population remained predominantly Anglo-Australian.

**Becoming Australian**
Throughout the nineteenth century, there had been pressure for immigrants to conform to the language and lifestyle of British Australians. For first-generation Chinese immigrants to Australia this meant learning the language and adopting the local lifestyle. Their children, second-generation migrants born and educated in Australia, grew up speaking English fluently. In the interest of helping their children integrate into Australian society, some Chinese immigrants did not teach their children Chinese language or customs.

**Did you know?**

**Chinese Names**
Chinese is a tonal language and names are pronounced differently depending on dialect. Some Chinese people in the nineteenth century had several names throughout their lives: one for babyhood, another for childhood and perhaps another if they got married or changed their occupation. A Chinese woman tended to keep her own name rather than adopting her husband’s name. A typical Chinese name is made up of three characters. The first is the family name, the second is a generational name common to all siblings and the third is the given name. Frequently the first name was mistaken for the surname.

**Anglicisation of Names**
In order to enlist in the First World War, or simply to integrate into Australian culture, some men of Chinese ancestry changed their names to disguise their heritage. For example, some of the Huey brothers changed their surname to Hughes and Sydney Hustwaite’s name made him difficult to identify as having Chinese ancestry. Both families only recently discovered their Chinese ties. The Langtip brothers changed the spelling of their surname from the original Lang Tip, while some members of the family changed it to Langton after the war. Anglicisation was also evident in the choice of some of the British first names given to the men featured in this book.

Without Anglicisation, recruitment officers often had difficulty understanding Chinese names and wrote them down incorrectly. As a result, many variations of Chinese names appear in military records, with some written as two separate words, some joined together and some hyphenated. For example, in the military records held by the National Archives of Australia, William Ah Chow can only be located by searching for William Ahchow. Similarly, other officials misheard Chinese names, such as when, according to Hunter Poon, his name was recorded on his birth certificate as Ander Leppit George Poon rather than Hunter Robert George Poon.
Enlisting

Although many Chinese-Australians were second or third generation Australians keen to fight for their country, they were not always viewed as ideal military recruits in the First World War. Recruitment posters at the time targeted young, fit males of Anglo-Australian heritage.

As well as having to meet physical and medical requirements, enlistees were asked if they were ‘natural born’ or ‘naturalised British subjects’. Australian citizenship did not exist at the time. Recruits were not asked to state their racial background. The decision to accept or reject a man for service was made by an officer at the recruitment depot, often according to the recruit’s appearance or personal knowledge of his family.

Being rejected for service could make life difficult for young men of Chinese heritage as they might be branded cowards along with men who chose not to enlist. Despite sometimes having trouble being accepted for military service, Chinese Anzacs were recognised for their wartime achievements. Nineteen Chinese-Australian soldiers received gallantry awards, some more than once.

As more recruits were needed the minimum requirements of height and age were relaxed. More Chinese Anzacs enlisted successfully in the later years of the war.

Reproduced courtesy of the Chinese Museum

As Chinese Australian men saw “this space” on the recruitment poster for them, they were often disappointed or surprised when they were rejected for enlistment.

First World War recruitment poster: There is still a place in the line for you. AWM ARTVD0076, 1915, chromolithograph on paper, 76 x 50.6cm
George and Herbert Kong Meng were sons of the successful Chinese-Malay merchant and community leader Lowe Kong Meng. The brothers were part of a large family of twelve children, with eleven years between the two boys. The eldest son, Sidney, was listed as the next of kin on their attestation papers as their father died in 1888. Herbert was quick to enlist and was accepted into the AIF, serving in the 7th Battalion. George was surprised that he was not accepted, and upon his second rejection, he wrote this passionate letter to *The Argus* newspaper:

**Letter to *The Argus*, 24 January 1916, page 11**

Sir, Having answered the Prime Minister’s appeal for recruits, I journeyed to Melbourne to offer my services to my country. I attended the recruiting depot at the Melbourne Town Hall … and … was sent in with some others to the … medical officer [who examined] me as to my physical fitness … Upon going before him I was told to get dressed again, and when I asked if I had failed to pass the medical officer said he would not swear me in. When leaving the depot, I received a certificate with ‘not substantially of European origin’ written on it, and signed by the medical officer. … With the exception of being asked where I came from, I was not asked one question whilst before the medical officer. Now, sir for your own guidance, I might state that my father was a British subject born at Penang … and arrived in Australia in 1854. My mother was born in Tasmania in 1842 and I myself was born in this state in 1877. I have had six years’ military training … My brother is at the front serving his King and country … and holds the rank of sergeant, but evidently the authorities at the Melbourne Town Hall depot seem to think I am not worthy of helping to defend the Empire. The Prime Minister has appealed to everyman of military age to join the colours; but, if this is the treatment the native-born are to receive, I am afraid the appeal will fall on deaf ears. England and France deem it is fit to use coloured troops to defend their shores, but the great Australian democracy denies its own subjects the same opportunities. I might state that I have gone to Melbourne on two occasions to offer my services to my King and country and after paying all travelling expenses, to be treated like this does not give one any encouragement to go again.

Yours, & c. GEORGE KONG MENG.
Despite the public support for George and the inconsistency of the recruitment procedures, it is likely that he never served. It is not clear on what grounds he was rejected each time and whether it was his age, being thirty-seven, or his Chinese ancestry causing the rejection on the grounds he was ‘not substantially of European origin’. Recruitment officers continued to apply the orders in an inconsistent manner throughout the war.

Further investigation into Herbert Kong Meng’s service from his Repatriation File, reveals that it is unlikely that he was aged thirty-eight when he enlisted in 1914. He did not die until 30 November 1954, with his age at the time of death listed on this file as eighty-eight years old. He was actually forty-eight years old when he enlisted and he put his age down by ten years on his attestation papers. Given the early enlistment restrictions on both age and ethnicity it is surprising that his enlistment was successful. It must have been frustrating for George, who was eleven years younger but still unable to enlist.

Herbert’s battalion embarked in October 1914 and proceeded to Egypt, where they trained under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel ‘Pompey’ Elliott. Herbert was one of those who took part in the landings at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 in the second wave. The battalion also assisted at the engagements in the village of Krithia and then in the battle of Lone Pine in August. With the huge loss of lives and the conditions at Gallipoli it is easy to imagine that Herbert would have felt the impact of war.

