



The
Simpson
Prize

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SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 students

2020 Winner
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The Simpson Prize 2020

“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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Allied victory in late 1918 brought about the end of a 4-year war and period of suffering for Australia and its people, and the arrival of 1919 brought with it the hope of a new age of peace and prosperity. It can be argued that allied victory ended the challenges faced by Australian soldiers and civilians to some extent, but the experiences of 1919 demonstrate how this new age of peace brought its own difficulties and hardships, even with new schemes and assistance from the government. The transition from war to peace was a difficult one for Australia, due to its inexperience in handling the consequences of such a devastating war. This meant soldiers and civilians alike were unsure how to adapt to the massive economic, social and emotional changes caused by the end of the war. From an individual perspective, allied victory did not bring an end to suffering, with many Australians struggling to cope with economic and employment challenges, as well as the emotional and physical trauma caused by the war.

For many soldiers, the allied victory in 1918 signalled many things, most importantly the return to civilian life. The Australian government in 1918 was well aware that many soldiers would struggle to reassimilate into their old lives and face many economical struggles as many soldiers were not able to return to their old occupations, due to physical and mental afflictions. Immediately following the signing of the Armistice agreement and the official end of World War One, Australian military commander John Monash addressed the divisional and brigade commanders on how best to integrate Australian service men and women back into their civilian lives as efficiently as possible; *"...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 ..."*¹. There was a massive effort from the government to encourage soldiers to enlist at various training schools and factories, especially disabled or injured veterans who were unable to return to work². This effort by the Australian government shows their aim to address the suffering of returned soldiers and support their return to civilian life, but individual experience shows us that despite this, the suffering of soldiers did not end with the 1918 Armistice.

Despite the government's repatriation scheme and attempts to end the suffering of Australian soldiers, they still experienced emotional hardship upon returning from the war. As this was the first major war Australia had been involved in, the country did not know how to regain its footing after four years of war, nor how to treat soldiers when they returned home. Soldiers did not know how to adjust to civilian life after experiencing the horrors of war, and were not given the hero's treatment they were promised at enlistment, were often 'cast off' by the society they tried to save; *"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."*³. Even the Repatriation Department warned against sympathising with returned soldiers, stating in 1919 that families *"must be sensible and urge the man to get back on the job"*, arguing that sympathising family and friends would not help veterans succeed in their new civilian lives⁴. Civilians and governments alike were not willing to admit to the horrors they had put hundreds of thousands of young men through and wished to forget about the war as quickly as possible; *"No fuss was made by the boys. Everybody went on working as usual"*⁵. This resulted in returned soldiers facing new

¹ Monash, J. 1918. *Address on Repatriation and demobilization*, transcript, p 19.

² Ibid, p 25.

³ Gammage, B. *The broken years: Australian soldiers in the Great War*, Melbourne University Publishing, Victoria, 2010, p. 275

⁴ Larsson, M. (2015). *Family Casualties*. In: J. Schultz and P. Cochrane, ed., *Enduring Legacies*, 48th ed. South Brisbane, Queensland: Text Publishing.

⁵ Sampson, P. (1983). *Papers of P. G. Samson, 1910 -1983..* [Diary] State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

challenges as they struggled to adjust to this new era, one that often did not want to particularly help those had given enormous sacrifice for their country.

While struggling to regain normalcy and re-assimilate into civilian life, soldiers also faced mental and physical challenges upon returning home from the war. After allied victory in 1918, approximately 60, 000 Australian men and women had died, with over 150, 000 wounded, gassed, taken prisoner or reported missing⁶. When the war ended in 1918, Australian's expected deaths to end, and for soldiers to return to normal lives with little issues or new casualties. Sadly, for many of these soldiers, this was not the case. Statistics from war time (1914-1918) and post-war (1919-1920) years show that deaths from non-battle casualties (deaths not attributed to enemy action) continued even after war had ended. From 1919-1920, 603 men in the Australian Imperial Force died from non-battle casualties, 12% of all non-battle casualties from 1914-1920⁷. This shows us, on an external level, how soldiers continued to suffer after the war, mostly from the deadly outbreak of Spanish influenza that occurred in 1919, or sadly, what was less spoken about, suicide.

Soldiers suffered enormously upon return to Australia, as they became victims of not only war, but also victims of ones that were less understood and recognized. The 1919 outbreak of Spanish influenza is attributed to soldiers who caught the virus while serving in Europe, then passing it on when they returned home. As historian Dr Peter Hobbins argues; *"we could consider 1919 as another year of war, albeit against a new enemy"*⁸. In 1919 alone, around a third of Australian's were infected, leaving 15, 000 dead within a year, matching the annual death rate for the First World War. As well as these physical challenges, there are hundreds of accounts throughout and after 1919 of soldiers traumatised by what they had seen during the war. In one case, a soldier was so troubled by his experiences in the war that in 1919, he rode into the Queensland outback and denied that he had fought in the war for over 40 years⁹. They were victims of what we now know as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), but little was known about mental health at the time, so doctors were unsure how to treat soldiers. Soldiers were unsure how to handle with the psychological scars of war, with many soldiers committing suicide¹⁰. The experiences of soldiers in 1919 shows how at the conclusion of one war, they had to fight a new war, one that could not be seen or understood, increasing their hardships.

