Chapter 1

Australia at War and Peace

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In 2014, as Australia – along with many other countries – commemorates the centenary of the beginning of World War I, it is worth considering, in this introductory chapter, the kinds of history generated by Australia’s experience in the wars of the 20th century. Apart from the monumental official histories of Australia’s involvement in the World Wars, the conflicts in South East Asia and peacekeeping activities, there have been many scholarly and personal accounts of the experiences of the combatants, whether regimental histories, biographical accounts or books drawing on private (even forgotten) diaries of relatives. The latter part of the 20th century saw a move to record the experiences of previously overlooked parts of Australia’s war history, with studies of nurses, women's
auxiliary forces, and other men and women involved in service defending the homeland. A few, too, recorded the history of the aftermath of war (the ‘cost of war’ as Stephen Garton put it in his 1990 study). More recently, in the 21st century, there have been revisionist studies of Australia’s military record (such as Craig Stockings’ Zombi Myths of Australian Military History and Anzac’s Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military)\(^1\), and the debate about whether or not Australia’s nationhood began at Anzac remains evergreen.

Yet many gaps in the history remain, either warranting initial research, or requiring further studies that build upon this. This volume, focusing on the theme of ‘marginalisation’, has drawn together in one collection six such neglected areas in the following chapters.

While it cannot be argued that the subject of any of these chapters is an entirely new field of research, all have received relatively little attention in the copious literature of Australia’s war experience in the 20th century. The chapters are arranged in roughly chronological order, with the first three discussing individuals or groups who have been marginalised in the literature and the last three examining changing attitudes to commemoration as illustrated in the so-called memory boom resulting from, and feeding into, vast web-related tools and information, the increasing interest in family history research, rising attendance rates at Anzac Day marches, burgeoning military tourism, and a marked increase in the construction of war memorials.

In ‘A charity or a right?’ Repatriation of disabled ex-servicemen in Western Australia, post World War I, Sue Summers examines the troubled repatriation of disabled ex-servicemen in Western Australia, through a case study of Trooper Frank Bolger who served with the 10th Light Horse in Gallipoli for nine months before being discharged as totally incapacitated and unfit for further service. With extensive injuries, Bolger did not have the physical capacity to benefit from the War Service Settlement program in Western Australia and, like hundreds of other ex-servicemen unable to return to ordinary life, he led an unsettled existence in the towns that were once the heart of the Western Australian Goldfields. Unable to undertake regular work, Bolger flossicked for small gains when his health permitted, which drew the attention of the Repatriation Department that was unwilling to accept that his disability was severe or permanent. As a result, his pension was constantly under review, a process that involved an endless round of covert surveillance, investigations, expensive medical appraisals, reductions and suspensions and appeals.

Summers shows that Bolger is typical of many World War I soldiers who were promised much within the rolling recruitment campaigns across Western Australia that drew large numbers of men into the war effort. On their return they were confronted with a downturn of the economy and job shortages compounded by the vagaries and inconsistencies of the Repatriation Scheme in WA. As Bolger pointed out in a letter to the Department of Repatriation in Perth in 1921: “According to the terms I enlisted under in 1914 I don’t see why it [war pension] should be liable to suspension as it is not charity, but a right”. This and other rights – outlined in the rhetoric and enlistment policies of World War I – were all too often disregarded by the Repatriation Office in Perth, and often in contravention of instructions from its Melbourne headquarters. In discussing Bolger and similar cases with a clear focus on the post-World War I repatriation policies and schemes for disabled ex-servicemen in WA, Summers shows how unprepared the authorities were to receive ‘75,000 invalids’ who returned from the war, many of whom were never restored to full health.

Lenore Layman’s chapter, “I was manpowered? The personal impact of labour reservation in World War II”, explores the experience of another marginalised group: men of military age who, working in reserved occupations and essential industries, were barred from enlisting in the armed forces. While official war historians Paul Hasluck (1952, 1970) and Sydney Butlin (1955, 1977) documented the administrative and economic details of manpower policy and its enforcement, the impact of labour reservation on the workers themselves has not found its historical place. In many ways, it was a galling war and an unfair postwar legacy for men who were manpowered. Prevented from enlisting, they could not follow their mates into the armed services as many of them wished (and tried) to do. While exempted from the International Labor Organisation’s definition of forced labour, manpowering created a set of coercive and discriminatory industrial practices with inequitable and often distressing consequences which continued to affect people’s postwar lives.