The 7th Battalion moved on to the Western Front and by May 1916 Herbert was engaged in the front-line trenches. In July 1916, the battalion took part in its first major action at Pozières. During his time on the Western Front Herbert suffered from influenza and chronic bronchitis; he was hospitalised and finally considered ‘Permanently Unfit’ for general and home service from May 1917. He was repatriated to Australia in July 1917. It seems that he may also have suffered from shell shock, with the word ‘senility’ appearing more than once in his service record.
Benjamin Moy Ling was the son of Kim Wee Ling and Reverend James Moy Ling, a naturalised British subject who preached at the Gospel Hall in Melbourne. Ben attended Wesley College and was known for his singing talents. Before the war he worked as a law clerk and accountant. Ben’s passage into the AIF was not an easy one. Ben tried to enlist several times before being accepted in 1917. He was born in Australia but his father was born in Canton (now Guangzhou), China, and his mother in Singapore. He was found to be not fit for service as he was ‘not substantially of European origin’. On his successful enlistment, The Spectator Central Mission Gazette reported on his farewell:

Ben sang a popular wartime song ‘The Trumpeter’ at a Methodist ‘Pleasant Sunday Afternoon’ meeting, and was praised for his patriotism as well as his singing. … When interviewed about volunteering, he said: ‘If Australia is good enough to live in, it is good enough to fight for. I hope to live in it again after the war.’

The Spectator Central Mission Gazette, 9 May 1917.

Ben Moy Ling was granted special permission to enlist by Brigadier General Robert Williams. He attended the AIF’s Signals School in Broadmeadows, Victoria, to learn semaphore before being sent overseas.

Ben left Australia in October 1917 and arrived in England on 26 December. He did not join his unit, the 4th Divisional Signalling Company, in the field until 10 October 1918, five days after the AIF’s last major battle on the Western Front and just a month before the Armistice.

A Christmas photograph taken in 1904 at Drummond Street, Carlton. The father, Reverend James Moy Ling, is the older man standing at the rear. The European woman is a family friend and Ben is sitting crossed legged on the far right. He is nineteen years old.

Image courtesy of Serena Cheung and Christopher Shai-Hee
The Trumpeter

Trumpeter, what are you sounding now?
Is it the call I’m seeking?
Can’t mistake the call, said the Trumpeter tall,
When my trumpet goes a-speaking.
I’m urgin’ ’em on,
They’re scamperin’ on,
There’s a drummin’ of hoofs like thunder.
There’s a madd’nin’ shout as the sabres flash out,
For I’m sounding the ‘Charge’ no wonder.

Lyrics by John Francis Barron.
Signalling
The system used for flag signalling was called semaphore. The signaller held two flags in a variety of positions to spell out the alphabet. The flags were generally red and yellow to help with visibility in low light.

A signals instructor holds a semaphore flag, England, 1918.

AWM P1583.002

While the Australian infantry were taken out of the line for a well-deserved rest, fighting continued along the front and the vital work of signalling had to continue. Ben’s unit maintained communications between the rear areas and the Australian artillery, which was firing in support of British and United States troops up until the end of October. The signaller’s job was a dangerous one. Lines had to be run across open ground and were often cut by traffic and shell fire. Repairing them was extremely dangerous. Ben was fortunate that his time in the line unit was short, and if he saw action it was during the war’s final days. The 4th Divisional Signal Company’s unit diary describes the weeks leading up to early November as an exhausting period. By the time the war ended on 11 November, most of Ben’s company was in training behind the lines.

Ben remained in France until May 1919. During his time there he attended a three-month educational course at the Australian Corps Central School and was hospitalised with tonsillitis. He left France for England in May 1919, reaching Australia in October. Ben was discharged from the AIF having had a mercifully brief exposure to the front lines.

Linesmen of the 2nd Divisional Signal Company of Australian Engineers prepare to lay a telephone line from an observation post on Westhoek Ridge, Belgium, September 1917.

AWM E00809

Did you know?
After the war

Ben returned to his home in Rathdowne Street, North Carlton, Victoria. Ben is believed to have worked at the Victoria Markets and was involved in community events. He remained a bachelor and was a popular baritone singer who performed at numerous church, charity and college concerts. He also sang on Melbourne radio.

Ben Moy Ling was a founding member of the Young Chinese League and served as the vice-president. He believed in helping young Chinese-Australians understand their Chinese heritage. He continued to promote the contribution of Chinese immigrants and their descendants to Australia, and to work towards better cross-cultural understanding.

Family members remember Ben as a polite, softly-spoken gentleman who was articulate and well-presented. He died in 1946 and was buried in a family grave at the Melbourne General Cemetery.

Young Chinese League

The Young Chinese League grew out of two Chinese-Australian associations: the Chinese Athletics Association and the Chinese Progressive Association, and was officially founded in 1932. The League aimed to promote an understanding of Chinese culture to Australians and to show how Chinese immigrants had contributed to the local and wider community. In order to join the League, members had to have at least one parent or grandparent born in China. Women or men who had married into Chinese families were also granted membership. The League organised social events such as debutante balls and sporting competitions, where young Chinese-Australians could meet and socialise.

Did you know?

Clipping from *The Geelong Advertiser*, 3 April 1907, listing Ben Moy Ling as a finalist in an Australian Natives’ Association (ANA) music competition. Interestingly, the ANA was associated with the White Australia Policy.

Decorative urn on the Moy Ling family grave at the Melbourne General Cemetery, 2014. Image courtesy of the History Teachers’ Association of Victoria (HTAV)
Hunter Poon

Hunter Robert George Poon was born near Ballina, New South Wales, in 1894. His father William Poon migrated from China to work on the Queensland goldfields and his mother Elizabeth Key had Chinese ancestry.

After Hunter completed his education at Toowoomba Grammar School, he trained as a teacher and worked at the Childers and Lockyer High Schools. He enlisted successfully in the AIF in September 1916 and sailed for England in January 1917 on the transport ship HMAT Ayrshire. In his autobiography he described suffering from sea sickness and playing bridge in his free time. He arrived in England on 12 April and was quickly promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal.

Once in Britain, Hunter won the coveted position of Messing Corporal due to his neat handwriting. The catering job included logging reports and allowed more free time than other posts. In his leisure time Hunter applied for leave to visit neighbouring towns. He requested to be removed from the role without the knowledge of his superiors and was posted to the 15th Battalion, which was in the Ypres sector in Belgium.

In October 1917, only a fortnight after joining the Battalion, Hunter was struck by shrapnel in his right hand and lower back in the fighting near Ypres. The soldier beside him was killed. Hunter had surgery at the 35th General Hospital in Calais and was sent to England for a period of convalescence and leave. In April 1918 he embarked on HMAT Borda to return home. He was discharged on 23 August 1918.

A military cemetery at Vlamertinghe, west of Ypres, near where Hunter served. October 1917.

AWM E00847
After the war

After his discharge Hunter returned to teaching and spent the next twenty-eight years as a high school teacher in Toowoomba, Queensland. For a time he also managed the Nambour sports store.

