



# THE Simpson PRIZE

A COMPETITION FOR  
YEAR 9 AND 10 STUDENTS

2015 Winner  
Tasmania

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When Britain declared war with Germany on the 4th of August 1914, the prime minister of Australia at the time, Joseph Cook said the following day "...When the Empire is at war, so also is Australia". When the Labor Party came to power in September 1914 the new Prime Minister Andrew Fisher said much the same as Joseph Cook "Should the worst happen ...", Australia would "...rally to the Mother Country ... to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling."

In 1914 approximately 97% of Australians were either born in Australasia or the United Kingdom, even those whose families had resided in Australia for several generations often felt strong ties to the "mother country" and were very supportive of Australia entering the war. In Tasmania this support was demonstrated by 2020 young men reporting to recruiting centres and enlisting in the two weeks following the declaration of war.

The majority of men legally old enough to enlist would have been born into British colonies prior to federation in 1901 when the Commonwealth of Australia became an independent dominion of the British Empire. There was no doubt about the relationship to Britain on the Australian Imperial Force enlistment papers that those who intended to join the Australian Military forces completed. Question number three asked "Are you a Natural Born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject". On the surface it would seem that defending the "Mother Country" was the main motivating factor for many of those who enlisted.

Tasmania's size with small, close communities meant everyone knew a soldier and was aware of the harsh conditions that a soldier would have to face. Therefore the loss and sacrifices made by those soldiers impacted deeply on their communities. Two such soldiers were Cyril Nash, a 35 year old wheelwright, and his younger brother George, a 20 year old labourer. Both enlisted on the 16 September 1914. Cyril's grave and that of his mother, Sarah with its memorial to George, can be found in the burial ground of St Matthews Anglican Church in Rokeby, a suburb on Hobart's Eastern Shore. The ravages of time have seen some of the graves deteriorate significantly, none more so than those of George, Sarah and Cyril.

Although their early enlistment hints at a desire to fight for King and country, Cyril and George's reasons for joining the Australian Imperial Forces have been lost in the passage of time. Images from 1914 like the one entitled "AT THE EMPIRE'S CALL" THE STURDY MEMBERS of the Australian Expeditionary Force Marching through Melbourne", which shows troops marching in front of a large crowd of well-wishers and editorials like "A United Empire", The Sydney Morning Herald, Monday, 3 August 1914 support the theory that people enlisted with the intention of defending the "Mother Country".



*In this the gravest crisis that has faced the British people since first they became members of a world-wide Empire there is no doubt of the message which Australia will send... The whole of the people of this continent are united in their determination to support to the utmost limit of their resources the Empire within which they have grown and prospered for so many years...<sup>1</sup>*

While items like these provide a public perception, it is more difficult to ascertain an individual's personal motivation. In the cases of Cyril and George, we do know due to technological advances that Cyril's profession of wheelwright was a dying trade and the number of young, fit labourers like George exceeded demand. We also know that, in Tasmania, the 12 years since Federation had not improved the state's economy in the positive way that had been hoped for. The Federal Government's protective trade policies and the Interstate free trade agreement set the Tasmanian economy back. The timber industry was poorly managed, agriculture faced land exhaustion due to poor farming practices and management and recovery from the potato blight which had been decimating potato crops since 1909 was slow; while on the West Coast mining was in serious decline. <sup>2</sup>

The situation in Tasmania continued to deteriorate after the outbreak of the war as while Federal grants and war contracts saw an improvement for primary industries, the closing of German markets,

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<sup>1</sup> Source 6 AWM: Trove <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article15526917> . Provided by AWM.

<sup>2</sup> Refer Appendices 2&3

delays in imports and the loss of access to overseas loans hit mining and forestry hard. A prolonged drought and devastating bushfires in the summers of 1914-15 compounded the situation.<sup>3</sup>

In 1914 the state of Tasmania had a population of approximately 200,000. Over the course of the war 15,484 Tasmanians enlisted which equates to 37.8% of Tasmanian males aged 18 to 44. About 13,000 served overseas, close to 2,500 of those lost their lives; that is at least one Tasmanian for every day of the war. While some of those enlisting may have been motivated by a feeling of Obligation to King and Country or a desire for adventure, for many it would be to escape unemployment. The unemployment situation was not unique to Tasmania; it was being felt around the country.

