

SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 students

2020 Winner
Western Australia
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Simpson Prize 2020 Competition

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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?

11th of November, 1918 marked the end of World War 1 (Source 1). Horns and sirens blared, signalling the ending of a four-year massacre, on the day which would become known as Armistice Day. Australia had succeeded in helping the Allied Powers (Britain, France and Russia) triumph over the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. On this day, representatives from France, Germany and Britain met and signed the Armistice that ended World War 1 (Source 2). This was followed by the Paris Peace Conference (convened 18.1.19) which led to the formulation and historic signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28th, 1919. Officially, the world was no longer at war but unfortunately, these milestones did not bring an end to the suffering and challenges for Australia and its people. Instead, the aftermath of war meant that this was a hollow victory as it signalled the beginning of the deferred costs of war from an individual, national and global perspective.

The immediate task of repatriation of Australian soldiers and their families was left to the command of Major General Sir John Monash. Having led the Australian Army for the entirety of the war, Monash was suitably appointed to the role of the Director-General of Repatriation and Demobilisation. There were 167,000 Australian servicemen overseas, stationed across France, Belgium and the United Kingdom (Source 3). Some men had married whilst away from home, such as Sergeant James Matthews who is pictured with his British bride (Source 4). Together with their children, this totalled up to 200,000 individuals (Source 3). In his address, Monash outlined not only the difficulties of transporting them home in the most expeditious way, but also in ensuring that they were sent home in appropriate physical, mental and moral states. In addition, there was great demand on shipping troops as other allied countries were also implementing their own repatriation systems (Source 5) such that Private A. Golding wrote that "they told us we would be another 12 months in France." (Source 6)

More than 61,000 soldiers died from their war injuries after they returned home. Some of the more serious injuries included loss of limbs, inhaled gas poisoning, complex intestinal injuries and disfigurement from shell blasts (Source 3). Unhygienic and cramped living conditions in the trenches led to diseases such as pneumonia, dysentery and sexually transmitted diseases. Tuberculosis affected an estimated 3,000 returned Australian soldiers (Source 7). Beyond the physical injuries, most soldiers, especially frontline servicemen, experienced psychological trauma such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and "shell shock" symptoms such as delusions and hallucinations. There were very few trained psychologists in Australia in the years after the war, and at first, very few facilities for the mentally ill (Source 8). To add insult to injury, mental health illnesses were poorly understood and perceived as evidence of weakness or cowardice. It wasn't until the 1930s whereby the long term impact was widely recognised, with nearly 13,000 people receiving war pensions based on psychological illness.

Added to the medical burden was the influenza pandemic in 1918 which initially infected many soldiers in Western Europe. The arrival of infected ships resulted in the first known cases on the 9th or 10th of January, 1918 in Melbourne (Source 9). Subsequently, this disease spread and infected up to 2 million people, with an estimated death toll of 15,000. Hospitals were generally overcrowded, enabling the flu to spread quickly. This, combined with the large numbers of injured soldiers, overwhelmed the medical staff and hospital resources. The Defence Department established military hospitals to cope with this enormous demand

on public health. In a photograph supplied by the Australian War Memorial, Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses are depicted wearing protective clothes and masks with a recovering patient outside a flu ward (Source 10).

The financial cost of medical care and welfare benefits reached unprecedented levels. By 1920, the government was providing war pensions for more than 90,000 incapacitated soldiers and 49,000 dependents (Source 3). In determining eligibility for pensions, it was often difficult to prove that a medical condition was a definitive consequence of war as well as to determine the levels of disability and appropriate compensation. There were also disputes as to who were genuine dependents. By 1938, there were 77,000 incapacitated soldiers and 180,000 dependents on pensions, which cost Australia nearly 148 million pounds (Source 11).

1919 saw Australia in recession with record levels of unemployment. There was low demand for unskilled labourers amongst the returned soldiers, especially if they were victims of debilitating injuries. An estimated 3000 men were fitted with artificial limbs (Source 7). In the Repatriation Film supplied by the Australian War Memorial, a confronting stream of war-related amputees is seen entering a building to be fitted with artificial limbs (Source 12). By 1920, the unemployment rate had reached 8% and was rising (Source 13). Some soldiers were fortunate enough to be able to resume their previous jobs but others resented the fact that women had filled their positions in their absence. Disabled servicemen were taught new trades under vocational training schemes. Veterans were also given preferential recruitment to the Commonwealth Public Service. Others were enticed to become farmers, attracted by the government's land and financial assistance (Source 5). Unfortunately, at least half of these aspiring farmers subsequently failed due to inadequate training and understanding of the land, lack of adequate capital, high financial debt and nutrient-poor land (Source 3).

