



THE Simpson PRIZE

A COMPETITION FOR
YEAR 9 AND 10 STUDENTS

2015 Winner
Queensland

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At the outbreak of World War One (WW1) in August 1914, recruitment offices in Australia were overwhelmed by the numbers of volunteers that responded to the British call to assist in the defence of the 'Mother Country'. Despite the fact that Australia was self-governing, it was still part of the British Empire and so was compelled constitutionally to provide assistance. Initially pledging 20,000 troops, the early rush of enlistees for the First Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.) meant Australia easily met its obligations. (Cryle, 2014) Although a number of historians, like Robert Hillman (2001), have surmised this response was due to a strong sense of loyalty to Britain, this is difficult to verify as: the small number of letters and diaries do not give a representation of the whole; interviews conducted after the war may contain bias; and primary sources from war often involve censorship. As a result, it is necessary to include investigations of community beliefs at the time as well as analysis of available statistics. Through examination of these sources, it can be surmised that to a moderate extent Australians enlisted to defend the 'Mother Country', but to a greater extent they enlisted as a rite of passage to manhood and to improve their lot in life.

Loyalty to Britain and the King drove a considerable portion of the earliest recruits to join the war effort. Although by 1914, Australia had been federated for 13 years, it was still strongly connected to the United Kingdom legally, culturally, economically and through approximately 13.3% of its 4,500,000 citizens being British born. (Hillman, 2001; Australian Defence Force, 2012) Australia had a history of loyally defending the Empire from the Anglo-Maori war of 1860 up to the end of the Boer war in 1902 when 16,175 troops fought alongside the British. (Pedersen, 2007, p. 7) Consequently, most citizens expected the loyal response of Prime Minister Cook when he stated, "... the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war..." (as cited in Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014) At the onset of WW1, it was still the fostered community belief that belonging to the powerful Empire was necessary for protection, particularly from a hostile Japan and the German presence in colonised New Guinea and Nauru. (Lake, Reynolds, McKenna, & Damousi, 2010; Gammage, 2010) Journalists were instrumental in championing this message by calling for loyalty to the Empire so as to preserve freedom and the welfare of humanity. This is evidenced in **Source 6**, *The Sydney Morning Herald* article entitled "A United Empire" from 3 August 1914, just prior to the start of recruiting. It calls for Australia to unify behind the Dominions in defending the British Empire as, "We know that our security and our independence depend on the victory of the British arms." (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1914) Messages such as these and those that told tales of German atrocities, played upon the general community's pride in the Empire and belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. (Gammage, 1970; Carthew, 2002) The historian, L. Robson, who undertook a detailed analysis of the attestation papers of the First A.I.F., concluded that indoctrination in the moral supremacy of the Empire, also assisted through schooling and Imperial Loyalty Leagues, led to the rush of enlistees. (Blair, 1998) The statistics that Robson's research produced also point to an enlistee's background making them likely to want to defend Britain. The 52,561 recruits of 1914 were: young (around 24

years old); white; mostly Australian born; single; urban; Anglican; blue-collar workers; and 98% were of British descent. (Stevenson, 2013; as cited in Blair, 1998, p.55) Along with this, around 15% had served Britain and 16% of Officers were Boer War veterans. (as cited in Blair, 1998, p. 55) The number of recruits that were either British, were descended from Britain, or had served Britain previously would suggest that there was a significant portion that would have been motivated primarily to defend the Empire when they enlisted for WW1. (Australian Government, 2009; Australian Identity, 2012) There are several individual accounts that support this claim such as, Charles Foster who “wanted to uphold the traditions of the British race” and Jack Tarrant who “went for loyalty”. (Pedersen, 2007, p. 16) However, there is also documentation to contradict this sentiment. General Sir Ian Hamilton, who was a British commander in the Gallipoli campaign, wrote to British Prime Minister Asquith in 1914, when discussing recruitment of Australian troops, “Play the tune an Australian army for Australia, and they dance to any extent. Not otherwise. Australia – not Empire – is then the string we must harp on...” (Lake, Reynolds, McKenna, & Damousi, 2010, p. 65) This is possibly the reason the first recruitment posters appealed only to Australian nationalism, with no mention of Britain or the Empire. (See Appendix 1) That some men enlisted in the First A.I.F. due to a desire to defend the Empire is clear, but the extent to which this drove enlistments overall is less certain.