The announcement of allied victory in 1918 brought a mixture of emotions for women. Eyewitness images and artworks from the time show there were generally two reactions, elation and victory, but also mourning and loss¹¹. Wives and families of soldiers suffered greatly as they learnt to live without the support of husbands, fathers and sons. Thousands of women became war widows, and faced living without a reliable

⁶ Awm.gov.au (2019). First World War 1914-1918. Australian War Memorial. [online]. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war>

⁷ Butler, A.G. (1943). Special problems and services, vol. III of The official history of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918. Canberra: Australian War Memorial, p.900. Refer to Appendix 1.

⁸ Hobbins, P. (2019). Centenary of Spanish flu pandemic in Australia. University of Sydney. [online]. Available at: <https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2019/01/21/centenary-of--spanish-flu--pandemic-in-australia.html>

⁹ Harney, B. (1958). Harney's War.

¹⁰ Roberts, J. (2015). The Front Comes Home: Returned Soldiers and Psychological Trauma in Australia during and after the First World War. University of Wollongong Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, [online] 17(2). p 25

¹¹ Lahey, V. (1924). Rejoicing and remembrance, Armistice Day, London, 1918. [Charcoal, watercolour on paper] Canberra: The Australia War Memorial. Refer to Appendix 2.

source of income and had to learn to become economically independent¹². Government efforts, such as training, employment options and living allowances were created, but often these efforts fell short. One tragic example was Irene Louisa Sloane, who married hairdresser Albert Sloane in 1916 before he left for war. When he returned in 1918, he was a changed man, like many other returned servicemen. Distressed by what he witnessed and did during the war, he committed suicide in late 1918. Irene was given a small payment in November, and applied for a living allowance but received no further payment due to the circumstances of her husband's death. She had a very small income due to her fragile physical and mental condition, and also had two sisters to look after¹³. This is only one example of what happened to thousands of women, who were denied living allowances for frivolous reasons, such as where their husbands served or the way they died. While many couples were reunited after the war¹⁴, thousands of women were subject to immense difficulties and suffered throughout the post war years, struggling to grapple with deaths of loved ones as well as financial hardships.

While allied victory brought an end to many of the challenges faced by Australia and its people, it also brought about new challenges and suffering. For many Australians, 1919 brought with it unemployment, discrimination and economical and emotional hardships. It is undoubted the Australian government was aware of these sufferings and made efforts to ease the struggling of individuals, but experiences during 1919 show that this was not always the case. On an individual level, the end of war brought about several new challenges many struggled to overcome, with little or no help from the government and society. The inability of the government and Australians to understand and recognise the trauma and sacrifice thousands of young men went through and support the families of those who died meant the struggles and hardships continued, and arguably became worse, for thousands of Australians long after the allied victory in 1918.

¹² Clarke, P. (2019). War Widows of the ACT: A Forgotten Legacy of World War I. [online] Womenaustralia.info. Available at: <http://womenaustralia.info/exhib/widows/essay.html>

¹³ Assistance for Irene Louisa Sloan, widow of Albert H Sloan. (1993). [Paper Files and Documents] National Archives of Australia, NAA: A2487, 1919/3215. Canberra.

¹⁴ Wedding portrait of James Reginald Matthews and Caroline Janetta Matthews, 1918. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1028878>. Refer to Appendix 3.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Statistics showing the accumulative deaths in the AIF from 1914-1920, found in *The official history of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918*.

Year	From battle casualties	From non-battle casualties	Total	Progressive total
1914	-	14	14	14
1915	7,819	655	8,474	8,488
1916	12,823	873	13,696	22,184
1917	20,628	1,108	21,736	43,920
1918	12,553	1,687	14,240	58,160
1919	27	597	624	58,784
1920	-	6	6	58,790
Totals	53,850	4,940	58,790	58,790

Appendix 2: Painting by Vida Lahey depicting groups of women mourning and rejoicing at St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square, London, on Armistice Day, 11 November 1918.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Appendix 3: Studio portrait of 50 Extra Regimental Sergeant James Reginald Matthews, 1st Australian Army Pay Corps (ex 7th Battalion), and his London-born bride Caroline Janetta (nee Huggett) on their wedding day in London on 13 April 1918. Cpl Matthews later returned to Australia with his wife on 25 February 1919.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P04219.001

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Source 2: Monash, J. 1918. Address on Repatriation and demobilization, transcript, p 19, 25. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1341638>

Source 5: Gammage, B. The broken years: Australian soldiers in the Great War, Melbourne University Publishing, Victoria, 2010, p. 275

Source 7: Butler, A.G. (1943). Special problems and services, vol. III of The official history of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918: Australian War Memorial, Melbourne, p. 900. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1416843>

Source 8: Wedding portrait of James Reginald Matthews and Caroline Janetta Matthews, 1918. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1028878>

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