Hunter was known for his skill as an excellent cricketer. Before the war he was a leading bowler and a right-handed batsman for the Toowoomba team. He continued to play cricket while on service overseas with the AIF and it is possible he was one of the men referred to in the 15th Battalion War Diary’s entry for 8 October 1917: ‘Battalion’s Sporting Programme being steadily developed, and the devotees of the various branches of sport are taking them up in earnest’.

After he came home, Hunter captained a team of returned soldiers in what was known as the ‘Diggers’ Team’. He commented that, as former soldiers, the players were used to taking orders.

Hunter was selected to play for Queensland in a match against Victoria at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in December 1923. His selection for the team made international news. Hunter later competed on behalf of Toowoomba against Jardine’s Eleven of the Marylebone Cricket Club.
In addition to the physical wounds he sustained, Hunter suffered from shell shock, which could be brought on at unexpected times. As Hunter observed, ‘The effects of war, the concussion of shells and the prospect of sudden death still remained in our subconscious minds’. In his autobiography, Two Sides of a Coin: The True Life Story of an Australian Born Chinaman, Hunter described one such incident. One day he was writing on the blackboard with his back to the students and he did not notice the principal entering the room. The students stood as a mark of respect.

… the sudden, unexpected clatter of the stools made a bang that sent me off as in a state of shell shock, and I was led away until I recovered – fortunately this happened on [only] one subsequent occasion.

Hunter Poon, Two Sides of a Coin: The True Life Story of an Australian Born Chinaman (A.B.C), personal manuscript, 1996, p. 29

Teachers who were returned soldiers were granted extra periods of leave by the Department of Education. Like those of many injured soldiers, the effects of Hunter’s war service worsened as he grew older. The common practice of smoking during the war later led him to develop chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

In 1979 Hunter described his physical ailments:

… a stiff right wrist, two fingers that are purely ornamental … [I] cannot close my hand while the injury to my back and left buttock finally left me totally and permanently incapacitated.

Hunter Poon, Two Sides of a Coin, p. 86

In his personal memoir he reflected on the advantages and challenges of being a Chinese-Australian:

Being of Asiatic breeding and living all my life in a completely white community, I can understand the treatment meted out to the Aborigines and non-Europeans, while on the other hand, living completely as an Australian, I can see both sides of the coin.

Hunter Poon, Two Sides of a Coin, p. 1

Hunter grew up as a product of his Australian surroundings but came to regret not learning to speak Chinese. He married an Anglo-Australian, Ethel, with whom he had three children. Hunter suffered some racial discrimination growing up but was popular and well-liked in every community in which he lived. He believed that some Anglo-Australians accepted him largely because of his sporting ability and war service. Hunter lived in Brisbane until 1980, when he died at the age of eighty-five.
Samuel John Tong-Way was the eldest son of Chinese-born parents John and Mary. John Tong-Way arrived in Victoria in 1883 and after a short period as a miner, converted to Christianity and began work as a missionary. Mary was married by proxy and followed him to Victoria in 1893. Samuel was born in Ballarat, Victoria, in 1894. He had a brother, Hedley, and half-brother, Joseph. The family was well known in the community. A street in Ballarat next to the Tong-Way house was recently named after the family, in recognition of John’s missionary work.

Samuel went to school at Golden Point State School and then the newly established Ballarat Agricultural High School (now Ballarat High School), which he attended in 1910–1911. Samuel is named on the school honour board as a soldier of the First World War.

At Ballarat Agricultural High School, all students were expected to train in military drill. Samuel was taken aside and told that due to his Chinese ancestry he would not be permitted to participate. He is believed to have been the only student in the school to be excluded. In 1912 Samuel began teaching at Dean Higher Elementary School in Ballarat before transferring to Humffray Street State School the same year. In 1913 he was accepted into the Melbourne Teachers’ College as one of fourteen teachers awarded the new secondary teaching studentship. After graduating, Samuel taught in Clunes, Victoria.
Silk jacket brought to Australia by Mary Tong-Way, c. 1893. Image courtesy of the Chinese Museum

This pictorial honour board at the University of Melbourne commemorates students who served in the First World War. Image courtesy of Greg McCann
In 1916 Samuel attempted to enlist in the AIF but was rejected on the grounds that he had ‘hammer toes’ or bent toes. Samuel was humiliated by this rejection as the town of Clunes had already given him the farewell event given to local volunteers. Too embarrassed to return, he went to teach at Daylesford Higher Elementary School.

When Samuel tried to enlist for the second time in 1917 with his brother Hedley, the recruiting officer could have been in no doubt that he was not of European descent, as he answered yes to the question ‘Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty’s service?’ and explained that it was on the grounds of ‘non-European origin’. No mention was made of ‘hammer toes’ but Samuel was described on the same form as having a dark complexion, brown eyes and dark hair.

Samuel was twenty-two years old when he successfully enlisted after a third attempt. He wanted to be a stretcher bearer but, measuring 160 cm, he was considered too short and was posted to the 5th Division Signalling Company. John Tong-Way was not happy that his sons enlisted, being a deeply religious man who considered himself a pacifist. Samuel also recognised that his parents did not feel as much a part of the Anglo-Australian community as he did. Part of Samuel’s reason for enlisting was the gratitude he felt to the government for giving him the opportunity to get a degree and have a teaching career. The Victorian Department of Education also strongly encouraged its staff to enlist.

Samuel departed from Sydney on RMS Osterley in May 1918 and arrived in Liverpool in July. He was posted to France on 7 December, almost a month after the Armistice. Consequently he did not experience battle or sustain war injuries. He returned to England in February 1919 and remained there until 1920. For most of 1919 Samuel was allowed leave to study science at the Imperial College of Science and Technology in Kensington.

After the war

After Samuel returned from Europe he continued his studies at the University of Melbourne. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts in 1921 and resumed his teaching career. Samuel accepted a range of Education Department postings to country schools. He taught at Yarram Higher Elementary from 1921 until 1927 before becoming head teacher at Won Wron, Red Cliffs, Wandin Yallock and Jeparit. Samuel’s name appears in a 1943 promotions list published in the Argus newspaper. The Victorian Education Department reports describe Samuel as a clever, resourceful and hard-working teacher.