Indigenous Australian veterans suffered distinct hardships post-war. More than 1,000 Indigenous Australians fought in the First World War and over a third of them were killed on the battlefields (Source 14). Many had enlisted with the hope that they would be treated as equals, both in the trenches and post-war, where they envisioned that the gap between races would be bridged (Source 15). While serving in the army, indigenous servicemen were treated the same as white soldiers and everyone received the same pay, food and shelter. However, upon returning home, they were treated with lower status than white Australians and their pay was less due to the Protection Acts. They were refused into bars due to segregation. They were even denied citizenship and the right to vote. They were not entitled to repatriation schemes offering farmland nor vocational training. Incredulously, some were even moved off their native land in order to free up land for other returning soldiers (Source 16). In NSW, only one Aboriginal veteran was granted land (Source 17). In Issue 424 of the Koori Mail, Gracelyn Smallwood wrote that "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 18) This highlights the injustice that indigenous veterans faced in that they were not treated equally when it came to repatriation benefits such as pensions, free medical care and homes to live in.

Returned soldiers faced difficulties with assimilation back into society. Some grew to resent civilians who would "never understand exactly what it was like for those men and women who had served in the war" (Source 6). In Bill Gammage's book, *The broken years: Australian soldiers in the Great War*, he states that "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..." (Source 19). These conflicting sentiments led to them being "unable to comprehend either the magnitude of the soldiers' ordeal, or the force of the memories, good and bad... They wanted a return to normalcy and they expected returned men to show a similar desire." Therefore, both the veterans and the Australian community encountered difficulties with the process of reintegration.

Allied victory may have brought an end to World War 1 in 1918, but it certainly did not bring an end to the suffering and challenges for Australia and its people. For the families of 60,000 Australian soldiers who died and 23,000 who went missing during the war (Source 2), their grief and bereavement was marked by the realisation that their loved ones' contributions had come at a great personal cost. Amongst the returned soldiers, the feeling of victory was non-existent back on Australian soil, once the realities of medical, financial and economic burdens set in. The experiences of 1919 and beyond, however, serve to remind us of the extent of their legacy: lest we forget the bravery, sacrifice and mateship of the Australian soldiers during the war, as well as their courage to rebuild their lives and country in the aftermath of war.

Appendix

Source 1

Editors, H. (2009, October 29). World War I. Retrieved from https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history

By the fall of 1918, the Central Powers were unravelling on all fronts.

Despite the Turkish victory at Gallipoli, later defeats by invading forces and an Arab revolt had combined to destroy the Ottoman economy and devastate its land, and the Turks signed a treaty with the Allies in late October 1918.

Austria-Hungary, dissolving from within due to growing nationalist movements among its diverse population, reached an armistice on November 4. Facing dwindling resources on the battlefield, discontent on the home front and the surrender of its allies, Germany was finally forced to seek an armistice on November 11, 1918, ending World War I.

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Allied leaders would state their desire to build a post-war world that would safeguard itself against future conflicts of such devastating scale.

Some hopeful participants had even begun calling World War I "the War to End All Wars." But the Treaty of Versailles, signed on June 28, 1919, would not achieve that lofty goal.

Source 2

Parkes. (2017, July 31). Shell-shocked: Australia after Armistice. Retrieved from http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/shell-shocked/index.aspx

At 5am Paris time on 11 November 1918, representatives of France, Germany and Britain met in a railway carriage parked in a French forest and signed the Armistice that ended World War I. It followed a difficult year for both sides, in which German military leaders came to believe they could not win the war. The cease-fire came into effect along the entire Western Front six hours later, at 11am.

As the guns fell silent and the news broke, rejoicing erupted from Paris and London to the cities and towns of Australia. The reaction was understandable. After more than four years of bloody conflict and countless casualties, the war was at an end. But for many Australians the effects of World War I remained with them for the rest of their lives.

World War I left behind a vast legacy of sorrow that was felt for generations. The loss of 60,000 Australians meant that scarcely a family in Australia was left untouched. Yet for many, the sadness was deferred or unresolved.

The lack of details about the fate of more than 23,000 missing soldiers delayed the grief for their families. Even into the 1920s, many clung to the slim hope that perhaps a mistake had been made and their son, brother or husband might still be alive and unable to find his way home.

Communities in nearly every Australian city and town erected memorials to honour their war dead. Rolls of honour listing those who served and died were erected in schools and halls. Some communities built memorial drives or avenues of honour.

Official attempts to address collective mourning on a national scale took the form of public commemoration, such as Armistice Day ceremonies, and the building of national monuments in each state and territory.

Source 3

Beaumont, J. (2013). Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War. Sydney: Allen & Unwin

When the war ended, there were 167,000 Australian servicemen overseas: 87,000 in France and Belgium; 63,000 in the United Kingdom (many in hospitals and convalescent homes); and 17000 in Egypt, Syria and other minor theatres.

