

AUSTRALIANS IN WAR

As a child I grew up in the post Second World War period of the early “50”s. My parents were somewhat poor. My father was a guardsman on the coal trains and my mother was contained within the boundaries of home duties. I often saw her empty the contents of her purse on the bed quilt and separate the coins into piles. Each pile represented some future necessary purchase. Every now and then there was a little surplus to make a lay-by payment on an article of clothing that had been put in storage in a clothing store. This was my mother’s simple way of budgeting till my father’s next pay day. There were no credit cards in those days and so purchases were usually made when cash was in hand.

People were still feeling the effects of the shortages of the War. Then there was the loss of so many young men, some parents lost all their sons. Many parents who owned farms were now short-handed; families in cities were also affected as many servicemen who did return were torn in mind and body. As with the nation of France the gene pool of Australian young men had been badly depleted.

My father unlike his older brother had missed the call up as he was a few months under age. He felt he had missed out on something even though many of his friends did not return home. I remember hearing the stories of the great mate ship of the Australian servicemen. Some boasted that they had lied about their age to join the ranks of the brave. Later on some wished they hadn’t signed up when lying on the ground mortally wounded they cried for the comfort of their mothers.

Every year on 25th of April (ANZAC DAY) at dawn hundreds gather at a local cenotaph and stand before the monument to remember the fallen. In my twenties I joined some of the old diggers who gathered every year. My father-in-law who served as a warrant officer in W.W.II gave his support every year at the dawn services. As the aging bugler sounded the call to those who had made the effort to get out of bed at 4-00am the unified gathering seemed to come to attention in a matter of fact manner as the service that honored the fallen continued like clockwork. I remember those famous lines reiterated year after year,

“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning We will remember them”

These words for many were so meaningful; for me I felt loss as I saw the insanity of war. Many standing by me as the sun came up gave honor to the bravery of the fallen long ago. Many of these men like my father-in-law were members of the RSL; “Returned Soldiers League”. Today there are many of these RSL clubs. The RSL was formed in June 1916 by troops returning from WWI with the purpose of preserving the spirit of

mate ship formed amidst the slaughter and horror of battle, to honor the memory of the fallen and to help each other whenever required. The influence of the League came from its founding days where rituals for ANZAC Day dawn services, marches and Remembrance Day commemorations were penned. There were many benefits for paid up members of the RSL. The RSL pushed for veterans' benefits, sometimes entering political debate so that RSL members could be compensated with better aged pensions and entitlements.

Many veterans from the Vietnam War found the RSL, dominated by the ranks of World War II veterans, an unwelcoming environment, and chose not to participate. However, over the past 20 years Vietnam Vets have become more actively involved. This may have been reflective of the changing status of Vietnam veterans, who were mauled by social attitudes in the 1970s and 80s. As fewer old guard World War 2 veterans stepped down (the youngest survivors are in their 90's), this meant that the younger Vietnam veterans who are now 70 years old are now included wholeheartedly.

Nevertheless, the focus of the RSL is above all on the welfare of Australian men and women who have and are serving in the armed forces. It has advocated for veterans entitlements, the protection of former battlefields and the rights of serving soldiers, sailors and airmen. The RSL also ensures that those who have served the country are commemorated for their service by providing funeral information to those who have served with the deceased and handing out individual red poppy flowers at the funeral to ensure that the deceased service to their country is acknowledged.

As a child my mother took me to the ANZAC DAY March in Sydney.

ANZAC is the acronym, the initial letters of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. This was the formation of Australian and New Zealand troops in Egypt who were grouped together (ANZAC) before the landing on the beaches of Gallipoli on 25th of April 1915.

Every year Australians celebrate ANZAC DAY with a public holiday. Anzac Day is as sacred as Christmas Day.

I witnessed hundreds of returned soldiers marching. This parade of returned soldiers marched every year for some hours. It was a tradition and a good day's outing; everyone seemed to enjoy watching their heroes marching the streets of the CBD. It was quite a grand parade as thousands of onlookers like me stood on the each side of the street to cheer a particular battalion or company. At the close of the march many of the fortunate met at pubs to reminisce their glory days of service; their friendship rekindled over a glass of ale. Even though the last returned soldier of the 1914-18 war has now passed away, still this yearly tradition lingers as though the flame of remembrance refuses to go out. Just a few days ago was the 100th year of the Gallipoli slaughter where Australian

and New Zealand infantry were given the task of climbing the rugged landscape to take Turkish ground. The blockbuster movie “Gallipoli” managed to show the futility of this campaign as many young men were foolishly sacrificed by impatient senior officers.

When I was ten years of age my father built a “lowboy” wardrobe in our bedroom. He had just purchased 18 volumes of books published by the Australian War Museum in Canberra. These books catalogued many of battles of the 1st and 2nd World Wars, most of which I had little knowledge. As there was no bookcase in the house he placed these books on top of the lowboy standing between heavy timber book ends. For some reason my father gave his permission to read the books if I so desired. They were of special interest to me for they had many stories of battles with photographs and drawings of tanks, ships, aircraft and guns. There were many biographies of many Australian military heroes written in these books. They seemed to be like classic books, unlike any I had seen before. I knew my father had paid a lot of money for them, so care in the reading was essential. They were much better than some of my other classic books by Robert Louis Stevenson. Stephenson was a very descriptive writer and as far as novels go one of my favorite authors. I still remember the first few pages of his 1883 work *Treasure Island* which tells the story of Jim Hawkin’s boyhood adventures including his personal quest for buried treasure. Then of course there are the unusual characters like Billy, a wild seaman who comes to stay at Jim’s father’s inn bringing with him a large sea chest. He frightens the locals by getting raucously drunk and on page eleven (my copy), but actually written on page one of chapter one “The Old Buccaneer”, he sings the old sea song:

“Fifteen men on the dead man’s chest – Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!”

Yes, I was very impressed with the content of page one and happily read more of my book *Treasure Island*. I did not need the usual encouragement of my grandmother, who gave me the book. I wasn’t sure if the dead man’s chest related to a man’s chest or the luggage chest he carried with him into the inn.