These men faced a community, which did not fully recognise that they were forced to remain at home. After the war they were not eligible for any of the reconstruction benefits flowing to ex-servicemen. Their vital war work was largely forgotten and they found no place in the ongoing Anzac legend. As Layman observes, “To be manly, let alone heroic, was to be in uniform, women recalled. These powerful wartime attitudes have shaped national remembering”. While their contribution to the war effort was acknowledged by Prime Minister Ben Chifley, it has been neglected in either commemorations or histories of the war. Redress is long overdue. This chapter explores the impact of labour reservation on those who were caught up in this wartime policy and argues for the full integration of reserved workers into histories of the war effort and commemorations of the war.

A similar, even greater stigma attaches to conscientious objectors who were accused of cowardice and of conspiring with the enemy; in peacetime they were despised as being ‘soft’ and ‘unmanly’ because they did not relish military
training. Their sacrifices and heroism went unrecognised by a society wedded to the notion that ‘sacrifice’ and ‘heroism’ necessarily involved active service overseas, fighting wars that were sometimes only marginally strategic for Australia.

In "What kind of democracy is this?" Conscientious objectors to the National Service Schemes, 1950–1972' Bobbie Oliver examines a different kind of sacrifice from that of laying down one's life for one's country—the sacrifice made by young men who went contrary to the tide of popular opinion to make a stand against conscription for military service, and in particular, conscription for active service overseas in the Vietnam War. Historians have often portrayed Australians as a nation eager to go to war, especially on behalf of 'a powerful ally' such as Britain or the United States of America. This perception was gained partly from the thousands who willingly enlisted in both world wars, and the public scorn directed at those who stayed home. Resisters were often cast as 'the other'—aberrant, cowardly, and self-interested—who felt no duty to their country. This chapter discusses individual cases in the resistance to compulsory military training schemes in the 1950s and 1960s and active service in the Vietnam War (1965–72), and explores how, even when the war was no longer popular, resisters still suffered the stigma associated with refusing to enlist in the armed forces, and were regarded as having no duty to their country. It also examines whether those resisters had any appreciable influence upon more recent anti-war protesters.

The concluding chapters discuss commemoration. In 'Women and the making of Anzac Day,' Robyn Mayes and Graham Seal discuss the marginalisation of women in the shaping of this national day, and the lack of scholarly work on the involvement of women in Anzac Day commemoration as it has evolved into its current dominant form. The chapter examines the role of women in the ongoing creation of Anzac Day practices and meanings and the closely related representation of women's roles in the media surrounding this yearly event. It does so by drawing on the coverage of Anzac Day in the West Australian newspaper from 1960 to the present.

Mayes and Seal show that, until the later 1970s, women's attendance at dawn services was actually discouraged. While many women accepted their role on the side lines, as spectators, rather than as participants in the Anzac Day march, others deeply resented it, as eloquently expressed in 1963 by the President of AWAS, the Australian Women's Army Service. AWAS members, she said, felt despondent being "permitted to go along" to the march but with "no service identification" and no acknowledgement in the official programme. Despite changes, brought about partly by the protests of Women Against Rape and other groups in the 1980s, the involvement of women still tends to be represented either as complementary to the masculine Anzac ideal and ritual, or as a threat (to not only Anzac Day but to the nation).

In 'Lennos and Gallipoli: Towards redressing a marginalised history,' John Yiannakis shows that, despite the island of Lemnos being just 100 kilometres from the Gallipoli peninsula and having played a crucial role in the eight month Dardanelles campaign, the island is virtually unknown to most Australians. While there is much written about Gallipoli, Lemnos has not been included in this discourse, instead being marginalised so that it is not conceptualised as part of the Gallipoli campaign. What has been recorded and written about Lemnos deals mostly with the establishment and operations of hospitals for the wounded from Gallipoli. Many questions remain unanswered regarding the impact of the British presence on the local population. What social, political, economic and technological effect did the arrival of 20th century technologies have on the people and structures of a remote Greek island that still functioned as a rural subsistence community? What sorts of relationships developed between the locals and the foreigners, notably the Anzacs? Did the Australian presence disrupt or interfere with Lemnian society? The chapter presents a case for research aimed at addressing these questions while highlighting the 'space' Lemnos currently occupies in the literature and imaginings of Gallipoli and its absence from Anzac pilgrimages. Such research would help to re-dress the marginalisation of Lemnos in the history of Gallipoli and World War One, and may assist in establishing it as an integral part of future pilgrimages to Gallipoli.