Source 4

Simpson Prize Source 8: Wedding Portrait of James Reginald Matthews and Caroline Janetta Matthews[Photograph]. Retrieved from https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1028878





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. https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1028878

Simpson Prize Source 2: Monash, J. (1918). Repatriation and Demobilization

"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 ...

Source 6

Australian War Memorial. (n.d.). The Australian War Memorial. Retrieved from https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/1918/victory/returnhome

Despite the war being over, and Australian troops not constituting part of the Allied occupying force in Germany, it was to be a long time before many Australians would return home. The day after the armistice, Private A. Golding wrote:

They told us we would be another 12 months in France.

Repatriation to Australia was organised by Lieutenant General Sir John Monash, on a first come, first go basis.

Thousands of Australian men were killed in France in 1918. The memories of their deaths, however, were to remain forever with those who had witnessed them. Some service personnel, upon returning after the war, were so traumatised by their experiences that they could not talk about them. Hundreds of thousands of men returned to Australia with

permanent injuries- reminders of all they had experienced, and physical reflections of how the war had changed them.

There was also a sense of bitterness that people who had not served in the war would never understand exactly what it was like for those men and women who had.

Source 7

Millen, H. (2012). *Australian veteran's health: WW1*. Retrieved from https://www.mapw.org.au/files/downloads/WW1.pdf

The international nature of the conflict meant that soldiers were exposed to diseases from around the world, including typhus, malaria, dysentery, jaundice, measles, smallpox and mumps. Tuberculosis affected an estimated 3,000 returned soldiers, much of it only becoming apparent in the 1920s, with prolonged debilitating effects both on the soldiers and the wider public, due to its contagious nature. Sexually transmitted disease was widespread, especially among Australian troops.

Source 8

McDonald, M., Brandt, M., & Bluhm, R. (2019, June 03). From shell-shock to PTSD, a century of invisible war trauma. Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/from-shell-shock-to-ptsd-a-century-of-invisible-war-trauma-74911

In the wake of World War I, some veterans returned wounded, but not with obvious physical injuries. Instead, their symptoms were similar to those that had previously been associated with hysterical women – most commonly amnesia, or some kind of paralysis or inability to communicate with no clear physical cause.

English physician Charles Myers, who wrote the first paper on "shell-shock" in 1915, theorized that these symptoms actually did stem from a physical injury. He posited that repetitive exposure to concussive blasts caused brain trauma that resulted in this strange grouping of symptoms. But once put to the test, his hypothesis didn't hold up. There were plenty of veterans who had not been exposed to the concussive blasts of trench warfare, for example, who were still experiencing the symptoms of shell-shock. (And certainly not all veterans who had seen this kind of battle returned with symptoms.)

We now know that what these combat veterans were facing was likely what today we call post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. We are now better able to recognize it, and treatments have certainly advanced, but we still don't have a full understanding of just what PTSD is.

Shell-shock went from being considered a legitimate physical injury to being a sign of weakness, of both the battalion and the soldiers within it. One historian estimates at least 20 percent of men developed shell-shock, though the figures are murky due to physician reluctance at the time to brand veterans with a psychological diagnosis that could affect disability compensation.

Lawson Crescent. (2019, May 31). Influenza pandemic. Retrieved from https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/influenza-pandemic

Maritime quarantine contained the spread of the virus until its virulence lessened, and restricted its eventual introduction into Australia to a single entry point.

The first case of pneumonic influenza appeared in Melbourne, on 9 or 10 January 1919. Early cases were so mild, however, that there was initially confusion about whether the virus was the Spanish flu, or simply a continuation of the seasonal flu virus from the previous winter.

This uncertainty delayed the confirmation of an outbreak from Victorian health authorities, which allowed the infection to spread to New South Wales and South Australia by the end of January 1919. New South Wales was the first state to officially proclaim an outbreak of pneumonic influenza on 27 January 1919, with Victoria following suit the next day.

Tensions in the new Federation surfaced as the other states viewed Victoria's delay in confirming the outbreak as a breach of the November agreement made with the Commonwealth. Soon each state made their own arrangements for handling and containing outbreaks, including organising their own border controls. The Commonwealth temporarily withdrew from the November agreement on 11 February 1919.

The experience of pneumonic influenza varied from place to place. The city of Sydney implemented strict measures in an attempt to limit the spread of the disease. This included closing schools and places of entertainment and mandating the use of masks.

Such measures didn't prevent the spread of the disease, but did manage to slow its movement. Even so, Sydney experienced three waves of outbreaks, with many deaths and many more infections.

