



The  
Simpson  
Prize

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# SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 students

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Tasmania

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“Allied victory brought an end to war, suffering, and challenges for Australia  
and its people.”

To what extent do experiences of 1919 support this view?

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On the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, 1918, Australia and the rest of the world agreed to reinstate global peace. “As soon as the news came out, [people] were singing patriotic songs, going up and down [the streets] with flags.” Recounted Pauline Cockrill from the History Trust of South.<sup>1</sup> Little did Australia know that the allied victory was only the start of another war, challenges and suffering. Demanding full war guilt to Germany, the negotiations conducted by Prime Minister Billy Hughes’s in the Paris Peace Conference and The League of Nations directly fuelled the ascension of Hitler and the Second World War. Challenges from the shortage of ships and money led to long journeys across the sea and strikes across the streets. And the accounts of families, restless veterans and Aboriginal soldiers show that years of silent suffering permeated in Australia. These experiences of 1919, therefore, disprove the statement that “the allied victory brought an end to war, suffering and challenges for Australia” but rather, reveal the opposite was true.

With the allied victory, guns finally fell silent in the Western Front, granting relief to thousands of Australians. The signing of the Armistice in the Spring of 1918 was met by ecstatic locals shaking their hands and throwing their hats in joy; “The war is over!” They iterated incredulously with tears rolling down their cheeks (Source 1). On a global scale, the end of the war marked the beginning of negotiations, and Australia had won the right of representation at the Peace Conference 1919, a turning point in defining Australia’s presence on the international stage.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it is also this very negotiation conducted at the palace of Versailles that blurs the line of what ‘end of war’ means for Australia.

The allied victory was never able to bring an end to war as the later peace negotiations—the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations—barren the chance to remove the roots of war. In the treaty of Versailles, Hughes fuelled significant contribution to the war guilt clause: insisting that Germany should pay for the full cost of the war.<sup>3</sup> As the economist at Versailles, John Maynard Keynes (1919), noted that the harsh war guilt and reparations inflicted on Germany ensured the rise of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Keynes was correct in that the successive economic crisis from the reparations instilled a spirit of revenge in Germans

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<sup>1</sup> ABC News. (2019). *Midnight parties and mock funerals: How we celebrated the first Armistice Day*. [online] Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-11/how-australia-celebrated-the-first-armistice-day-100-years-ago/10454904> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2019].

<sup>2</sup> Burness, P. (2008). *Amiens to the Hindenburg Line*. Canberra: Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, p.18.

<sup>3</sup> portfolio, O. (2019). *The Peace Treaty » Billy Hughes at War | Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House*. [online] [billyhughes.moadoph.gov.au](http://billyhughes.moadoph.gov.au). Available at: [https://billyhughes.moadoph.gov.au/peace\\_treaty](https://billyhughes.moadoph.gov.au/peace_treaty) [Accessed 3 Nov. 2019].

<sup>4</sup> KEYNES, J. (1919). *ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE PEACE*. [S.I.]: SELF.

which Hitler capitalised on for the rise of Fascism and the beginning of World War II. On top of that, other efforts to regain world peace such as the League of Nations was downplayed by Billy Hughes. He mocked, “Give [Woodrow Wilson] the League of Nations and he will give us all the rest. He shall have his toy!”<sup>5</sup> This lack of collective cooperation would lead to the collapse of the League of Nations and the rise of Fascism that would later haunt Australia in the form of World War Two. Thus, although the allied victory brought a physical end to war, Australia’s experiences in 1919 regarding the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations points to an intangible start to another war—in this sense, war never ended, it only disguised itself until 1939.

Regardless, the signing of the armistice meant that Australia was faced with the challenge of returning soldiers back home amidst ship shortages. There were 95,000 Australians in France, 60,000 in Britain,<sup>6</sup> and a further 70 million men and women trying to return to their homeland. But the chronic shortage of shipping from the post-war catastrophe meant that many men had to wait abroad, away from family and home, for their turn to go. In the heart of this agitation, John Monash (1918) questioned:

“[A]t what rate shall we be able to send the men home? That depends on the shipping available, and there will be a heavy demand by all nations, and for all purposes, on all available tonnage. This is an imperial question; in fact, it is an international question...” (Source 2)

The challenges of returning men home were further accentuated as many men had married while there were overseas. Source 3 depicts one them: Sergeant James Matthews who married Caroline Janetta in London before returning back to Australia in 1919. Thousands of other servicemen like Mathews married and even had children overseas; hence, the added task of transporting 12,000 wives and children<sup>7</sup>. Eventually, Australian soldiers from around the world gathered to embark on a year-long journey back home (Source 4); their families boarded on ‘family ships’ (Source 5). But the slow, arduous task in finding transportation will always be remembered as one of many immediate challenges brought by the allied victory.