But the war books on the lowboy took my interest more than any other. I still have eleven of the eighteen. One is “Stand Easy” 1945. The first 3 books also written about the Australian Military Forces were “Soldiering On” 1942, “Khaki and Green” 1943, “Jungle Warfare” 1944.

I also have in my library “As You Were” 1946. This was a separate volume written like a year book. They also published 1947, 1948 and 1949 of the same title. I can only

guess with all the testimonials coming after the war, the War memorial trust wanted to honor as many as possible. These books mention the “glories of the past” – inclusive of travel, adventures, good comradeship in service and memories of the involvement of Australians in the various campaigns. I will mention more about these two books later.

Darwin Bombing

After the fall of Singapore in February 1942, the focus of the Pacific War moved further east. Japanese forces invaded Timor north of Australia on 20 February 1942 the Japanese bombed Darwin the day before hoping to disrupt future supply lines. The attack was also intended to lower Australian morale.

The raid, which involved 54 land-based bombers and 188 aircraft launched from carriers in the Timor Sea, left 243 people dead, up to 400 wounded, and most of the city’s civilian and military infrastructure destroyed. Many residents feared that this was the precursor to an invasion and began streaming out of the city. Eventually half the population fled. The Japanese did not invade Australia, but they did bomb Darwin, our most northern city another 63 times during the war as well as other towns in northern Australia.

Kokoda track campaign

In July 1942, Japanese forces landed on the northern coast of Papua. Their objective was to make their way overland along the Kokoda track and capture Port Moresby on the southern coast. This would give them control of Papua, and a base from which to attack the Australian mainland and shipping in the Pacific.

The Kokoda track or trail was just that, a track and nothing more. The 96 kilometres (60 miles) treacherous trail of dense jungle was foot trodden by local tribes over mountains and through rivers. Much of it can only be travelled on foot, which meant that all supplies and heavy equipment had to be carried. The track was made even more treacherous during tropical rains. Some rivers had large trees spanning from bank to bank.

The Kokoda action lasted until November 1942 and is remembered by the troops as one of the most difficult operations by Australians in World War II.

At first, the Japanese attack was successful. Despite winning some hard-fought battles, Australian troops vastly outnumbered by the Japanese were forced to retreat towards Port Moresby. Supplies ran short and tropical diseases such as *malaria* weakened the fighting ability of the men. There were few stretchers to carry the wounded, and even badly wounded men were forced to walk. The indigenous Papuan population had suffered badly at the hands of the Japanese, and many were determined to stay loyal to the Australian

forces. The locals cared for the retreating wounded Australian soldiers, who nicknamed them 'fuzzy-wuzzy angels'.

The Kokoda operations did not go smoothly or to plan. The Commander of the Allied Forces in the Pacific was the American General Douglas MacArthur who was based in Melbourne, Australia. A few days after General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Melbourne on **21 March 1942**, he established his Headquarters for the US Army Forces in a large building at 401 - 403 Collins Street, Melbourne.

I quote the reason for MacArthur's new command, "On 22 February 1942, President Roosevelt reluctantly ordered General Douglas MacArthur to abandon his hard-pressed army in the Philippines and assume the office of Supreme Commander, South West Pacific Area (SWPA) with headquarters in Australia. Roosevelt believed that General MacArthur had personally compromised the defense of the Philippines through serious errors of military judgment, but MacArthur had promoted an image of himself in the United States as a hero and brilliant general, and Roosevelt came under enormous public pressure to save MacArthur and give him a new command. MacArthur ordered his starving and desperate troops to fight on to the end, and gave them false hope of survival with a cruel lie that substantial military relief would soon arrive from the United States".

MacArthur criticized the Australian forces for retreating along the Kokoda Track, and the commanders who were unable to stop the Japanese were quickly replaced. The commander of the Australian forces, General Sir Thomas Blamey, was unpopular with his men. On one occasion, he accused his own soldiers of 'running like rabbits' after an unsuccessful battle. What is not told in the history books was that all our crack commandoes and experienced infantry men were overseas fighting with other coalition forces in Europe and Africa. Many of the pilots were in England flying Spitfires, Hurricanes or Lancaster bombers. The troops in Papua on the Kokoda trail were mainly volunteers with no jungle warfare training with little or no equipment. Even the stretchers were made from rough cut poles and blankets. It was certainly good on-the-job training. The track stretched from Buna to Port Moresby with the village of Kokoda about half way between. For more than four weeks this campaign was waged in extreme mountainous conditions where even donkeys found it difficult going. Imagine an area of 100 miles long concertinaed into ridges rising as high as 7,000 feet and then plummeting to 3,000 feet. Then cover this with dense jungle with entwined vines; if that is not bad enough add numerous rivers and streams. Then because of time restraint dump rotten food and dead bodies on each side of the track. Then pour rain water for hours every day usually about midday and during your sleepless night reducing the track to a yellow mud slide. You wouldn't get better at our fun park "Water World". The track was made worse

by the native bearers who trod the track carrying the wounded on stretchers. I think unless you were there with these soldiers, only then can one experience the true courage of these men.

However, approximately **625 Australians** were killed along the Kokoda Trail and over 1,600 were wounded. Casualties due to tropical sickness exceeded 4,000.

By early September 1942, the Japanese were within 48 kilometers of Port Moresby, and could see the lights of the town. But they were now far from their own supply base on the northern coast, and faced the difficulties of moving supplies and weapons along the narrow, mountainous track. Their men were now suffering from the same hunger and disease that had earlier affected the Australian troops.

At the same time, American forces had occupied the island of Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, east of Papua. They could use the island as a base to attack Japanese shipping. In response, the Japanese command decided to concentrate on Guadalcanal and withdrew their forces from Papua, even though they were within sight of their objective in Port Moresby.

Australian and American troops followed the retreating Japanese along the track, and fought them when they reached their coastal base at Buna. Allied casualties were extremely high. As stated before, more than 600 Australian troops died in fighting throughout the Kokoda operation, and more than 1600 were wounded. Over 4,000 soldiers suffered from tropical diseases. Estimates of the Japanese dead are uncertain, but it is thought as many as 12,500 died, because of the Japanese military tradition of committing suicide rather than surrendering. Like the Australians, it was just as difficult for the Japanese soldier. To give a better view of the conditions of the campaign experienced by the Japanese soldiers I will use the following article written by Steve Bullard.