In Perth, the combination of the city's relative isolation and effective state border quarantine control ensured that pneumonic influenza didn't appear there until June 1919.

Perth experienced a spike in infections after crowds gathered to celebrate Peace Day on 19 July 1919.

Simpson Prize Source 6: Collection relating to the service of Martha May Priestly (nee Brooks) as a VAD[Photograph]. (c.1919). Retrieved from https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C362415?image=1

Source 6: Photograph



Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses M.M. Brooks and "Smithy" with a recovering soldier outside the flu ward at the Randwick Military Hospital,

1919. https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C362415?image=1

SBS. (2014, March 25). Effects of WW1 lingered long in Australia. Retrieved from https://www.sbs.com.au/news/effects-of-wwi-lingered-long-in-australia

By 1938, only a year before the Second World War commenced, 77,000 incapacitated soldiers and 180,000 dependants remained on pensions that by then had cost Australia nearly 148 million pounds. Their associated medical bills ran to another 8.5 million pounds.

Source 12

Simpson Prize Source 3: Repatriation Department. (c 1918). *Repatriation film* [Motion picture]. Australia.

Source 3: Film



Repatriation film, Repatriation Department, Australia, c. 1918. https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F00139

Source 13

Cameron, K., Lawless, J. & Young, C. (2001). *Investigating Australia's 20th Century History*. (2 ed.). Victoria: Nelson Thomson Learning

Source 14

Brennan, B. (2017, April 25). Anzac Day: Indigenous soldiers thought 'when we got back we'd be treated differently' Retrieved from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-25/anzac-day-indigenous-soldiers-shunned-by-society/8468364

At least 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers served during World War I, and as many as 8,000 may have signed up during World War II.

Source 15

Moremon, J. (n.d). Indigenous Australians at war. Retrieved from https://www.dva.gov.au/i-am/aboriginal-andor-torres-strait-islander/indigenous-australians-war

Probably about a third of the Indigenous soldiers who served overseas were killed in action or died of wounds or disease. Some were sent home with horrible wounds. At least three were captured. Private Douglas Grant, 13th Battalion, suffered the indignity of being separated from his fellow Australian prisoners of war to be studied by German doctors and anthropologists. He was then placed in charge of a camp of black prisoners (probably French colonial or Indian troops) reinforcing the fact that, although a combat soldier, Grant's captors saw him as 'different'.

After the war, Indigenous veterans found that their war service counted for little. Douglas Grant, for example, involved himself in ex-service affairs but was continually frustrated by racism and lack of recognition. Very few Indigenous veterans were granted a soldier settler block. They were not given full citizenship and rights and still had to live under the so-called 'Protection Acts' that imposed strict control over almost every aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life.

Source 16

State Library NSW. (2017, Sep 21) Indigenous Australian Soldiers. Retrieved from https://guides.sl.nsw.gov.au/c.php?g=671848&p=4728776

Initially recruiting officers allowed Indigenous Australians to enlist only if their skin was considered 'white enough' but as the war went on, with casualty rates rising and recruitment numbers dropping, the officers weren't as selective. It's not sure how many Indigenous Australians fought in the war but it is believed to have been around 500-600. They were involved in the majority of the campaigns.

Many enlisted with the hope that fighting for the country would in turn change the way they and other Indigenous Australians were treated – to no longer be discriminated against and to be treated equally. Others enlisted for the same reasons as non-indigenous Australians

such as to see the world while receiving good pay (the pay was the same for Indigenous and non-indigenous soldiers).

In the trenches Indigenous Australians were considered and treated equal but when they returned home, things went back to the way they were before the war. The men were no longer equal to non-indigenous soldiers who they fought side by side with. They continued to be discriminated against, for example, they couldn't apply for land under the soldier settlement schemes or even have a drink with their fellow soldiers at the local.

Source 17

Simpson Prize Source 4: Smallwood, G. (2008, April 23). The injustices of Queensland stolen wages. *Koori Mail*, 25-25.

"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 18

Australian War Memorial. (2017, Aug 24) Retrieved from

https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/indigenous

Only one Indigenous Australian is known to have received land in New South Wales under a "soldier settlement" scheme, despite the fact that much of the best farming land in Aboriginal reserves was confiscated for soldier settlement blocks.

The repression of Indigenous Australians increased between the wars, as protection acts gave government officials greater control over Indigenous Australians. As late as 1928 Indigenous Australians were being massacred in reprisal raids. A considerable Aboriginal political movement in the 1930s achieved little improvement in civil rights.

Source 19

Simpson Prize Source 5: Gammage, B. (2010). *The broken years: Australian soldiers in the Great War*. Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing.

"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 or bad, which separated returned men from others. They wanted a return to normalcy, and they expected returned men to show a similar desire."

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