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<sup>5</sup> Theaustralian.com.au. (2019). *Subscribe to The Australian / Newspaper home delivery, website, iPad, iPhone & Android apps*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/the-great-war/the-great-war-the-price-of-peace/news-story/75ecd1242724a4dae2e9cb91a5f43f9f> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2019].

<sup>6</sup> Burness, P. (2008). *Amiens to the Hindenburg Line*. Canberra: Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, p.18.

<sup>7</sup> Burness, P. (2008). *Amiens to the Hindenburg Line*. Canberra: Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, p.18.

The war also left Australia heavily indebted and facing huge repatriation costs, leaving the Commonwealth government having to redirect their money away from industries and workers. This made 1919 a record year for strikes in Australia, with more than 460 industrial disputes and 6.3 million working days lost<sup>8</sup>; amongst dozens, the most consequential challenge of 1919 was the three-month seamen's strike. When the Arbitration Court awarded an inadequate demand and failed to pay a war bonus previously agreed to, the seamen began to walk out of their jobs<sup>9</sup>: 7000 people stopped work and nearly five million dollars in wages was lost.<sup>10</sup> Soon, food exhausted in communities, families were in destitute, and manufacturing factories that relied heavily on the import of coals shut their doors. Frankly, a single economic difficulty in the freight industry had created far-reaching challenges. Being aware of this, the government faced a bigger challenge of balancing its economic prosperity on a tight budget. All in all, the ripple effects of the seamen's strike come to show that the post-war economic challenges gave hardship not only on national but also industrial and personal levels. Likewise, when exploring the post-war effects on a personal level, one can see that Australia embodied a deep element of suffering.

For bereaved families and friends, the allied victory meant their loved ones were never able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. The grievance and suffering they had to endure are perfectly captured by Vida Lahey's *Rejoicing and remembrance, Armistice Day, London, 1918* (Source 6). The stark contrast Lahey makes in her painting with the right-side depicting women rejoicing and the left mourning illustrates how for families left behind, the signing of the armistice meant that their loved ones were now forever alone in 'alien soil'.<sup>11</sup> This was especially the case for Australia as the dead remained on the battlefields, unlike the United States which facilitated the return of 70% of dead bodies.<sup>12</sup> Many were restless by this fear of unknown as Mrs C. Charstling put it as "not having the remotest idea of the last resting place of Our beloved Eric."<sup>13</sup> The same went for fellow Australian soldiers and officers who left the battlefields with mixed feelings. Army medical officer William

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<sup>8</sup> strike, H. (2019). *History: The 1919 seamen's strike*. [online] The Socialist. Available at: <https://thesocialist.org.au/1919-seamens-strike> [Accessed 4 Nov. 2019].

<sup>9</sup> Anon, (2019). [online] Available at: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/27508383?read-now=1&seq=5#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27508383?read-now=1&seq=5#page_scan_tab_contents) pg. 52) [Accessed 4 Nov. 2019].

<sup>10</sup> Walker, J. (2019). *The first hundred years of strikes in Australia. 1820-1920*. [online] Marxists.org. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/australia/1945/18201920.htm> [Accessed 4 Nov. 2019].

<sup>11</sup> Ziino, B. (2007). *A distant grief*. UWA Publishing, p.59.

<sup>12</sup> ABC News. (2019). *100th anniversary of the military death that shocked Australia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-18/major-general-william-bridges-wwi-death-centenary/6476904> [Accessed 4 Nov. 2019].

<sup>13</sup> Ziino, B. (2007). *A distant grief*. UWA Publishing, p.88.

Crowther typified as he prepared to return to Tasmania: “I look back on 1918 grateful to be writing this and sad to think of old friends and companions of a mile who lie behind in France.” Home called, reunions beckoned, and yet their departure bespoke a severance of ties with fallen soldiers that death itself had not made complete.<sup>14</sup> This lonely reality bestowed much grievance and suffering to bereaved soldiers. Nevertheless, back home, these emotionally wounded soldiers had greater troubles of their own.