Samuel’s brother Hedley also returned safely from the war. He was given a Soldier Settlement Scheme block and Samuel invested money in the venture to help his brother fence the property during the Christmas holidays. Like many soldier settlers given land, Hedley was unable to make his block profitable and both men lost the money they invested in it.
Samuel was an active member of the communities in which he lived and worked. He was a member of the Victorian Freemasons, the Presbyterian Church and the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia, now known as the RSL. In 1949, the Merbein branch of the Australian Natives’ Association (ANA) awarded Samuel an honorary lifetime membership for his contribution in establishing the first children's library in Victoria. The ANA was a mutual organisation for Australian-born men, founded in 1871. It provided members with medical and death insurance and lobbied for improved services for its Australian-born members. The ANA is best known for its support of Australian Federation and the White Australia Policy. It is not so well known for its encouragement of Australian patriotism and support for local industry, water conservation, Aboriginal welfare and the adoption of the wattle as Australia’s national emblem.

According to Samuel’s relatives, he rated his ANA membership as one of his biggest accomplishments. For him, it symbolised his acceptance as a member of the Australian community.

Samuel died in 1988 and is buried in the Kangaroo Flat cemetery in Bendigo, Victoria. Both he and his brother Hedley are listed in the Ballarat Avenue of Honour and have trees planted as memorials to their service.
Chin Lang Tip was a market gardener who emigrated from China and settled in Tarraville, Victoria, in 1867. He and his Anglo-Australian wife, Mary Ann, had seven girls and ten sons, four of whom – Henry, Leslie, Bertie and Ernest – served in the First World War. The family ran a profitable market garden and were accepted by the local community. It is likely that the brothers worked with their father in the gardens, as three stated their occupation as ‘farmer’ on their attestation papers.

In January 1916, six of the Langtip brothers went to Melbourne to enlist. When the attending medical officer realised they were from the same family, he rejected two, failing them on medical grounds. This was an informal practice by recruiting officers, aimed at minimising the impact of war on families and their livelihoods. Henry, Leslie and Bertie served in the 4th Australian Light Horse Regiment, with Ernest enlisting a day later and being posted to the same unit.

The 4th Australian Light Horse Regiment was a mounted infantry unit of the AIF which served in the Middle East. Many of the men recruited for this regiment came from the country and were skilled horsemen. All recruits had to pass a riding test in order to be accepted into the Australian Light Horse. The Langtip brothers had experience with horses and were members of the Port Albert Rifle Club.

Henry, Leslie, Bertie and Ernest rode together in one section. The horses used by the Australian Light Horse were mostly sourced in Australia and shipped to Egypt on transport ships. Four men were allocated to each section. This meant they usually rode together and, when in combat, three would fight while the fourth looked after the horses. Each soldier was also expected to take care of his own mount when not in combat.

The Australian Light Horse served throughout the Sinai and Palestine campaigns and took part in the Battle of Beersheba in October 1917. At Beersheba the 4th and 12th Light Horse Regiments did not dismount and, in what proved to be the last great Australian cavalry charge, galloped under artillery and machine-gun fire to seize Beersheba and its vital water supply.

We rode all night to get right around Beersheba … it was a terrible ride in heavy dust all the way.

The horses have still got the saddles on & I don’t know when they will get them off. The attack started at 4.30 pm & within half an hour the first trenches were cleared & then they never stopped till they got Beersheba. Our casualties were fairly light considering the ground was as level as a table. 31 October 1917.

Henry Langtip’s diary.
King of the Feathers

Australian Light Horsemen who served in the Middle East attracted many nicknames, including ‘King of the Feathers’. This was a reference to the plume of emu feathers most soldiers wore tucked into the band of their slouch hat. When asked about the feathers by people unfamiliar with Australian animals, the Light Horse troopers were known to jokingly reply that they were kangaroo feathers.

The Australian Light Horse headdress was very distinctive.

Typical Light Horse by Henry Woollcott, 1919.
AWM ART03580, oil on canvas on cardboard, 53.5 x 42.8 cm

Emu plumes similar to those worn by Australian Light Horsemen.
AWM REL28/00

Did you know?

This Australian 4th Light Horse Association lapel badge would have been worn by the Langtip brothers after the war.
AWM REL35917
Henry Langtip’s diary

Henry’s diary reveals the personal side of life as a soldier and the nature of war. It describes the difficult conditions faced by soldiers campaigning in the desert, including dust storms, extreme heat, monotonous rations, insect and bug infestations and a lack of water. Henry also wrote about the long boring hours waiting for letters from loved ones at home. Soldiers combated boredom by playing games of bridge, cricket and football:

The 12th Light Horse arrived here to play cricket. Cotter was bowling for the 12th but we beat them easily. Our team retired in the first innings & then we beat them in 1 inn & a good many runs.

Diary entry, 29 October 1916

In the early 1900s Albert ‘Tibby’ Cotter was a well-known Australian fast bowler. Tibby’s cricketing talent made him an Australian household name. When he volunteered for the Australian Light Horse in April 1915, his enlistment was widely publicised.

According to Henry, alcohol was sometimes provided to the men from the wet canteen service while they were stationed at a military base and away from danger. In July 1916 Henry wrote, ‘hundreds of bottles of beer are drunk every night’. During the day troops suffered heat exhaustion in the desert heat and at night the temperature dropped to freezing. Some of Henry’s daily activities included digging wells, trenches and latrines. Working with horses meant a regular routine of grooming, feeding and exercising.

Service during the First World War gave soldiers the opportunity to travel and see the world. Henry’s diary reveals his excitement at seeing some of the wonders of the world while on leave. He made the following notes after periods of leave that allowed him to explore Cairo:

Out at the pyramids and they are taller than I expected ... The inside is wonderful ... The mosques are lovely. I never expected it to be anything like what it is.

Diary entries, December 1916 and January 1917

Henry was one of the troops posted to the Imperial Camel Corps and he wrote in his diary about the challenges of training and riding camels:

On camels for the first time today and it was great as several [soldiers] fell off. They are hard to get on as you get on just the opposite to a horse.

Diary entry, 28 December 1916
The Australian Light Horse in the Middle East suffered fewer fatalities than units on the Western Front. The horses were not brought back to Australia due to quarantine restrictions and were classified into three groups. Class A horses were in excellent form and were passed on to the British and Indian militaries. Class B horses were auctioned off to local farmers as working horses. Class C horses were elderly, ill or had sustained injuries, so were put down.

After the war

All four Langtip brothers returned home safely to Australia in 1919 but like many soldiers, Leslie and Bertie sought assistance from the Repatriation Department for ongoing health problems. Leslie unsuccessfully applied for support to complete an electrical engineering course. In 1930 he changed his surname to Langton. Henry, Ernest and Leslie all married, with Ernest having twin sons who later served in the Second World War. Although the brothers had fought closely together during their time in the Australian Light Horse, they did not remain in close contact after the war.