In the final chapter, 'Forgetting the wars: The fall and rise of war commemoration in Australia,' John Stephens asks, "So what is being 'remembered' by current generations in front of a war memorial and what is being forgotten?" Stephens argues that the increased interest in 'war memory and ceremony' in Australia is part of a global movement. Despite the inevitable exhaustion of memory of the major conflicts of the 20th century through the thinning of those with direct war experience, the numbers attending war commemorations are swelling along with the numbers of war memorials and other spaces dedicated to war remembrance. War commemorations not only mark traditional anniversaries such as Anzac and Remembrance days but also embrace others such as V-J Day, Long Tan Day and the Battle of the Coral Sea to name a few. However, in this burgeoning environment of memory and remembering the role of forgetting appears to be often overlooked.

While commemorative spaces such as war memorials are essentially mnemonic devices whose role is to "block forgetting", the processes of memory cannot exist without forgetfulness. Selective amnesia is part and parcel of any ideological and political process and this understanding can be applied to war commemoration. New memorial spaces and rituals reveal a complex balance between what can be
remembered and forgotten that is different from earlier war remembrance. In examining the role of forgetfulness in current war memory, this chapter argues that the growth in Australian war remembrance and commemorative spaces is as much a product of forgetting as it is of remembering.

Although they focus on diverse areas of Australian war history, all six chapters are interrelated through the theme of marginalisation: disabled soldiers, manpowered (or industrial) conscripts, conscientious objectors, the exclusion of women from official commemoration, the displacement of Lemnos Island from the Anzac legend, and the uneasy interplay of remembering and forgetting in memorialisation as documented by John Stephens.

The Anzac legend, or mythology, as Mayes and Seal detail in their chapter, is interwoven with the national identity—a largely masculinised identity that that has been crafted and honed over time as a key story that Australian people want to tell and hear about themselves. Collectively, our nation honours the 'fallen': the 'active', 'virile' and 'enthusiastic' young men eager to partake in the 'great adventure' of World War I, the 'Sons of the Anzacs' in World War II, and those who 'did their duty' in fighting to combat the perceived communist or terrorist menace in later conflicts. Those who laid down their lives for their country are treated with reverence, immortalised as heroes, celebrated within public commemorations and through the thousands of war memorials constructed throughout Australia, 877 within Western Australia alone.²

Yet within this collective respect and admiration, where does one find ritualised commemorations and memorials dedicated to the 'glorious disabled'; to those who served their country as industrial conscripts, or to the conscientious objectors whose voices disrupted the perceived rightness of war?³ This would have drawn public attention to a very different story of war and of the Australian collective identity—notably the community's overwhelming support for men to volunteer or be conscripted for active service and their equal reluctance to acknowledge women's role in the war effort.

Above: 'The Glorious Dead,' the central epitaph on the 10th Light Horse Regiment War Memorial, Kings Park, Western Australia which lists the names of the 301 Light Horsemen killed in the war (photo courtesy of Sue Summers).
the Allies, yet as both Oliver and Stephens point out Gallipoli was a disaster, a minor engagement of the First World War which continues to overshadow all other conflicts that Australians have engaged in. The Anzac legend, it would seem, is sacrosanct, untouchable, as evidenced by a growing resistance to critical debate by various members of the public, traditional media reportage, and sometimes academic discourse. Those offering reasoned criticism of Anzac as a strategic military failure, or of other aspects of Australian military history, are somehow deemed 'un-Australian', unqualified to comment, and deserving of abuse.¹ In the public imagination far more importance is placed upon the revitalisation of the Anzac Legend than the results of on-going global studies investigating the mental health (depression, post traumatic stress, suicide) and traumatic brain and body injuries of members serving in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.²

This is not to exclude the increasing numbers of Australians who have spoken out against sending expeditionary forces overseas which may suggest that opposition is, if anything, on the rise. This is consistent with Australia’s progression to a multicultural, multi-ethnic nation in which a wider divergence on what does constitute the ‘national interest’ is to be expected. At the same time, expressions of protest are changing. Massive street demonstrations like the Vietnam Moratoriums, as Oliver indicates, appear to be a thing of the past, yet meaning is “constantly in the remaking”³ and it is too early to assume the outcome of changing politics and media coverage, the impact of military tourism and pilgrimages, and the enduring influence of the so-called memory boom.

Another factor we have yet to fully understand is the rapid emergence of digital technologies with their capacity to massively expand the reach of individuals and social networks to reposition existing concepts and memories and to carry their ideas throughout the 21st century. We have yet to see the outcomes, but there is hope for a more representative commemoration of those who served their country in their various capacities, including Anzac pilgrimages, which acknowledge the contribution of all the nations that took part in the conflict, and the role of communities on nearby Greek islands, as argued by Yiannakis.