*“...things are so bad out here for there is a drought on. We haven’t had any rain for months so I thought I would join the army..”*<sup>4</sup> font

The early enlistment of Cyril and George saw them both land at Gallipoli on the 25 April 1915. On the 9 September Georges “Medical Report on an Invalid” states:

*Landed in Gallipoli on 25 April fighting for 4 months. Broken down with strain. Became nervous had insomnia tremor anorexia”*<sup>5</sup> quote

George was transferred back to Australia later that month, however in March 1916 he returned to the front with the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion where aged 22 he was killed in action at Mouquet Farm between the 3 and 4 September 1916. He is commemorated on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.<sup>6</sup>

Initially, many believed that the war would be a short conflict, but as time proved otherwise enlistment numbers dropped off. Conscription was an issue that caused division in the community. Those who were against conscription were not necessarily against the principle of conscription or against the idea of defending the mother country. While some were opposed to the war in general, the economic situation the war was producing, protection of unionism and protest against the British

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<sup>3</sup> BUSH FIRES  
DAMAGE DONE IN THE HUON.  
BOX MILLS DESTROYED.  
(From Our Huon Reporter.)  
HUONVILLE, October 26.

*“The glaring heat of Saturday provoked a recrudescence of the bush fires of a fortnight ago ..., A considerable extent of bush land between Geeveston and Raminea on the one hand, and between Geeveston and Franklin on the other, has been enveloped in flame...”*

<sup>5</sup> <http://mappingouranzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/334529> Date accessed 30 September 2014

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

treatment of Irish rebels have all been cited as reasons. Conscription was taken twice to referendum; once in October 1916 and again in December 1917 but both times it was narrowly defeated.<sup>7</sup>

George's older brother, Cyril, spent four years and 163 days as a driver in the Army Service Corps both in Gallipoli and France. In 1916 he was promoted to Acting Corporal but was demoted in March 1918 for the "crime" of leaving horses unattended. Although he survived the war he was killed in an industrial accident at the EZ Company Risdon on 24 February 1920.

Can we really accurately determine the extent an individual, their community and their country were motivated to support a war because of their desire to defend the mother country one hundred years after the event? What we can determine today is the commitment of the community to remember and honour the sacrifices made by those who served their country, and the "mother country" regardless of their reasons for doing so.

This is evidenced by what is happening in our communities today. Take for example those deteriorating graves in danger of collapsing at St Mathews Church. Even though there was nothing heroic, notable or outstanding about Cyril and George earlier this year a group of dedicated volunteers including the Howrah Rotary Club set about restoring the graves with a grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund, and in July a commemorative function was held to mark the restoration. There is a real desire to "record...their lives, while retaining the heritage of their 100-year-old memorials". Australians want to keep the memory of their Anzacs alive.

*"Lest we forget"*

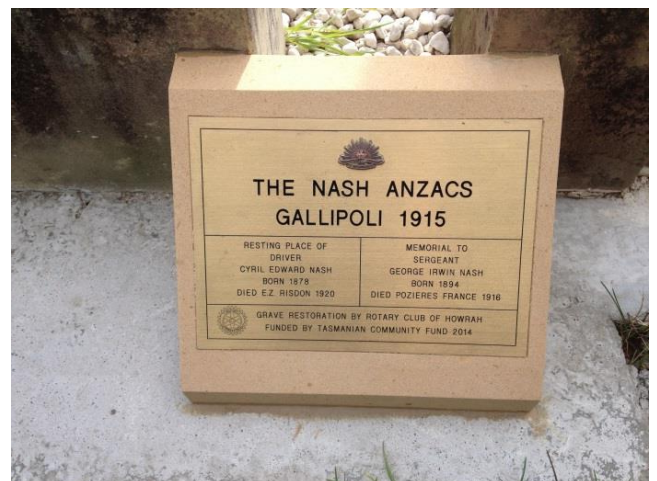
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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/australia\\_world\\_war\\_one.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/australia_world_war_one.htm) Date accessed 20 September 2014.