Despite rhetoric of the time calling for defence of British civilisation, it was mainly indoctrination through compulsory military training, education and literature that gave Australians impetus to go to war. Notions of honour, duty, justice, adventure and mateship were advanced in schools and the broader community. This belief is supported by Gammage (1970) who concluded that the introduction in 1911 of compulsory military service, with mandatory cadet training for schoolboys, had instilled these ideals and produced young men primed for combat. Similarly, such motifs were utilised in an article from *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 6 August 1914 which stated, “It is our baptism of fire...the discipline will help us to find ourselves. It will test our manhood and womanhood...” (as cited in Pedersen, 2007, p. 12) Historian Gammage (1970), after studying the First A.I.F. veterans’ letters and diaries concluded that many believed war was a rite of passage and the worthiest test of nations and men. Such chivalrous beliefs had been nurtured through the education system and popular literature of the time. Official historian for the Australian Army, Charles Bean, recalled how he, like most Australians, was “brought up on tales of Crecy and Agincourt, Trafalgar, Waterloo, the Indian mutiny and the Crimean, Afghan, Zulu and other British wars.” (as cited in Thomson, 2013, p. 55) The Queensland 1914 Light Horse recruit, Bob Ellwood, corroborated this when asked why he enlisted. He responded by saying, “...a lover of my country, lover of my family and my culture and standard of living. That influenced me plus, as I say, I may be a little bit brainwashed through my association with this private library of military books and of course I had an adventurous nature.” (Rees, 2011, p. 9) Through literature and education, young men

were groomed to glorify war and develop a false perception that battles would be quick and efficient. (Lake, Reynolds, McKenna, & Damousi, 2010) The photo in **Source 3**, taken circa August 1914, of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force marching past shows rapturous crowds and a grand spectacle. (Australian War Memorial, 1914) Charles Bean believed that early ceremonial parades confirmed his view that recruits were inspired by favourable descriptions of war garnered from novels and similar accounts from Veterans. (Bean, 1941, p. 426) Comments by Geoff McCrae, who enlisted in 1914, embody the romanticism depicted in the photo, “I want the chance to win a Victoria Cross. Besides, I’ve never been to England.” (McMullin, 2012, p. 22) Obligations of duty and mateship had generated an appetite for war and made men more susceptible to pressure from mates and the public to enlist. (Thomson, 2013) Those who met the criteria but chose not to enlist were typically branded ‘shirkers’, ‘traitors’ and ‘pro-German’. (Cryle, 2014) Fear of social isolation from those who had enlisted was common. (Ziino, 1999) Volunteering for the Australian war effort was a logical step for men who had been groomed from boyhood to become soldiers.

Disillusioned and frustrated with life at home, some volunteers enlisted in the hope of making their lives better. In 1914, drought gripped many parts of the country and had significantly increased unemployment. Enlisting for secure employment due to hardships on the land is explained by Robert Antill in an extract from a letter written to his parents in **Source 1**, “We haven’t had any rain for months so I thought I would join the army.” (Antill, 1914) Australian soldiers had the best pay conditions of the war at 5 shillings per day which was equal to an average worker’s wage minus rations and board. (Pedersen, 2007) The war, according to accountant, Murray Aitken of Kalgoorlie, “... was a real God send...men had never been better dressed nor earned so much money in their life.” (Pedersen, 2007, p. 16) Journalists estimated that half of Sydney’s 5,500 unemployed signed up. (Pedersen, 2007) Sid Norris, a 1914 recruit, said, “Well there was no work. I had no money. I never enlisted for any reason for King and Country. That wasn’t in it.” (Thomson, 2013, p. 35) Still others had more personal reasons such as escaping poor domestic situations or proving their affiliations. (Macdougall, 2004) For example, Henry Lanser enlisted to “dispel any doubts of loyalty over Germanic name”. (Blair, 1998, p. 59) Among some volunteers, enlistment was seen as providing an escape from hardship and an opportunity to improve their lot in life.

In 1914, Australians enlisted to a moderate extent to defend the ‘Mother Country’ and to a greater extent as a rite of passage to manhood and to improve their lot in life. Whilst Australia held close ties with Britain and many felt loyalty to the Empire, fighting for her defence primarily motivated those of British birth or those with prior military experience of fighting for the ‘Mother Country’. Australian volunteers were more generally motivated by societal values cultivated from childhood, such as duty and mateship, as well as romantic notions of honour, glory and adventure. Financial security and social advantages offered by enlistment attracted some recruits for whom personal interests were of

immediate concern. Through examination of the historical evidence, the identity of Australian recruits in 1914 can be regarded as distinct from that of only loyal defenders of the 'Mother Country'.

Sources

Source 1

Extract from a letter by Robert Edmund Antill, 1914-1917.

You may think it funny of me turning up such a great job but it was like this: Philpott had only about 3 days work left for us and 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. Well I joined and here I am. Whoever thought that when I left home that I was leaving for a soldier but still there a such a lot of things happening in this world it's no use being surprised, is it...