He was also perturbed by their grumpy nature and unusual smell:

On camel drill and jolly fun it is. One thing that I don’t like is the odour. They smell something like rubberised leather only a bit more musty ... I had to go to the lines and get my camel to take back the blankets that came from the barracks. He was pretty mad and I very nearly got a buster.

Diary entries, 1 and 5 January 1917

Leslie Langtip’s courage

Nineteen Chinese Anzacs received medals for bravery during the First World War. One of these was Leslie Langtip, who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM). His citation reads:

During the advance on Kaukab on 30th September 1918, this NCO [non-commissioned officer] gave valuable assistance in the capture of a field gun and showed great initiative and courage. He forced the Turkish drivers to take their own gun towards our lines under heavy fire and when a party of the enemy endeavoured to retake the gun he took up a position near the gun from which he drove back the party.

Leslie Langtip’s service records. The citation appeared in both Australian and British newspapers.

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Camels

The Imperial Camel Corps was formed in January 1916 to serve in the desert campaign. It mostly contained Australian Light Horsemen but also included British and New Zealand soldiers. Camels were ideal for a desert environment, needing less water than horses. For a time the Camel Corps supplemented the work of horse-mounted soldiers. When it was disbanded the Australian Light Horsemen rejoined their regiments.

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Richard Wessey Wong was one of six children born in Tasmania to Bartholomew Poo Wong and Emma Jane Richards. He was known as Wesley and was always ‘Wes’ to his family and friends. The family name was shortened to Wong. The family moved to Beechworth, Victoria, where his father was a missionary with the Methodist Church. There was a large community of Chinese-Australians in the area following their emigration from China during and after the gold rushes.

Richard and his brother William were working as blacksmiths when they tried to enlist. William was rejected on the basis that he was ‘not substantially of European origin’. Richard was almost rejected on medical grounds. His attestation papers include a ‘Recommendation for further examination: doubtful teeth and tendency to flat foot’. However, he was accepted in January 1916 and was posted to the 17th Battalion.

Richard suffered two personal losses in the years before he enlisted. His partner, Isabella Crockett, and their daughter Isabel both died under tragic circumstances. Isabella was of Anglo-Australian heritage and although she and Richard never married she adopted his surname.

Richard was sent for training at Cootamundra in New South Wales and then to England. He was deployed to Fricourt, France, as a machine gunner. Machine gunners were regularly targeted by enemy snipers and mortars. They were often sent out in front of their own lines, occupying shell holes or saps to protect working parties at night or to break up attacks.

Richard’s time on active service was short-lived. He left Sydney in August 1916 and was killed approximately seven months later. His final days were spent in France with the 17th Battalion. On 2 March 1917 the battalion was in action near Warlencourt. Richard died from injuries received in an artillery barrage during an assault on German positions. He was buried close to where he fell.
The road to Bapaume, where Richard was killed in France.

Did you know?

**Dead Man’s Penny**
A bronze Memorial Medallion or ‘Dead Man’s Penny’ was given to the families of men and women who died in the First World War with a commemorative scroll signed by King George V. The medallion showed the female figure of Britannia representing England, standing alongside a lion, a symbol of strength and courage. Other animal symbols include two dolphins representing Britain’s sea power and a second lion seen savaging the German Imperial eagle. Around the edge of each penny was written, ‘He (or she) died for freedom and honour’. Rank was not mentioned in acknowledgment that all soldiers are equal in death.

After his death, an Australian Red Cross Missing and Wounded Inquiry Bureau file was opened containing information and several accounts of his death from men who had seen him killed. The statements were collected several months after Richard’s death and, due to confusion during the conflict and the time that had elapsed, there are some points of difference in the accounts.

Lance Corporal Edgar Groom described the circumstances of Richard’s death:

> I saw him killed a little on the left of the Bapaume Road sometime in March, 500 yards past the Butte de Warlencourt, but on the opposite side of the road (going towards Bapaume).

> We had bombed the enemy out of a strong point there, right on the crest of a ridge. Before daybreak next day, the enemy counter-attacked and a shell from the preliminary bombardment, which burst close to Wong, killed him instantly.

> I was about 2 bays from him, that is about 200 yards. I did not see the shell land but heard it and went at once. He was still quivering when I went to him. He was badly torn about. We buried him a few yards away from where he fell. It is certain there will be a cross up for we held this land for a long time.

Red Cross Missing and Wounded files for Private Richard Wong.
National Archives of Australia
Richard Wong’s studio portrait on the previous page shows a handsome young man who was later described by Corporal Henry Savage of the 17th Battalion as ‘half a Chinaman to look at but a very decent fellow’. Like many, his story is that of a soldier who did not come home. His military records show that a copy of the bereavement book Where Australians Rest was sent to his mother. She also received his personal belongings and waited for eight years to learn the final location of her son’s grave. It was not until 1925 that Richard was reburied in the Warlencourt British War Cemetery, France.

Letter sent to Richard’s mother detailing the place of Richard’s burial in France.

National Archives of Australia

Dear Madam

With further reference to the burial of your son, the late No. 5430 Private R. W. WONG, 17th Battalion, I am now in receipt of advice from the Imperial War Graves Commission that in order to conform with the uniform layout of the WARLENCOURT BRITISH CEMETERY, the following official registration has been allotted to the site of the late soldier’s final resting place, viz:—


where a permanent headstone will be erected and engraved with his full regimental particulars and date of death, together with any verse or epitaph previously submitted in the form of a personal inscription.

According to the latest progress report to hand, the erection of war stones in this cemetery is now proceeding, and generally the work of re-construction has reached an advanced stage. The opportunity will be afforded relatives later of obtaining a copy of the printed Register containing full particulars of all British and Dominion burials therein.

These additional details are furnished by direction, it being the policy of the Department to forward all information received in connexion with the deaths of members of the Australian Imperial Force.

Yours faithfully

Captain
Officer i/c Base Records.

Letter sent to Richard’s mother detailing the place of Richard’s burial in France.

National Archives of Australia
Richard Wong was not the only Chinese Anzac to not survive the war. Of those with Chinese ancestry that are known to have served in the First World War, around forty died of their wounds or were killed in action.

Fredrick Ernest Wilson, another Chinese Anzac of the 5th Battalion suffered a serious wound at the Gallipoli landing and was sent to No. 17 General Hospital in Alexandria, Egypt where he died in early May 1915.
Thomas Albert Hughes was born near Morwell, Victoria, in 1889. His mother, Annie Evans, is believed to be of British and Irish descent and his father, James Huey, was born in China. Although Thomas had been born Huey, like many Chinese-Australians some members of the family chose to anglicise their surname, in this case to Hughes. Thomas’ brother was born David Henry Chin Huey, but enlisted as David Henry Hughes. Not all the brothers changed their surname to Hughes – another brother enlisted under the name John Robert Joseph Huey, but his birth certificate listed him as John Richard Ah Huey.