The experiences of 1919 show that distressed soldiers were expected to return to normalcy, giving no room for the psychical, psychological and emotional trauma the soldiers endured. This public expectation further exemplified the suffering returned men had to bear: “[The public] were unable or unwilling to comprehend [] the magnitude of the soldiers’ ordeal... They wanted a return to normalcy, and they expected returned men to show a similar desire.” (Source 7) As this bitter reality dawned, soldiers often struggled with silent, insurmountable psychiatric disorders, and in many cases, turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism. As a result, cities saw an upsurge of alcohol-related violence and unemployment. Moreover, this post-war struggle worsened as authorities were less willing to accept such dissonance between real and ideal in repatriation schemes. One example includes the address on *Repatriation and Demoralization* by John Monash (Source 2) which only elaborated on the educational and industrial side of repatriation. Whilst this plan was beneficial, it failed to look after soldiers’ mental well-being. Overall, the allied victory was a fresh start for those back home (public and authorities), but to soldiers, it was a long-awaited end. These differing views created a disconnect in the way of life during 1919s, only causing more suffering for the returned men.

Similarly, the year 1919 was a year of suffering for Aboriginal veterans. At a time when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders weren’t counted as citizens, much of the repatriation scheme was skewed with prejudice and racism towards Aboriginals. Aboriginal advocate Gracelyn Smallwood (2008) issued in the Koori Mail:

“Aboriginal veteran of World War 1 [] was not only denied his pay packet and his pension, but upon his return was given the very same rags he had been wearing the

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<sup>14</sup> Ziino, B. (2007). *A distant grief*. UWA Publishing, p.59.

day he volunteered, and sent back to work on a station, as if the trenches and mud and the fighting never happened.” (Source 8)

The extent of racism against Aboriginals in repatriation was loathsome, not to mention the racial prejudice they had to bear in the process of applying for benefits. For example, in Tasmania, a medical officer recorded an Aboriginal man as a “half-caste [with] very little stamina which is natural with this type of man from the island.”<sup>15</sup> This kind of racial discrimination not only mischaracterised Indigenous men in medical records but also exemplified their suffering as they were denied proper repatriation from the very land they fought for—the very land they called home.

Perhaps the year 1919 was supposed to be a peaceful year: the first time in four years without guns, bloody men or fear. However, the reality was that the allied victory gave birth to more war, challenges and suffering. The Australian delegate’s contribution to later peace negotiations fuelled the Second World War, whilst challenges regarding transportation and the economy complicated war-to-peace transitions. Personal sufferings of bereaved families, returned men and Aboriginal veterans dulled the Australian spirit, and collectively, these hardships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became known as Australia’s ‘grey years’.

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<sup>15</sup> Press-files.anu.edu.au. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p332783/pdf/article09.pdf> [Accessed 4 Nov. 2019].

## Appendix

### Source 1:



#### Source Information:

A crowd in Sydney's Martin Place celebrates the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918

#### Source Reference:

ABC News. (2019). *Armistice Day in Australia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-09/armistice-day-in-australia-1/10478464> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

### Source 2:

“We are faced with the problem of returning to Australia something like 200,000 individuals – comprising fighting men, munitions workers, and dependants (wives and children). The problem is not only how to return these people home to Australia in the most expeditious way, but also how to send them home in a condition – physically, mentally and morally – to take up their duties of citizenship with a minimum of delay, a minimum of difficulty and a minimum of hardship on the community and on the individual ...



To do that we have to begin creating a morale throughout the AIF – a morale which, for want of a better word, I will call the “reconstruction morale” ...

[A]t what rate shall we be able to send the men home? That depends on the shipping available, and there will be a very heavy demand by all nations, and for all purposes, on all available tonnage. That is an Imperial question; in fact, it is an international question. Great Britain must be prepared to take her share of tonnage, and the Shipping Control will allot certain proportions to Australia. Our position is likely to be relieved by the necessity ... of bringing from Australia to England a great amount of wool, wheat and meat ...

We have also to consider the capacity of Australia to absorb the men, for it would be a great disaster to have dumped in Australia 200,000 men who were either without employment themselves, or who would displace from employment those now employed ...