In marking the Anzac centenary, it is interesting to note how the Western Australian press observed the 21st anniversary of the beginning of the Great War. The *Sunday Times* in its 1935 article, “Twenty-One Years Ago To-day. The War that did not End War”, remarked on the plethora of ex-servicemen still unable to convince the Repatriation Commission that their ill-health was the result of the war: “The figures are a revelation and bring home forcibly the horrors of the great holocaust.”⁴ Seven years earlier, the *Western Argus* - while praising the Commonwealth Government for making provision for soldiers - asked, “How many of us ever stop to think what the Great War has cost us - what it is still costing us?” Nearly a century later, we have yet to acknowledge the shadow side of the Anzac legend. What we prefer to remember is the elevated story of war, underpinned by a selective amnesia that sustains national identity, in particular the endorsement of the majority for men to enlist, the self-serving heroic status that the community has placed upon the ‘glorious dead’ and those who risked their lives for their country, the lack of recognition for those men and women whose war service presented as ordinary, and the arbitrary and often obstructive support for those totally and permanently injured.⁵ This is the underbelly of the legend, the story we prefer not to hear about ourselves.

This book is dedicated to those who fell, those who survived, those who - without recognition - served in various capacities in the war effort, including those who made a stand on the grounds of conscience against participation in war. We honour their lives, their aspirations, and the different challenges and obstructions they faced to resume ‘normal’ life after the war. Through adding a query to the well-known words, ‘Lest We Forget’ the authors are drawing attention to the fact that much has been forgotten or overlooked and are making a case for a more inclusive, open and true-to-life account of Australia’s war service and military history.

Notes


² WA figure sourced from the research of John Stephens, Graham Seal and Julie Lunn, 2013.

³ Other than a generic acknowledgement or commemoration of the ‘men and women’ who served their country, who went to war and lost their lives, or who were ex-prisoners, war memorials specifically dedicated to Australian servicewomen are few and far between. There is the Australian Service Nurses National Memorial and the Australian Service Women’s Memorial both erected in Canberra in 1999. There is also a monument dedicated to Australian Army Nurses who served in the Battle for Australia (1942–43) at Anzac Square, Brisbane, depicting a nurse tenderly assisting a wounded soldier. At present, there are some plaques, but no known monuments for ‘disabled’ soldiers in Australia. The monument of Simpson and his donkey at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne depicts one man’s heroic support of wounded men at Gallipoli, but according to *Monument Australia*, Simpson’s story was utilised as a powerful propaganda tool for enlistment and then quickly forgotten at war’s end (See, http://monumentaustralia.org.au/display/32490-simpson-and-his-donkey). “The American Veterans Disabled for Life War Memorial, the first of its kind in the US, is due for completion in 2014.
Academic and institutional studies abound, yet are given relatively little coverage in the mainstream media. See, for example, the longitudinal Vietnam Veterans Health Study at the Anzac Research Institute and the Australian Vietnam Veterans Family Health Study at the Brain and Mind Research Institute at the University of Sydney, plus the study on Veteran and Military Mental Health at the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health at the University of Melbourne. There is the National Vietnam Veterans’ Readjustment Study at New York University’s Langone Medical Centre and the Armed Forces and Mental Health study conducted at the Mental Health Foundation, UK. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that PTSD afflicts almost 31 per cent of Vietnam veterans; as many as 10 per cent of Gulf War (Desert Storm) veterans, 11 per cent of veterans of the war in Afghanistan, and 20 per cent of Iraqi war veterans (see NIH Medline Plus). On the positive side, as Summers outlines in her chapter, there is vast improvement in public awareness of the existence of post traumatic stress which did not exist as a classification until the Vietnam War. In the early years of the 20th century, however, returned soldiers unable to overcome lasting injuries were too often subject to unsympathetic, unjust, and inexplicable decisions hardened by a pervasive belief that receiving assistance was shameful and that many ex-servicemen were malingerers, hypochondriacs or neurotics who needed to recover their self-respect to become useful members of the community.


“Twenty-One Years Ago To-day, The War that did not End. War. What its Survivors are still suffering in this State,” Sunday Times August 4, 1935.

“What the War has Cost Us. Repatriation Figures. Australia’s Annual Bill,” Western Argus, July 3, 1928.

See Summers’ chapter, ‘A charity or a right? Repatriation of disabled ex-servicemen in Western Australia, post World War I’ for further detail.