Superior Private Takahashi Eijuro ceased his foraging as a single gunshot echoed from the jungle behind him. He knew instinctively that his wounded company commander, whom he had half-carried, half-dragged during the last week before an incessant wave of Australian pursuers, had fulfilled his wish to die for the Emperor. Surely Takahashi would be next. With almost the last of their strength, Takahashi and his sergeant used a sword and their bare hands to bury the commander in a shallow grave by the river, before pressing aimlessly on to an unknown fate. Takahashi was attached to the Signals Company of the South Seas Force that, under the command of Lieutenant General Horii Tomitaro, was ordered to capture Port Moresby by the perilous and largely uncharted

overland route through the Owen Stanley Range. The rugged jungle-covered mountains, an increasingly problematic supply situation, the stubborn resilience of the Australian enemy, and the willingness to fight to the last man where no hope of retreat or evacuation remained; all these factors accounted for the lives of more than 12,500 Japanese troops from the time the advance party landed on the north coast of Papua in July 1942 to the annihilation of the force by February the following year. Expectations were initially high among the spirited South Seas Force, which had invaded and occupied Guam and Rabaul with relatively few losses. The Australian enemy was known from wartime propaganda to be a good bushman, an expert horseman and a crack shot, not to mention his genetic predisposition to adventure and murder owing to his convict background! The Australian reliance on material strength on the battlefield, however, was expected to be no match to the spiritual strength of the Japanese soldier. Despite this, the Australians at times won respect for their bravery and their unexpected fighting spirit. At other times, the desire for revenge for constant Allied air attacks or for the death of a comrade left a trail of brutal treatment of those unfortunate Australians left behind or captured. Months of training and drill, trust in one's physical strength and loyalty in one's comrades were insufficient preparation for marching into battle in the mountains of Papua. Motor transport was limited to some coastal areas around Buna. Transport to Kokoda and beyond was by packhorse, villagers procured from Rabaul, and Formosan and Korean labourers. Everything but essential food, ammunition and equipment was soon discarded from the 50-kilogram loads soldiers were expected to carry, including luxuries such as mosquito nets and spare boots. Starvation and disease became the deadliest enemy for the Japanese in Papua. The staple of the Japanese soldier was polished white rice, supplemented with dried bean paste (miso) and soy sauce powder, barley, tinned fish and meat, and sometimes hard-baked biscuits and bread. The Japanese military doctrine of minimum support meant that troops mostly carried and prepared their own food during the campaign. Groups of soldiers would huddle around concealed fires in the evening and pre-dawn darkness – to avoid smoke betraying their position – and cook their daily supply of rice. Local produce, such as taro, potatoes, pumpkin, sugar cane and melon, was available at times early in the campaign, but the Japanese soldiers quickly became weakened and malnourished owing to a reduced diet deficient in essential vitamins and minerals. Evacuation and care of the sick and injured on the trail was stretched to breaking point. In mid-November 1942, the 500-bed Line of Communication Hospital at Giruwa, staffed by 57 medical officers and orderlies, was bursting with more than 2,000 patients. A steady stream of sick and injured arrived from battalion aid stations, even though short-term casualties were simply carried behind forward positions, to enable them to quickly rejoin their units. There were critical shortages of medical supplies, including the anti-malarial quinine and atabrine, and food resupply became more

infrequent the longer the campaign lasted. The men of the South Seas Force are said to have cried “banzai” and shed tears on the high ground past Ioribaiwa while gazing down on the twinkling lights of Port Moresby and the moonlight reflecting on the distant sea. At this point, Private Uehara Tetsunosuke was not alone in believing his superiors’ promises that his stomach would be filled if only he could fight on for another two or three days and reach Port Moresby. It was a bitter betrayal to receive the order to retreat when the prize was, in his mind, so close, and when so many of his comrades had fallen to bring him so far. Hunger, exhaustion, malaria, and the constant press of the enemy during the retreat over the next few months led many to plunge into despair beyond human endurance and to wish to escape the hell their lives had become. With little ammunition, little food, and little hope, they were forced back to their bases on the north coast, all the while scouring the land for food – eating “white pork”, a euphemism for human flesh, became a desperate attempt by some to sustain life. With evacuation to Rabaul even of the sick and injured difficult, and the words of the Emperor to continue their resistance fresh in their minds, the garrison troops at Buna, Gona and Sanananda began a desperate last stand. Known in Japanese as *gyokusai*, a glorious sacrifice for the Emperor, these final battles resulted in many Allied casualties and the deaths of almost all the Japanese defenders. Takahashi and Uehara were among the lucky ones. Not just for returning from the Kokoda campaign alive, but for surviving the times and being able to look back and question, with the insight of the passing years, the reason for their involvement. Survival, however, comes at a price. The faces of their fallen comrades and the memories of their own actions in the face of the enemy will forever privately haunt them in a country where public expression and commemoration of the war is constrained by political and social fetters.

As in most wars there were good men on either side; soldiers fighting under orders of those of a higher rank, each in the struggle to survive another day. In my missionary travels I have met such wholesome men. I have worked with Germans, men and women of God, who had no idea of the Nazi ideal and were greatly saddened what took place during World War II.

In recent years, walking the Kokoda track across the Owen Stanley Range has become popular with Australians who wish to share the hardships of the original soldiers, and to pay tribute to their dedication and their do or die endurance. Today, without the stress of dodging bullets and using professional guides and local porters to help carry food and water, it takes about eight days to walk the Kokoda track. Even under ideal conditions, the walk is more than strenuous and a number of walkers hopeful of finishing the walk

have died in their pursuit. The Kokoda track should only be attempted by those in peak physical fitness.

ARMISTICE DAY (Remembrance Day)

It seems so long ago, yes more than a hundred years. It was celebrated this week in France and was attended by many World Leaders.