George Irwin Nash

Service Number 1040

(AWM Private Collection)



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Men of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF) marching past the Town Hall in Melbourne, Victoria, prior to embarking for New Guinea, c. August 1914.' AWM P03067.014

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## APPENDIX 1

*“In this the gravest crisis that has faced the British people since first they became members of a world-wide Empire there is no doubt of the message which Australia will send. Differences between parties or interests have ceased to exist. The whole of the people of this continent are united in their determination to support to the utmost limit of their resources the Empire within which they have grown and prospered for so many years. The sentiment which has prompted this resolution is not one of gratitude or of self-interest alone. We know that our security and our independence depend on the victory of the British arms. We know that if we were to stand aside we could not be certain of our national existence for a year or for a day. But the impulse that determines us in this moment springs from our common citizenship with the people who are exposed to immediate attack. In times of peace we have insisted that our loyalty to the Empire is none the less real because our first duty is to the country in which we live. In a time when all Europe is in arms we shall remember that we fulfil our duty best by insisting that our loyalty shall display itself in a practical form. Two of the self-governing Dominions have already stated definitely the offers they are prepared to make. The Australian people will not be behind their fellow-subjects in Canada and New Zealand. Each of these three peoples will be animated by the conviction that the proof of their unity will not be used for any selfish end. They all believe that the British Empire stands for the progress of civilisation, and for the welfare of humanity throughout the world. Its defeat would be the end of a system of government which has enlisted its most capable servants in the preservation of freedom and in the protection of the weak against the scourges of nature and the rapacity of their fellow-men. Its victory will be a means of securing the peace of the world against any nation that would subjugate the rest of Europe.”*

“A United Empire”, The Sydney Morning Herald, Monday, 3 August 1914

## APPENDIX 2

The Mercury Monday August 9<sup>th</sup> 1909

### IRISH POTATO BLIGHT

### MINISTERIAL ACTION

### REMEDIAL MEASURES SUGGESTED

*As stated on Saturday, the New South Wales Minister of agriculture (Mr. Perry) expressed his intention of at once issuing a proclamation prohibiting the importation of potatoes from Tasmania....The Minister for Agriculture (Hon. Alec. Hean) on Saturday telegraphed to Mr. Perry, asking him to defer issuing any prohibition order against the importation of Tasmanian potatoes until the conference of Ministers of Agriculture had been held in Melbourne.*

*The New South Wales Premier (Mr. Wade) despatched the following reply to the Tasmanian Government yesterday:*

*'I desire to inform you a report has been received from the Queensland Government that Irish blight has been found by their officers in Tasmanian potatoes imported into that State. The Victorian Government entomologist and the director of microbiology in Sydney also report the existence of such disease in Tasmanian potatoes received in Melbourne and Sydney. Under the circumstances, I regret I found it necessary to issue a proclamation under the Vine and Vegetation Diseases Act, 1901, prohibiting the importation, introduction or bringing into this State of any potatoes from Tasmania. The proclamation will be issued in the "Government Gazette" on Wednesday next, taking effect the following morning'*

### APPENDIX 3

The Mercury August 1914

“DISTRESS IN TASMANIA.

MANY MINERS UNEMPLOYED.

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT

RELIEF WORK.

ZEEHAN. August 13.

*A mass meeting of unemployed was held at Renison Bell tonight. Over 60 were present and M Blauer president of the F.M.E.A. presided.*

*The following resolution was taken:-*

*Owing to the closing down of the mines in this district, and the suffering already caused through no labour being required, the meeting respectfully prays the Hon. the Minister of Mines and the Minister of Lands and Works to earnestly consider the advisability of immediately regrading and laying with steel rails the tramway from Renison Bell to the Boulder mine which it is understood, the Government have already contemplated, and which work would in a short time repay the small cost to the State through the public revenue...The suggestion was acted on, and committee appointed to inquire into the probable cost, and report to a meeting on Sunday next. Out of nearly 200 men formerly employed in the district, only 12 are now working ".*

### APPENDIX 4

BUSH FIRES

DAMAGE DONE IN THE HUON.

BOX MILLS DESTROYED.

(From Our Huon Reporter.)

HUONVILLE, October 26.

*“The glaring heat of Saturday provoked a recrudescence of the bush fires of a fortnight ago, and flame and smoke once again crowned the heights around the Huon valley with a lurid aureole. The outbreak, as before, was all round the valley, but nowhere did it approach nearly the main centres of the district. Viewed from Huonville and Franklin, for instance, the spectacle was one of glowing skies in various directions, but all afar off, behind barriers of mountain and hill. A considerable extent of bush land between Geeveston and Raminea on the one hand, and between Geeveston and Franklin on the other, has been enveloped in flame, and in the first-named fire zone the mill at Raminea belonging to Mr. Chesterman has been completely destroyed, together with much timber.”*