Thomas did not seem to have experienced any difficulty enlisting. His AIF attestation papers note that he had the words ‘Advance Australia’ tattooed on his right arm. While the records of many Chinese Anzacs state their skin colour as ‘dark’, Thomas’ attestation paper lists his skin colour as ‘fresh’. His eye colour was originally written as ‘dark’, then crossed out and replaced with ‘grey’.

Thomas left Melbourne in July 1915 on the troopship HMAT Orsova, bound for England. He told his family that he did not enjoy the journey but that there was ‘not much point crying about it’. Thomas was posted to the artillery and trained at Lydd in Kent before being sent to France. He learnt to load ammunition and many other aspects of modern artillery work. Field guns were operated by teams of six to eight soldiers. One soldier was responsible for directing the fire, others for operating the gun, loading the shells and maintaining the supply of ammunition and replacement parts.
Thomas described many of his experiences while on active service in a series of postcards that he sent to his sister, Violet. The postcards provide an insight into Thomas' life as a soldier that his war records do not. As there was limited space on each card he often wrote his stories over several cards and numbered them so that his sister knew in which order to read them.

Soldiers were permitted to write letters home, but not to divulge military information that might reveal the location of their unit. Many letters were not stamped with a date or postal location for this reason.

I am sorry that I can not say to [sic.] much as we are not allowed to let any one know our movement.

Postcard, undated

In a card to Violet on 30 April 1916, Thomas wrote that he hoped to be home for Christmas. This was a commonly expressed hope of soldiers, first in 1914 and then in subsequent years. By 1916 few men entertained any real belief that the war would end quickly.

These postcards describe Thomas’ experiences during the First World War. They also reveal the emotional impact of service on a soldier.

We have lost a few of our boys since we came over here and several wounded. I am one of the lucky ones. So far I have seen a couple of flying machines shot down yesterday. It was a very nice sight to see them falling. The hun was killed.

Postcard from the Western Front, 30 April 1916

Thomas served on the Somme for two months, taking part in the campaign that began in July 1916. More than one million men lost their lives during the Somme fighting, one of the war’s costliest battles. Many of the dead, unable to be retrieved, lay where they fell. This obviously had a strong impact on those soldiers fighting on the Western Front. Thomas recounted this experience in his postcards to his sister:

The dead was [sic] laying all over the place, there was some places where they never had time to bury them. And when the hot weather came in the stench was awful. There was dead gunners laying all over the place of course we soon got used to all these sights.

Postcard from France, c. 1916
Did you know?

**Embroidered Postcards**

These finely stitched postcards were made by French and Belgian women and sold to soldiers serving on the Western Front. Many included what was known as ‘the language of flowers’, which symbolised different emotions. A red rose denoted romantic love while a pink one suggested friendship. Daisies signified innocence, violets faithfulness, iris' inspiration, ivy fidelity and forget-me-nots remembrance. The combination of red, white and blue flowers was a patriotic gesture alluding to the flags of Australia and France. Poppies often featured on postcards as they were a common sight on the battlefields.

Some of the daily hardships Thomas faced on the Somme included poor rations, long hours of physical work, mud, mosquitos, a lack of ammunition, illness and exhaustion. In a letter to Violet he wrote that he was ‘about to start an all night shift manning the guns’. Exposure to the constant noise of explosions and gunfire caused many servicemen to develop hearing problems and shell shock. During heavy barrages the guns became extremely hot and artillermen had to avoid being burnt, as infections from open wounds could be a serious problem for soldiers.

In their first action on the Somme, the Australians captured the village of Pozières, killing many Germans and taking prisoners. Pozières was razed to the ground in the barrage that followed the Australians’ assault. Although Thomas wrote that he enjoyed seeing German planes being shot down, his letters showed a great deal of sympathy for the German prisoners he saw in a nearby ‘cage’.

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Embroidered postcards from Thomas to Violet, undated.

Image courtesy of Kevin Hughes

This postcard shows the devastation for civilians, with the ruins of the village of Combes in the Somme Valley, France, c. 1916.

Image courtesy of Kevin Hughes
Boomerangs were often shown in postcards received by Australian soldiers before they left to serve. They symbolised hope of a safe return.

Allied soldiers, including Australians, were subjected to anti-German propaganda. This was evident in materials informing soldiers and those on the home front to despise Germans and to boycott German products. During the First World War the St Kilda Football Club temporarily changed its colours so that they would not be the same as those on the German Imperial flag. Even the name of German shepherd dogs was changed to ‘Alsatians’.

After the War

Thomas Hughes was discharged from the AIF in July 1919. His military training and devotion to duty led to him take up a career in the police force. He returned to Middle Head in Sydney, married Maud Randall in 1927 and had a son. Over the generations, the Hughes family’s Chinese ancestry was not spoken about. Later generations were under the impression their ancestors were Welsh and only recently did they become aware of their Chinese heritage.

Did you know?

Repatriation Records

Repatriation records were created for war veterans to document any issues they experienced after returning home. Many soldiers applied for pensions and other assistance due to illnesses suffered as a result of war service or because of wounds received while in the AIF.

Thomas’ repatriation records show he tried for many years to get a pension due to his suffering from heart and thyroid problems. The repatriation authorities decided in June 1956 not to fund his treatment as the illnesses were not considered ‘attributable to war service’.
Thomas William Ah Chow, known as William, was a farmer in Bruthen, Victoria, who tried to enlist early in the war but was rejected for being ‘not substantially of European origin’. Undeterred, he reapplied in June 1917 and wrote on his attestation paper ‘no’ to the question ‘Have you ever been declared unfit for service in His Majesty’s service?’ The recruitment officer must have questioned this statement as it is crossed out and replaced with a pencil note ‘yes, not of sufficiently European appearance’. By this time, restrictions were being relaxed and William’s enlistment was accepted.

William joined the 25th reinforcements for the 5th Battalion AIF. He arrived in France in February 1918 while the battalion was out of the line and it is likely that he took part in the daily training exercises and sports competitions that had been organised that month. By May, the 5th Battalion had moved up to the front and William received his first wound. He was admitted to hospital on 5 May but was able to rejoin his unit after recovering.

In July the 5th Battalion was back in the trenches, sending patrols out into no-man’s-land to locate and destroy enemy posts and take prisoners. William was one of two 5th Battalion men wounded on 8 July, but his injury was not serious and he remained on duty. Three weeks later he was less fortunate. Manning the support trenches behind the front line, he received a serious shoulder wound. William was taken to a hospital in Boulogne before being transferred to England. He never returned to the trenches.