Front page of *The New York Times* on Armistice Day, 11 November 1918

The Armistice was signed and yet was not immediately observed. The headlines said, “End of the War”. Oh that this statement was an everlasting fact that would change the attitudes of world leaders for future generations. Unfortunately this was not the case. It is as if mankind is looking for ways to experiment with their new toys of destruction. Australians have partnered with other nations in past conflicts in Europe, Africa, South Pacific, Papua New Guinea, Borneo, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq just to name a few.

THIS SPECIAL ARMISTICE DAY was:-

Observed by	Belgium, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and many other countries
Significance	Commemoration of the signing of the Armistice between the Allied Powers and the Central Powers effectively ending all military operations and hostilities in all theatres and fronts of World War I at Compiègne, France
Date	11 November
Next time	11 November 2019
Frequency	Annual
First time	World's first official observance at Buckingham Palace, London, on 11 November 1919
Related to	Coincide with Remembrance Day and Veterans Day; and related to Remembrance Sunday

Armistice Day is commemorated every year on 11 November to mark the armistice signed between the Allies of World War 1 and Germany at Compiègne, France at 5:45 am, for the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front of World War I, which took effect at eleven o'clock in the morning—the "eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month" of 1918. But, according to Thomas R. Gowenlock, an intelligence officer with the US First Division, shelling from both sides continued for the rest of the day, only ending at nightfall. The armistice initially expired after a period of 36 days. Sadly, a formal peace agreement was only reached when the Treaty of Versailles was signed the following year.

The date is a national holiday in France, and was declared a national holiday in many Allied nations. In some countries Armistice Day coincides with Remembrance Day and Veterans Day, and other public holidays. Armistice Day is not celebrated in Germany, but a German national day of mourning, Volkstrauertag, has been observed on the Sunday closest to 16 November since 1952.

The first Armistice Day was held at Buckingham Palace, commencing with King George V, hosting a "Banquet in Honour of the President of the French Republic" during the evening hours of 10 November 1919. The first official Armistice Day events were subsequently held in the grounds of Buckingham Palace on the morning of 11 November

1919. This would set the trend for a day of Remembrance for decades to come. Similar ceremonies developed in other countries during these periods.

In Australia, the South Australian State Branch of the Returned Sailors & Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia developed during the inter-war period a simple ceremony of silence for departed comrades at 9 p.m., presumably to coincide with the traditional 11:00 a.m. time for Armistice ceremonies taking place in Europe due to the ten to eleven-hour time difference between Eastern Australia and Western Europe. Veterans in New Zealand have used silence to pay homage to departed comrades in general at veteran functions, as the toast of "Fallen" or "Absent Comrades". One can only imagine the work involved in faithfully aligning all the time zones every year.

Other countries also changed the name of their holiday just prior to or after World War II, to honor veterans engaged in more current conflicts. The United States chose All Veterans Day, later shortened to 'Veterans Day', to purposefully honor all military veterans.

In Australia, "LEST WE FORET" is carved on most WAR monuments.

Even though these are fitting words to remind Australians of the folly of wars that have impacted so many families in this nation, yet we know by reading our Bibles that war will be ongoing until Jesus Christ returns and sets up his righteous world government. Only then can there be worldwide peace. Bible scholars are currently preaching these truths to give a future hope to many who have been affected by war.

In reading general Sir Thomas Blamey's Order of the day, on 15th August, 1945 it seems as if he thought we had won an overwhelming victory in all theatres. Here is the content of his speech.

ORDER OF THE DAY

GENERAL SIR THOMAS BLAMEY,

Commander-in-Chief

Advanced LHQ, Borneo,

15th August, 1945.

SURRENDER OF JAPANESE.

The Japanese have surrendered.

Our long and arduous struggle has ended **in complete victory.**

The climax has come at the time when all six Australian Divisions are fighting strenuously, each in its own area, in the far flung battle lines. No divisions amongst the Allies have contributed more to the downfall of our enemies than ours.

Our general officers and our commanders of all grades, our regimental officers and our warrant and non-commissioned officers have led you unflinchingly to victory. **Under their guidance, the troops have been formed into a magnificent army to the pride and glory of Australia.**

We have fought through the burning days and freezing nights of the desert. We have fought through the ooze and sweat of tropical jungles. We have defeated the Italian and the Germans and we would soon have destroyed completely the Japanese before us.

We are now to go to our homes, having done our part in ensuring freedom for all peoples. We will not forget this freedom, for which we have fought so long and successfully, and so let us stand together in future years to ensure that it remains the crowning heritage of Australian people. Above all, we give thanks to the Almighty for His greatest and crowning mercy that marks for all people the total downfall of tyranny.

[Signature: T Blamey]

General

Commander-in-Chief,

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.

The above speech is found on the first page in my book "Stand Easy", compiled in 1945 by the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, A.C.T.

One can only imagine what General Blamey really thought in the privacy of his own home. I am sure he knew how many died in both World Wars.

The First World War was one of the deadliest conflicts in the history of the human race, in which over 16 million people died. The total number of both civilian and military casualties is estimated at around **37 million** people. The war killed almost 7 million civilians and 10 million military personnel. Let's look at some figures of this war.

Casualties of World War I

Country	Total mobilized forces	Killed or died ¹
	Allied Powers:	
Russia	12,000,000	1,700,000
France ²	8,410,000	1,357,800
British Empire	8,904,467	908,371

Russia lost 30% of its military; France 25% and Britain 16%.

Australia was somewhat fortunate; we only lost 61,928 killed and 152,171 wounded or 1.38% of our total population.

Germany had horrendous figures:-

The population at that time was 64,900,000. Soldiers killed in action- 2,050,897. The wounded totally 4,247,143. Civilian deaths were 426,000. The percentage of the population was 3.82%.

A yet Hitler went ahead a second time in World War II invading nations without one thought of what it would cost in military loses.