Private record: AWM 1DRL/0047

Source 3



12,918. "AT THE EMPIRE'S CALL." The Sturdy Members of the Australian Expeditionary Force Marching through Melbourne. Copyright 1914 by Geo. Rose.

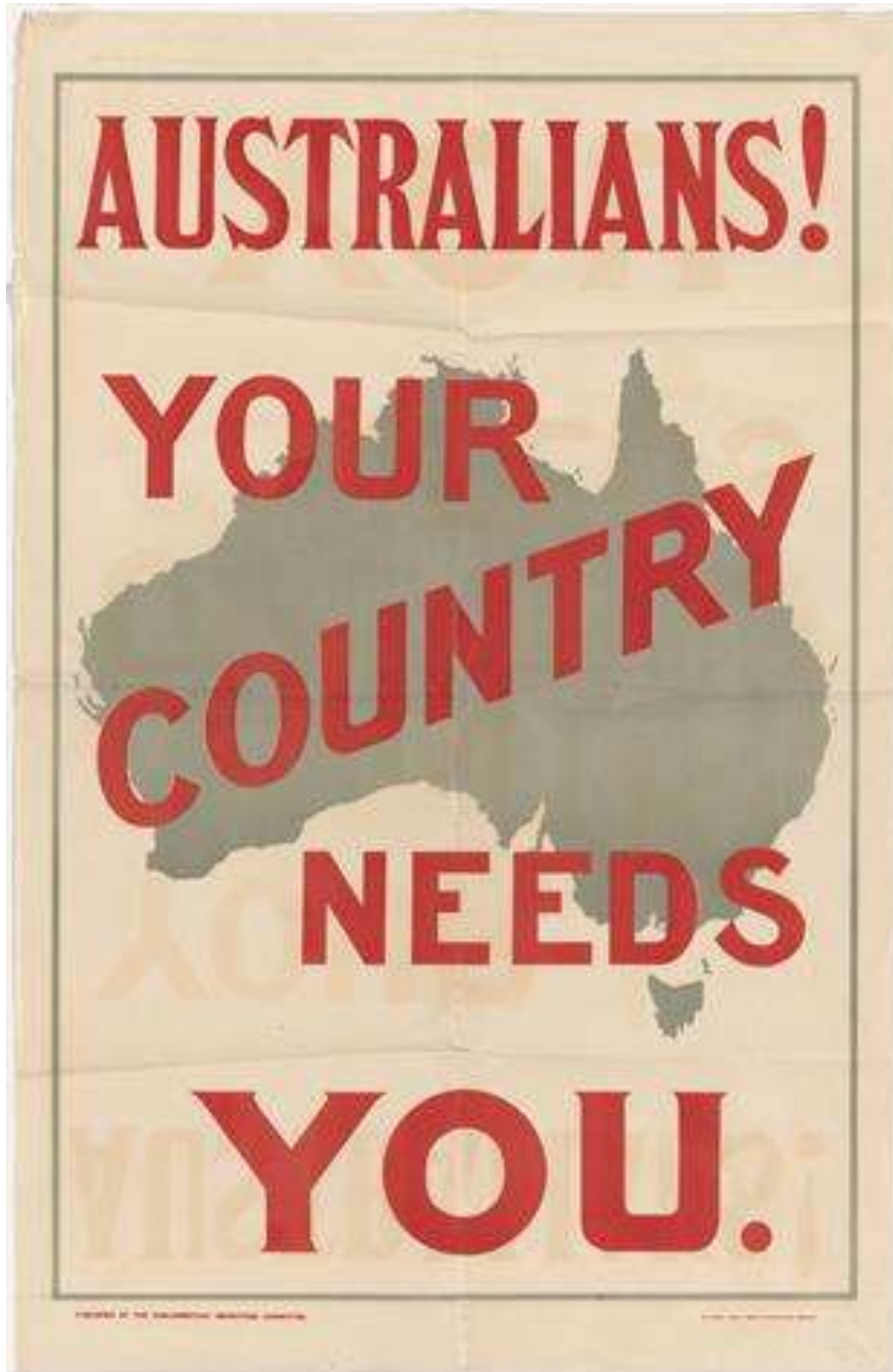
Men of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF) marching past the Town Hall in Melbourne, Victoria, prior to embarking for New Guinea, c. August 1914.' AWM P03067.014

Source 6

“A United Empire”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday, 3 August 1914. *Trove* at the National Library of Australia website: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article15526917>.

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.

Appendix 1



World War 1 recruitment poster circa 1914 (Museum Victoria, 2014)

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