What employment can be made available? We have Education, which will become part of the Demobilization Department, and will embrace:

- Commercial training.
- Preparing men for academic careers.
- University Courses.
- Professional or vocational training.

Then Industrial employment comprising:

- Commercial employment ...
- Scientific employment.
- New apprenticeship ...
- Men who have broken their apprenticeship, or whose term of apprenticeship has been arrested, and who wish to continue in their trade.
- Wage-earning in a man's present trade.
- Learning of new trades: this is of special importance to Australia, who in future intends to open up new industries, such as tin-plate making, ship building ...
- Agricultural and rural industries of many kinds ...
- Commonwealth workshops. The Commonwealth proposes to establish workshops, stores, etc. ...

In conclusion, I ask for the utmost co-operation on the part of every officer and man; for what I am setting out to do is to be attempted in the common interests of ourselves, our men and our country.”

#### **Source Information:**

Address on *Repatriation and demobilization* by John Monash to divisional and brigade commanders on 26 November 1918, pp. 19–20, 24–25, 30.

**Source Reference:**

Awm.gov.au. (2019). *AWM4 30/1/2 PART 1 - November 1918*. [online] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1341638> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

**Source 3:****Source Information:**

Sergeant James Matthews, 7th Battalion, and his British bride, Caroline Janetta (nee Huggett), on their wedding day in London, 13 April 1918. Matthews later returned to Australia with his wife on 25 February 1919.

**Source Reference:**

Memorial, T. (2019). *Wedding portrait of James Reginald Matthews and Caroline Janetta Matthews*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1028878> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

#### **Source 4:**



#### **Source Information:**

General Sir William Birdwood addresses troops assembled in Bray ready to commence their journey to Australia, 8 October 1918. These men were selected from those who had been serving since 1914.

#### **Source Reference:**

Burness, P. (2008). *Amiens to the Hindenburg Line*. Canberra: Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, p.115.

### Source 5:



#### Source Information:

On board a 'family ship', the *Borda*, bound for Australia, December 1919. More than 10,000 Australian soldiers had married in Britain, and many returned accompanied by wives and young children.

#### Source Reference:

Burness, P. (2008). *Amiens to the Hindenburg Line*. Canberra: Dept. of Veterans' Affairs.

## Source 6:



### Source Information:

The painting depicts groups of women mourning and rejoicing at St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square, London, on Armistice Day, 11 November 1918.

### Source Reference:

Memorial, T. (2019). *Rejoicing and remembrance, Armistice Day, London, 1918*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C186262> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

## Source 7:

“Yet before the last veterans reached home the cheers were already dying away, and it soon became clear that the soldiers’ rewards would be less than had been promised during the war. Worse, ‘when I got home in 1919 Ex Diggers were singing for a living in the streets. Men without arms and legs, some in wheelchairs’ [H. Brewer reminiscing in 1967]. Probably that was not common in 1919, but it became more so with time, as stay-at-home Australians, weary of war, recoiling from its horror, and sickened by the number of victims, tried to forget those tragic years as quickly as possible. They could continue in ways and occupations they had not quit, and they easily resumed pleasures and relaxations the war had caused them to abandon. They were unable or unwilling to comprehend either the magnitude of the soldiers’ ordeal, or the force of the memories, good and bad, which separated returned men from others. They wanted a return to normalcy, and they expected returned men to show a similar desire.”

### Source Information:

Bill Gammage, *The broken years: Australian soldiers in the Great War*, Melbourne University Publishing, Victoria, 2010, p. 275.

### Source Reference:

Memorial, T. (2019). *The Simpson Prize 2020 | The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/Simpson2020> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

## Source 8:

“I know of at least one Aboriginal veteran of World War I who was not only denied his pay packet and his pension, but upon his return was given the very same rags he had been wearing the day he volunteered, and sent back to work on a station, as if the trenches and mud and the fighting had never happened.”

### Source Information:

Gracelyn Smallwood, “The injustices of Queensland stolen wages”, in “Your say”, Koori Mail, Issue 424, 23 April 2008, p. 25.

### Source Reference:

Memorial, T. (2019). *The Simpson Prize 2020 | The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/Simpson2020> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

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Ro.uow.edu.au. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3398&context=lhapapers> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2019].

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