The casualties suffered by the participants in World War I dwarfed those of previous wars: some 8,500,000 soldiers died as a result of wounds and/or disease. The greatest number of casualties and wounds were inflicted by artillery, followed by small arms, and then by poison gas. The bayonet, which was thought be a decisive weapon by the prewar French Army, actually produced few casualties. War was increasingly mechanized from 1914 and produced casualties even when nothing important was planned. Even on a quiet day on the Western Front, many hundreds of Allied and German soldiers died. The heaviest loss of life for a single day occurred on July 1, 1916, during the Battle of the Somme, when the British Army suffered 57,470 casualties.

Sir Winston Churchill once described the battles of the Somme and Verdun, which were typical of trench warfare in their futile and indiscriminate slaughter, as being waged between double or triple walls of cannons fed by mountains of shells. In an open space surrounded by masses of these guns large numbers of infantry divisions collided. They fought in this dangerous position until battered into a state of uselessness. Then they were replaced by other divisions. So many men were lost in the process and shattered beyond recognition that there is a French monument at Verdun to the 150,000 unlocated dead who are assumed to be buried in the vicinity.

This kind of war made it difficult to prepare accurate casualty lists. There were revolutions in four of the warring countries in 1918, and the attention of the new governments was shifted away from the grim problem of war losses. A completely accurate table of losses may never be compiled. The best available estimates of World War I military casualties are stated beneath.

The following information was taken from US War department.

Armed forces mobilized and casualties in World War I*

*As reported by the U.S. War Department in February 1924. U.S. casualties as amended by the Statistical Services Center, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Nov. 7, 1957.

country	total mobilized forces	killed and died	wounded	prisoners and missing	total casualties	percentage of mobilized forces in casualties
Allied and Associated Powers						
Russia	12,000,000	1,700,000	4,950,000	2,500,000	9,150,000	76.3
British Empire	8,904,467	908,371	2,090,212	191,652	3,190,235	35.8
France	8,410,000	1,357,800	4,266,000	537,000	6,160,800	73.3
Italy	5,615,000	650,000	947,000	600,000	2,197,000	39.1
United States	4,355,000	116,516	204,002	4,500	323,018	8.1
Japan	800,000	300	907	3	1,210	0.2
Romania	750,000	335,706	120,000	80,000	535,706	71.4
Serbia	707,343	45,000	133,148	152,958	331,106	46.8
Belgium	267,000	13,716	44,686	34,659	93,061	34.9
Greece	230,000	5,000	21,000	1,000	27,000	11.7

Portugal	100,000	7,222	13,751	12,318	33,291	33.3
Montenegro	50,000	3,000	10,000	7,000	20,000	40.0
total	42,188,810	5,142,631	12,800,706	4,121,090	22,064,427	52.3

Central Powers

Germany	11,000,000	1,773,700	4,216,058	1,152,800	7,142,558	64.9
Austria-Hungary	7,800,000	1,200,000	3,620,000	2,200,000	7,020,000	90.0
Turkey	2,850,000	325,000	400,000	250,000	975,000	34.2
Bulgaria	1,200,000	87,500	152,390	27,029	266,919	22.2
total	22,850,000	3,386,200	8,388,448	3,629,829	15,404,477	67.4
Grand total	65,038,810	8,528,831	21,189,154	7,750,919	37,468,904	57.5

The Australian losses have not been included here.

There are obvious uncertainties relating to the true number of civilian deaths attributable to the war. It is not possible to record exact figures of fatalities, but it is clear that the displacement of peoples through the back on back campaigns in Europe and in Asia Minor, inclusive of the outbreak of influenza in 1918. History records deaths in large numbers. It has been estimated that the number of civilian deaths attributable to the war was higher than the military casualties, or around 13,000,000. These civilian deaths were largely caused by starvation, exposure, disease, military encounters, and massacres.

The count of casualties in World War II was even worse.

World War II is known to be the deadliest military conflict in history in terms of total casualties. Over 60 million people were killed, which was about 3% of the 1940 world population (est. 2.3 billion).

Of the **993,000 Australians** who served in the armed forces during World War II, 27,073 were killed in action or died, 23,477 were wounded, and 30,560 were taken prisoner of war. Statistics of military wounded are obviously more accurate for the major combatants. World War II fatality statistics vary, with estimates of total deaths ranging from 50 million to more than 80 million. The higher figure of over 80 million includes deaths from war-related disease and famine.

Civilians killed totaled 50 to 55 million, including 19 to 28 million from war-related disease and famine. Military deaths from all campaigns totaled 21 to 25 million, including deaths in captivity of about 5 million prisoners of war. Statistics on the number of military wounded are included where available.

More than half of the total number of casualties is accounted for by the Republic of China and the Soviet Union. The government of the Russian Republic in the 1990s published an estimate of USSR losses at 26.6 million, including 8 to 9 million due to famine and disease. The People's Republic of China as of 2005 estimated the number of Chinese dead at 20 million. The sources for the casualty count of many nations do not use the same methods, and civilian deaths due to starvation and disease have made up a large proportion of the civilian deaths in China and the Soviet Union.

In 2005 the German government listed the war dead of 7,395,000 persons, including Austria and men conscripted from outside of Germany's 1937 borders. The total number of German military dead was estimated at 5.3 million by Rüdiger Overmans of the Military History Research Office (Germany) (2000); this number includes 900,000 men conscripted from outside of Germany's 1937 borders, in Austria, and in east-central Europe.

The number of Polish dead are estimated to number between 5.6 and 5.8 million according to the Institute of National Remembrance (2009). Documentation remains fragmentary, but today scholars of independent Poland believe that 1.8 to 1.9 million Polish civilians (non-Jews) and 3 million Jews were victims of German Occupation policies and the war for a total of approximately 5 million dead."

The Japanese government as of 2005 put the number of Japanese casualties at 3.1 million. Australia although badly depleted by losses in the Second World War campaigns was not as affected as many other nations. Here are the casualty figures.

Military losses were 39,700

Civilian deaths were only 700

The percentage of population was only 0.58% of the 6,968,000 living at that time.

Other nations like Poland did not fare so well with approximately 5.8 million killed, which was 17.2% of their total population.

The Jews were decimated. In 1939, the core Jewish population reached its historical peak of **17 million** (0.8% of the global population). Because of the Holocaust, the number was reduced to **11 million** in 1945. Sadly, more than 1/3 of their people were killed.