Though his wound was serious, William might have been fortunate to leave the line before the Allied offensive began on 8 August. In the days of fighting that followed, the 5th Battalion had thirty-six men killed in action, three listed as missing and almost 180 wounded. William was still in hospital when the war ended. He arrived back in Australia in March 1919.

Whilst at the No 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield House, William may have enjoyed the performances provided to lift the spirits of recovering soldiers by well-known entertainers of the time. The photograph here shows a singer standing on a table and accompanied by a pianist, surrounded by patients at Harefield.
After the war

William returned to Bruthen, where he drove sheep, worked cattle and eventually assisted in building roads in the area. In 1923 he applied for, and was granted, an allotment of land under the Soldier Settlement Scheme.

William stayed on his block until 1926 but his oat and maize crops did not flourish. He experienced medical problems, including shortness of breath and his shoulder injury, which proved difficult for a farmer.

In 1942 William became a fire-spotter for the forestry commission and built a hut he called ‘Moscow Villa’. In the context of concerns about communism in Australia, officials questioned the name of his hut, but William explained that he was not a communist. The name was an acronym for ‘My Own Summer Cottage Officially Welcomes Visitors – Inside Light Luncheon Available’. William’s playful character is also evident in the fact that he often dressed up in traditional Chinese robes to greet visitors.

William lived at ‘Moscow Villa’ during the summer months, while in winter he returned to his family in Ensay, Victoria. Whenever there was fire danger, he rode his horse up to the fire tower on Mt Nugong and acted as lookout. He worked for the forestry commission for more than twenty years and when no replacement could be found for him, he came out of retirement to continue his duties. William died in 1967 and is buried in Omeo, Victoria. ‘Moscow Villa’ still stands and is a popular camping site. William was fondly remembered by his fellow fire-spotters.

William’s application for a soldier settlement block.
National Archives of Australia

Did you know?

Soldier Settlement Scheme

After the First World War, soldiers were able to apply for a block of land in rural areas on which to develop a farm. This government initiative was designed to assist soldiers after their return to civilian life and provide work opportunities. Some of those who received allotments had been unable to pursue their pre-war occupation because of wounds or illness. Applicants had to prove they had experience on the land and to provide evidence of sufficient money or support from family members to run their farms. Many grant recipients found the land infertile and unproductive and walked off their farms, having run up debts and finding it impossible to make a living. Despite the intention of the Scheme, few veterans found it an initiative to assist with employment in the post-war years.

William would have worn this colour patch on his uniform as a member of the 5th Infantry Battalion, AIF.
RELAWM 13307.069

William (left) stands in the doorway of ‘Moscow Villa’, greeting two bushwalkers, c. 1950.
Image courtesy of Noel Fraser, Norman Endacott, and Athol Hodgson.
In October 1914, at the age of twenty-eight, William Edward ‘Billy’ Sing enlisted as a trooper in the 5th Australian Light Horse Regiment. Billy’s father, John, was a Chinese-born drover from Shanghai who married English-born Mary Ann Pugh, from Staffordshire. While Mary Ann was quite well educated as a trained nurse, John was illiterate and signed their wedding certificate with an ‘X’. As a young boy growing up in Queensland, Billy was taunted for his Chinese background. In his hometown of Clermont, the Anti-Chinese League was very active, having been formed in 1887.

Billy was quick to respond to calls to enlist. His skills as a kangaroo shooter and noted marksman in the Proserpine Rifle Club, and his profession as a horse-driver made him an ideal recruit for a mounted regiment. After enlisting he was sent to Egypt, where he trained with the 5th Australian Light Horse. A formidable sniper, Billy is reported to have shot more than 200 enemy soldiers on Gallipoli and was given the nicknames ‘the Assassin,’ ‘the Murderer’ and ‘crack shot of the Anzacs’.

Did you know?

**Anti-Chinese Leagues**

There were many Anti-Chinese Leagues in the late 1800s in Australia. The key objective was to protect the interests of Anglo-Australians by stopping the immigration of Chinese labourers to Queensland, especially those coming to work on the goldfields.

**The Anti-Chinese Conference**

A conference of delegates from the Anti Chinese Leagues, and other associations interested in the question of Chinese labour in Queensland was held in the council room, Town Hall, last night ... Dr. Bancroft moved, ‘That it is desirable, in the general interests of European occupation of Australia, that Chinese should not be admitted into Queensland or any part of Australia to enter into competition with the inhabitants as labourers or traders’.

Extract from *The Brisbane Courier*, 20 August 1887, page 5

The power and influence of Anti-Chinese Leagues tended to fall away once the gold rush declined and populations dispersed.
As a sniper, Billy experienced a great deal of physical and psychological pressure. Sitting still for hours at a time led to his developing a number of conditions, including rheumatism. Billy was wounded several times and suffered the painful build-up of scar tissue on old injuries.

Billy was known for being an excellent sniper, as this letter from an officer demonstrates:

There is a champion sniper in the 5th Regiment called Sing. He is a half-bred Chinaman and has shot 119 Turks since we have been here. He spends all day and every day in a sniping position with a telescope and rifle and if they show their heads at all, he has them. He says - 'the silly fellows will put their heads up'.

Letter home from Brigadier General Ryrie, Commanding Officer, 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade, September 1915.
Dear Madam

I now beg to advise you that information has been received to the effect that No 355 Private W. E. Sing D. C. M. was admitted to the 1st Southern General Hospital Birmingham England 22/3/17, suffering from gunshot wound to left leg.

His postal address will therefore be:-
No 355 Private W. E. Sing D. C. M.
31st Battalion,
Australian Imperial Force,
A  B  R  O  A  D.

Any further reports received will be promptly transmitted.

Yours Faithfully,

J. M. Lean
Major.
Officer i/c Base Records.

Mrs Sing,
Post Office
Clermont    Q

As losses at Gallipoli rose, the Australian Light Horsemen were called in as reinforcements. Billy arrived at Gallipoli on 18 May 1915. The rugged landscape created ideal spots for him to set up what was known as a ‘sniper’s nest’, a place from which he could shoot while remaining hidden.

After being wounded Billy was evacuated from Gallipoli and sent to a military hospital on Malta to recuperate. But the war was not yet over for him, as he was transferred to the 31st Battalion and sent to the Western Front. He was fortunate to still be recovering from his wounds when his battalion went into action at Fromelles. More than 5,500 Australians were killed or wounded there. When Billy returned to the front he suffered further wounds and was gassed. At the end of July 1918 he was repatriated to Australia.