The following poem was written in my book AS YOU WERE, 1946. (page 88). They are fitting lines as a close. I'm sure he had a relationship with the creator.

A little humor from an Australian serviceman.

THE SIGNALLER'S REWARD

The signaler knocked at the pearly Gate

His face looked worn and old;

He meekly asked the man of Fate

For admission to the fold.

"What have you done," asked Peter,

"To seek admission here?"

"Oh ! I've worked hard as a signaler

For several weary years."

The Pearly Gate swung open wide

As Peter touched the bell,

"Come in and take your harp," he said,

"You've seen enough of Hell."

THE AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE

The Australian Light Horse was established as the outcome of a debate that took place in military circles in Australia in the 1890's concerning the future of mounted military troops. At that time Australia was known for its sparse population in arid remote communities and farms making it difficult to consider copying well-armed armies on a European model. Most of the Australian states were wracked by drought and depression hence our small so called army was supported by a large contingent of volunteers. To add to their training they were called upon to fight in the Second Boer War in South Africa. While Australian forces fought against the Boers in South Africa, more volunteer Light Horse Regiments were established around Australia.

When war broke out in 1899 between Britain and the Boers of South Africa ("Boer" was Dutch for "farmer") the Australian colonies sent troops to fight in the Imperial cause.

At first Britain was wary of using untried, unprofessional colonial cavalrymen. But she quickly saw that the slouch-hatted Australian "bushmen" were a match for the fast-moving and unconventional mounted commandos of the Boers. Soon even Australian infantry were put on horseback.

The Australians proved themselves to be expert rough-riding horsemen and good shots. Australian Bush life had hardened them to go for long periods with little food and water. They also showed remarkable ability to find their way in strange country and use its features for cover, in both attack and defense.

By the outbreak of World War I, there were 23 light horse regiments within Australia's part-time military force, consisting of 9,000 personnel.

One such Brigade was the 2nd Light Horse Brigade (New South Wales): 5th (New England) and 6th (Hunter River Lancers) Light Horse Regiments which was originally trained near Maitland, about 20 minutes drive from where I currently live. Other Brigades were raised up around the country because many young men were skilled in horse riding if nothing else.

Unlike many infantries the Light horse were like mounted infantry in that they usually fought dismounted, using their horses as transport to the battlefield and as a means of swift disengagement when retreating or retiring. A famous exception to this rule though was the famous charge of the 4th and 12th Light Horse Regiments at Beersheba, on 31 October 1917. In 1918, some light horse regiments were equipped with sabres, enabling them to fight in a conventional cavalry role in the advance on Damascus. However, unlike mounted infantry, the light horse also performed certain cavalry roles, such as scouting and screening, while mounted.

Troopers of the 4th Light Horse Brigade at Beersheeba, 1917

The light horse were organized along cavalry rather than infantry lines. A light horse regiment, although technically equivalent to an infantry battalion in terms of command level, contained only 25 officers and 400 men as opposed to an infantry battalion that consisted of around 1,000 men.



A Light Horse held by the reins by a soldier (Canberra War Memorial)

Many of the descendants of the army horses are still in use today, carrying tourists around the pyramids of Giza in Cairo, and providing transport for local Egyptians.

When a few hundred Australians and some Rhodesians held out successfully against several thousand encircling Boers at Elands River, they were helping create a new and better tradition.

Lord Kitchener who commanded the relieving troops commented, “Only colonials could have held out and survived in such impossible circumstances.”

By 1914, when Australia joined the war against Germany, there were 23 Light Horse regiments of militia volunteers. Many men from these units joined the Light Horse regiments of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).



Initially Australia promised four regiments of Light Horse, 2000 men, to fight in the British cause. By the end of the war, 16 regiments would be in action.

The Light Horse were seen as the “national arm of Australia’s defense” and young men, most from the country, flocked to join. Many brought their own horses and some even brought their dogs. It all seemed like a great adventure.

The recruits took a riding test which varied from place to place. At one camp they had to take a bareback army horse over a water jump and a sod wall. In another, they had to jump a log fence.

Recruits had to pass a very strict medical test before they were accepted.

They were then sworn in and issued with their uniforms – the normal AIF jacket, handsome cord riding breeches, and leather “puttee” laggings bound by a spiral strap. They wore the famous Australian slouch hat and a distinctive leather bandolier that carried 90 rounds of ammunition.

If a man’s horse met army standards, it was bought by the Commonwealth for about £30 (\$60). Many men were given remounts – army horses bought by Commonwealth purchasing officers from graziers and breeders.

These were called “walers” because they were a New South Wales stock horse type – strong, great-hearted animals with the strains of the thoroughbred and semi-draught to give them speed, strength and stamina.

Each horse was branded with the Government broad arrow and initials of the purchasing officer, and an army number on one hoof.

In camp, the horses were tethered by head and heel ropes between long ropes called picket lines.

In front of each horse was placed its saddle and equipment. The men slept close by in bell tents – eight men to a tent, feet to the centre like the spokes of a wheel.

At the start of each day, the light horsemen watered, fed and groomed their horses and cleaned the horse lines before breakfast. Then they did their training. Most were already expert horsemen and riflemen. The rest was drill and mastery of the mounted infantry fighting technique.

The effectiveness of this fighting method had been shown in the Boer War. But some of Britain’s highest ranking officers opposed the technique – perhaps because other high-ranking officers supported it.

Meanwhile, the Light Horse eagerly awaited their chance to fight on the battlefields of

France and Belgium – where cavalymen were already dying in their hundreds, true to the terrible old “death or glory” tradition.

Everything the Light Horse trooper needed for living and fighting had to be carried by him and his horse.

His extra clothing, food and personal possessions were in a canvas haversack carried over the shoulder. Across the other shoulder hung a one-liter water bottle. As well as the 90 rounds of ammunition in his bandolier, he carried ten rounds in the .303 (“three-oh-three”) rifle slung over his shoulder and another 50 rounds in pouches on his belt, which also supported the bayonet and scabbard.

In the first days of the war, even men who had owned horses since early childhood could hardly imagine the bond that would grow between man and horse as each came to depend on the other for their very lives.

A trooper wrote: “We were hoping that in a couple of weeks at the latest, once more mounted, we would canter gaily along the Gallipoli road to Constantinople (capital of Turkey). We were mostly young and optimistic! We were soon to find what a long, long road it was.”

The first of the Light Horse arrived at Gallipoli in May. Anzac Cove, scene of the first infantry landing, was already a bustling little port. Hundreds of men swam in the cove, ignoring the Turkish shells that burst over them.

As the light horsemen clambered to their camping areas up the steep, winding ravine of Shrapnel Gully, Turkish bullets cracked high over their heads. Infantrymen, who were old hands by now, laughed when the newcomers ducked.

Very soon, they too were old hands. They quickly proved themselves to be excellent soldiers and readily adapted to the dreadful living conditions at the Anzac front.

By August, when a huge attack was launched on the Turks, there were ten regiments of Light Horse at Anzac.

The 3rd Brigade – the 8th, 9th and 10th Regiments – was to make a dawn charge across a narrow ridge called The Nek.

Plans went horribly wrong and nine tiers of Turkish trenches packed with riflemen and machine gunners waited for the Australian attack.

The first line of the 8th Light Horse charged and was shot to pieces. Most men ran only a few yards before they fell.

The second line of the 8th went over the top and they too were cut down.

The first line of the 10th Regiment went to their deaths in the same way. The second line waited for the attack to be cancelled. Then, through an error, they too charged.

In three quarters of an hour 234 light horsemen were dead and 138 wounded in a futile action. They had shown remarkable courage and discipline. Never again would these qualities be wasted so tragically.

The Turks struck on the night of 3 August and tried to sneak around the end of the British line. But their move had been anticipated by General Chauvel, commander of the Anzac Mounted Division (three brigades of Light Horse and one of New Zealand mounted riflemen). He had placed the 1st Light Horse Brigade across their path.

Outnumbering the Australians by more than ten to one, the Turks pushed them back. But the light horsemen made fighting withdrawals in classic mounted infantry style. Another Brigade took up the fight at daybreak. Towards sunset, the Australians were so close to their camp that cooks were serving tea straight to men in the firing line.

During the Battle of Romani, Brigadier “Gallop Jack” Royston, one of the great “characters” of the Light Horse, had gone through 14 horses. Once, when Chauvel tried to find Royston, he was told: “He’s wounded and gone to get another horse.”

Observers noted a remarkable thing. As the final charge of fiercely yelling troopers was almost on top of the trenches, the Turks dropped their guns and surrendered. It seemed too late to stop the apparently crazed Australians.

But the light horsemen jumped down into the trenches and shook hands with the startled Turks.

They were delighted not to have to kill the enemy they had learned to respect at Anzac.

The light horsemen who now rode into Palestine along the desert battle paths of Napoleon and the Crusaders and the ancient Romans and Egyptians, were very different from the eager young men who had flocked to the muddy training camps of winter in Australia.

They were quickly developing their own “style” – something very different from their early attempts to imitate British military bearing.

One observer found them “tired-looking” as they moved around “with the slouching gait of the Australian countryman at home”. But when ready for action, he saw the same men show “an almost miraculous note of expectant eagerness”.

They had already proved themselves as formidable infantrymen. The Turks called them “the White Ghurkas” – a reference to their deadly skill with the bayonet.

Now the Arabs called them “The Kings of the Feathers”.

When the Light Horse went to Egypt, Queenslanders, Tasmanians and South Australians wore splendid emu plumes in their hats – actually, small squares of emu hide with the long, brown-tipped white feathers still attached.

The plume had originally been a battle honour of the Queensland Mounted Infantry for their work in the shearers strike of 1891. Now it was adopted by almost all the Light Horse Regiments.

Even when a Regiment did not wear the plume on parade or in battle, the men kept one in their kit and tucked it in the hatband when they went on leave.

It was the proud badge of the light horseman.

Australian troopers seemed almost as much at home in the desert as the Bedouin, the Arab nomads.

Many of the desert Arabs had the reputation of being great thieves – ready to take what they could from those who invaded their lands.

But these same Arabs soon had a saying: “The Kings of the Feathers, they steal your bread”.

Now, in March 1917, as the British launched their attack on the key Turkish fortress town of Gaza, problems of leadership became more obvious.

The attack was delayed by fog and by poor communication between some British officers.

Then, in June, everything changed. A new English Commander-in-Chief arrived – General Sir Edmund Allenby, a big, stubborn, energetic cavalryman who quickly earned the nickname, “The Bull”.

Up to this time, British headquarters had been at the Savoy Hotel in Cairo. “We’re a bit too far from our work here,” Allenby announced. “I’d like to get up closer where I can have a look at the enemy occasionally.”

He proceeded to move everything 240 kilometres nearer the front line. He then inspected everything from cook houses to flying schools, racing from one unit of his army to the next in his Rolls Royce staff car.

Signallers warned of his whirlwind approach by transmitting a cryptic “B.L.” for “Bull Loose”.

The famous poet “Banjo” Paterson was running a Light Horse remount depot. He watched Allenby arrive – “a great, lonely figure of a man, riding silently in front of an obviously terrified staff”.

Allenby had lost his son in the war and witnessed horrible slaughter on the Western Front. He told Paterson: “I am afraid I am becoming very hard to get on with. I want to get this war over and if anything goes wrong I lose my temper.”

In his drive for greater efficiency, Allenby formed all his mounted units into the Desert Mounted Corps under Chauvel.

The Light Horse respected Allenby. And, for his part, Allenby respected the Light Horse. He had commanded a squadron of Australians in the Boer War. He knew what they were capable of; and they were to play a vital role in his plan to break the Turkish line.

Instead of attacking Gaza again, he would strike at the other end of the line, Beersheba.

First, he arranged for a British officer to “lose” some faked papers which made the Turks believe that a new assault on Gaza would be covered by a mock attack on Beersheba.

Then he planned a series of secret night marches in which the British infantry prepared to attack Beersheba from the west and south while the Desert Mounted Corps under Chauvel would sweep out to the waterless east and attack from the desert.