A picture of Billy taken in 1918 shows a young man with a cheeky grin. Like many other soldiers, his time in combat both changed and damaged him. There are many different accounts of Billy’s personality. Fellow soldiers admired his skill as a soldier but also described him as cold and emotionless while shooting Turkish soldiers. In France it was documented that he swore at German soldiers while firing on them. War service did have an impact on Billy; in a letter he wrote to a friend while serving in France, he expressed his sadness at the vast number of soldiers ‘lying half-buried in no-man’s-land’.

Billy was Mentioned in Dispatches by General Sir Ian Hamilton, a senior British officer, for his bravery and actions at Gallipoli. He was also awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in January 1916. An extract from the London Gazette stated that he was awarded the medal for:

...conspicuous gallantry from May to September 1915 at Anzac as a sniper. His courage and skill were most marked and he was responsible for a very large number of casualties among the enemy, no risk being too great for him to take.

A note in his service record, dated 4 January 1917, states that he was among the men entitled to wear the letter ‘A’ over their battalion colour patch. This stood for ‘Anzac’ and was given to all who served at Gallipoli. In 1918 Billy received the highest foreign commendation known to be awarded to any of the Chinese Anzacs: the Belgian Croix de Guerre. This medal was awarded by the Belgian Government in recognition of soldiers who served with distinction.
On 19 June 1917, while still on active duty, Billy married a waitress, Elizabeth Stewart, in Edinburgh, Scotland. The wedding appears to have taken place at ‘Claymore’, a boarding house in Edinburgh. The marriage was not a success and it is not clear whether Elizabeth ever joined him in Australia.

After the war

Billy returned to Australia on 20 September 1918, only a few months before the end of the war. Like many veterans, he struggled to readjust to life in peacetime Australia. On his return, he was given a hero’s welcome by his home town of Proserpine. According to an article in the Urana Independent and Clear Hills Standard, Billy was ‘presented by his many friends with a purse of sovereigns and an illuminated address’. He applied for, and was granted, a Soldier Settlement block outside Clermont in 1919. He named it ‘Pernois’ after a rest camp in France, built a rough homestead on it and became a sheep farmer. The quality of the land was poor and, like many other soldier settlers, Billy walked off the land. Later he worked as a labourer and tried his hand at gold mining. In 1931 he made a modest gold strike, but did not use the money wisely. It is possible that Billy’s itinerant and rather solitary lifestyle was caused by Post-Traumatic Stress. Later in life he moved to Brisbane, where he lived alone in a boarding house. Billy died in relative poverty and obscurity. At the time of his death it is believed he had only five shillings to his name.

In historical accounts of the First World War, Billy is referred to first and foremost as a sniper. After his death a plaque was affixed to the boarding house where he spent his final years. In 1994 community members paid to have a bronze memorial erected over his grave. In 1995 a bronze statue of Billy was erected in Clermont. Unlike the heroic stance of most military memorials, the statue shows Billy poised in action, hidden behind a sandbag with his gun at the ready.
### Glossary

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<th>Term</th>
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<td>Ancestry</td>
<td>Ethnic descent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anglicisation</td>
<td>Making something more English in character or appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Australian</td>
<td>Those born in Australia but of British descent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Chinese League</td>
<td>Groups formed to oppose Chinese immigration to Australia. Several leagues formed during the gold rushes of the 1850s and their influence continued after Federation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>Weapons that fire large-calibre explosive shells over long distances.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attestation papers</td>
<td>The document which volunteers filled in with their personal details to join the AIF. They were then accompanied by service and casualty records for their time of service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Imperial Force (AIF)</td>
<td>The volunteer force raised by the Australian Government to serve overseas in the First World War. It became known as the First Australian Imperial Force during the Second World War, when the second AIF was raised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Light Horse</td>
<td>Soldiers mounted on horseback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Red Cross Missing and Wounded Inquiry Bureau</td>
<td>Founded by Vera Deakin, daughter of the former prime minister Alfred Deakin, in 1915, the bureau allowed friends and family to access information about soldiers who were wounded or killed in action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Natives’ Association (ANA)</td>
<td>A mutual society established in Melbourne in April 1871, encouraging thrift and educational improvement. While not politically aligned, the ANA campaigned for political reform and ‘patriotic’ causes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenue of Honour</td>
<td>Line of trees on either side of a road created as a memorial to those who fought during a war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bronchitis</td>
<td>An inflammation of the bronchial tubes (large and medium-size airways) in the lungs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialect</td>
<td>Form of language specific to a region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysentery</td>
<td>An inflammation of the intestine that causes diarrhoea, fever, abdominal pain and bleeding from the bowel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphysema</td>
<td>Infection of the lungs in which the air sacs become damaged. As the infection progresses the sufferer becomes increasingly short of breath.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freemasons</td>
<td>A social organisation for men providing fellowship and assistance to each other and the local community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Imperial flag</td>
<td>A black, white and red flag adopted by the North German Confederation in 1867.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Restriction Act 1901</td>
<td>Act designed to restrict non-white immigration to Australia, partly through the selective use of a dictation test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenza</td>
<td>An infectious disease caused by a virus that attacks the respiratory tract. The 1918–1919 Spanish influenza pandemic is estimated to have killed between twenty and forty million people around the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jardine’s Eleven</td>
<td>English cricket team led by Douglas Jardine in 1932–33, known for its aggressive and intimidating ‘bodyline’ bowling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messing Corporal</td>
<td>Non-commissioned officer in charge of providing food to troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned in Dispatches</td>
<td>One of the oldest British gallantry awards. It originally brought the courageous deeds of soldiers or sailors to the attention of higher command, even the King or Queen. After the First World War, the award was represented by a small oak leaf on the relevant service medal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual Organisation</td>
<td>Society that raises funds through membership in order to profit all members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pacifist
Person opposed to war and violence.

Periscopic Rifle
Rifle adapted so that it can be used to take aim from within a trench without the soldier being exposed.

Post-Traumatic Stress
Condition of persistent mental or emotional stress as a result of psychological shock. Formerly known as shell shock or combat fatigue.

Propaganda
Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view.

Repatriation
The process of bringing a soldier home from war.

Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia
Organisation founded in 1916 to support serving and ex-serving members of the defence force. Now known as the RSL.

Saps
A type of trench.

Sniper
A marksman whose skill is used to engage targets.

Soldier Settlement Scheme
A Government initiative to assist returned soldiers gain grants of land in country areas on which to start a farm and earn a living.

White Australia Policy
Collection of policies aimed at limiting immigration to those of Anglo-Australian heritage. Established around the time of Federation in 1901.

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“If Australia is good enough to live in, it is good enough to fight for. I hope to live in it again after the war.”
Benjamin Moy Ling c. 1917.