If Beersheba’s famous 17 wells could not be taken in one day, nearly 60,000 men and tens of thousands of animals would be desperately short of water.

The Charge at Beersheba

The attack on Beersheba was launched at dawn on 31 October 1917, and lasted throughout the day.

The British infantry captured most of their objectives. But the Australians and New Zealanders had to make dismounted advances across open ground against two strongly defended hill-forts.

By late afternoon, the two strong points had fallen, but there were still heavily manned trenches protecting the town. Time had almost run out.

Brigadier General Grant of the 4th Light Horse Brigade suggested to Chauvel that two of his regiments, the 4th and 12th, make a mounted charge against these remaining defences.

Such a thing had never been heard of – a mounted charge across three kilometres of open ground against entrenched infantry supported by artillery and machine guns.

But the sun was almost setting and many of the horses had already been without water for nearly 48 hours. Chauvel agreed.

The two regiments formed up behind a ridge and moved off into a classic, three-line charge formation, going from walk-march, to trot, then canter.

The Turks recognized the advancing horsemen as mounted infantry and the order was given, “Wait until they dismount, then open fire”. Field guns were sighted on the cantering lines, ready to fire.

Then suddenly, about two kilometers from the trenches, the light horsemen spurred to a gallop with wild yells, drawing their bayonets and waving them in the dying sunlight.

The Turkish artillery opened fire and shrapnel exploded above the plummeting lines of horsemen. Some were hit, but the Turks couldn’t wind down their guns fast enough and soon the shells were bursting behind the charge.

Two German planes firing machine-guns swooped over the horsemen and dropped bombs. But they exploded between the widely spaced lines. About 1600 meters from the trenches, rifles and machine guns opened fire. Again, some men and horses fell. But the Turkish soldiers were unnerved by the huge mass of light horsemen thundering closer and they forgot to adjust their sights. Their bullets began to whistle harmlessly over the heads of the charging troopers.

The light horsemen jumped the trenches and some leapt to the ground for an ugly hand-to-hand fight with the Turks.

Others galloped through the defenses into the town as demolition charges started to blow up the precious wells and key buildings.

But, within minutes, the German officer in charge of the demolition had been captured by a light horseman. The wells were saved.

By nightfall, Beersheba was in the hands of Allenby’s army. Of the 800 men who rode in the charge, only 31 had been killed. Mounted infantrymen and their superb walers had carried out one of the most successful cavalry charges in history – against what seemed impossible odds.

The fall of Beersheba swung the battle tide against the Turks in Palestine; and changed the history of the Middle East. This victory is believed to be prophesied and documented in the Book of Genesis.

To Jerusalem and Beyond

Now the Turkish line could be broken and, soon after, Gaza was taken. The Turks fell back in a rapid but hard-fought retreat and the Light Horse pushed after them.

In a series of bitter fights and constant searches for water, Chauvel's great mounted army swept northwards across the ancient Philistine Plain – towards Jerusalem.

The British Prime Minister had asked for Jerusalem as “a Christmas present to the nation”. The battle moved into the rocky Judaeen Hills which are crowned by the Holy City.

By now, it was bitterly cold and chill rain swept across bare ridges, making every gully a creek, every road a quagmire.

The Light Horse scrambled into this bleak battleground as infantry, with no shelter but their waterproof sheets, no food but army biscuits and tinned bully beef – and very little of these.

They stayed for five weeks, rain-soaked, frostbitten, half starved.

At Beersheba, the Light Horse had shown themselves to be superb cavalymen. Now, at their own request, nine regiments were armed with swords and rushed through cavalry training. Then they waited, hidden among coastal orange and olive groves, while Allenby – like a brilliant chess player – prepared for his winning move.

Everything told the Turks he was getting ready to attack in the east. Empty camps and long lines of dummy horses were laid out in the Jordan Valley. Infantry marched down into the Valley each day – and marched out again each night. A Jerusalem hotel was taken over and set up as a fake headquarters.

Then, in September 1918, Allenby struck near the coast. He pounded the Turks with an artillery bombardment, broke their line with the infantry, and Chauvel sent his huge mounted force through the gap to sweep around behind the enemy.

The retreating Turks were further battered by aerial attacks. Dazed, bewildered, they streamed down from the Samarian Hills in their thousands.

In three days, 15000 prisoners were taken. Within the fortnight, three complete armies were smashed and there were 75000 prisoners.

“Banjo” Paterson had brought horses up for the great drive. He described how captured Turkish soldiers who hadn't eaten for three days, sat down silently to accept their fate. He commented: “Neither English nor Australian troops had any grudge against the Turks, and the captured ‘Jackos’ were given more food and more cigarettes than they had enjoyed during the whole war”.

The Turkish commander had refused to eat until his troops were fed. Said Paterson: “Even in his worn and shabby uniform he could have walked into any officer’s mess in the world and they would have stood up to make room for him”.

This crippling defeat was centred on the plain of Megiddo – the Biblical Armageddon where a last terrible battle would be fought on the Day of Judgement.

When Allenby was made a Lord, he took as his title Viscount Allenby of Megiddo. He was, literally, the Lord of Armageddon.

Before the Light Horse left for Australia, Allenby wrote a remarkable tribute to them.

It concluded: “The Australian light horseman combines with a splendid physique a restless activity of mind. This mental quality renders him somewhat impatient of rigid and formal discipline, but it confers upon him the gift of adaptability, and this is the secret of much of his success mounted or on foot. In this dual role. The Australian light horseman has proved himself equal to the best. He has earned the gratitude of the Empire and the admiration of the world.”

Eventually, late in 1919, the last of the Light Horse were back in Australia. The regiments broke up. The soldiers returned home to families, their farms or jobs.

The content of this article may appear to be somewhat disjointed. My problem was that there was so much information I could have written a dissertation. Even then I would only just graze over the facts.

My own son Captain Andrew Gregor served in Iraq with the US forces as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot. After two tours he returned home with stress related issues. In saying so, I hope to put some meaning into what is written in my article.

We know that war will not go away until Jesus returns to take his place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Only then will men live in peace.