



The
Simpson
Prize

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SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 students

2020 Winner

Northern Territory

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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?

The Armistice of Compiègne was signed 11th November 1918 by the Allies and Germany, marking the cessation of fighting and Allied victory. In 1919, the Peace Treaty of Versailles declared World War One (WWI) officially over. Soldiers were welcomed home with flags, bands and speeches.¹ Australians celebrated the end of the war and Germany’s surrender. In 1919, nobody feared war. Loved ones were reunited and normal life could resume. In 1919, the League of Nations was formed, promising to “develop cooperation among nations and to guarantee them peace and security.”² Australia was the first nation to establish a “comprehensive scheme of Repatriation,”³ to send soldiers home in a condition where they could “*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.*”⁴ These events in 1919 seem to support the view that Allied victory brought an end to war, suffering, and challenges for Australia and its people. However, looking deeper than the feelings of relief and celebration, other experiences tell a more complex story. Suffering and challenges continued for individuals and for groups in society. Global events hinted that WWI was not the ‘War to End All Wars’, and that Australia would subsequently be embroiled in more wars throughout the 20th century. One hundred years from that year of celebration and hardship, in this essay we will examine the struggles for Australians that continued in 1919.

In 1919, grief remained close for most Australian civilians. Almost 60,000 deaths from the Australian Imperial Force were recorded over the course of the war.⁵ This was a massive toll on Australia, whose population in 1914 was 4,940,952.^{6*} For Australian civilians: 60,000 sons, fathers, brothers, husbands, and friends – lost. This was the fledgling nation’s first experience of loss to this extent, and the scale of the grief is difficult to fathom. When Vida Lahey, an Australian artist, returned to Australia after contributing to the war effort in London, one of her brothers had died of wounds and another was injured.⁷ She would have felt the same mixed emotions as many other Australian women. This is expressed in her painting, “*Rejoicing and remembrance, Armistice Day, London*,

¹*Yea Chronicle*, ‘Welcome to Returned Soldiers’, 16th October 1919, page 3. [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60040181?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FY%2Ftitle%2F124%2F1919%2F10%2F16%2Fpage%2F5943346%2Farticle%2F60040181>

²United Nations Office at Geneva, *History of the League of Nations (1919-1946)*. [Accessed 6th November 2019] [https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/36BC4F83BD9E4443C1257AF3004FC0AE/%24file/Historical overview of the League of Nations.pdf](https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/36BC4F83BD9E4443C1257AF3004FC0AE/%24file/Historical%20overview%20of%20the%20League%20of%20Nations.pdf)

³ Simpson Prize Source 3: Film, *Repatriation film, Repatriation Department, Australia, c. 1918*. Australian War Memorial. [Accessed 6th November 2019] <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F00139>

⁴ Simpson Prize Source 2: *The John Monash address, 26 November 1918*. Australian War Memorial [Accessed 6th November 2019] <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/Simpson2020>

⁵ Simpson Prize Source 7: Statistical data on deaths in the Australian Imperial Force. A.G. Butler (ed.), *Special problems and services*, vol. III of The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services, 1914–1918, Australian War Memorial, Melbourne, 1943, p. 900. [Accessed 6th November 2019] <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/Simpson2020>

⁶ Knibbs, G.H. (Australian Bureau of Statistics). *Year Book Australia, 1916*. Section 4, page 91. [Accessed 6th November 2019] <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/1301.01916?OpenDocument>

*It should be noted that this does not include the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as they were excluded from the Census at the time.

⁷Australian War Memorial. *The Lahey Family*. [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/memorial-boxes/1/case-studies/lahey>

1918.”⁸ It shows a crowd of women celebrating the Allied victory but moving on in grief and mourning. The Treaty of Versailles could not bring back those who were lost and end the suffering for their families. In 1919, while Australians celebrated Allied victory, the struggle of grief continued for all who lost loved ones.

While the soldiers who returned to Australia could consider themselves lucky to be alive, immense challenges awaited upon re-entry to society. By 1918, 1,749 amputees returned to Australia.⁹ Within two years, 113,000 out of the 264,000 men and women repatriated would be deemed ‘unfit’.¹⁰ Facial disfigurement and loss of sight or hearing was common. Exposure to poison gas left men with severe respiratory problems.¹¹ Many infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, typhus and dysentery affected soldiers.¹² Men who returned wounded or ill not only experienced pain and difficulty physically functioning, but the challenge of social isolation because of disfigurement or chronic illness. In 1919, while the Australian soldiers had been victorious on the battlefield, the challenges changed and suffering continued.

Countless veterans suffered from ‘shell shock’, now known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms included hysteria, nightmares or flashbacks, tremors, fatigue, and loss of speech or hearing.^{13 14} At the time, it was seen as a weakness, rather than an anticipated result of exposure to trauma.¹⁵ It damaged many men’s lives, careers, and relationships. The horror of seeing their mates shot down, killing other men for the sake of war, yet escaping death meant the battlefield stayed with many survivors. This is expressed through a poem written by veteran Vance Palmer, “*The Farmer Remembers the Somme*”. The poem talks of returning home, but only thinking of “...a quaking bog in a mist- stark snapped trees, And the dark Somme flowing.”¹⁶ For the soldiers, Allied victory did not end their struggles. In 1919, while victory brought normality for some Australian soldiers, many were left to pay a costly price.

Inevitably, war ignited new racial tensions in Australia. The German community at home faced xenophobia and oppression, being the ‘enemy aliens’. The spread of anti-German sentiment and fear was largely due to war propaganda. Posters intentionally portrayed the German people as malicious and bloodthirsty: like Norman Lindsey’s representation of a bloody, savage gorilla

⁸ Simpson Prize Source 1: Artwork. Vida Lahey, *Rejoicing and remembrance, Armistice Day, London, 1918*. Australian War Memorial [Accessed 6th November 2019]
<https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/Simpson2020>

⁹Ibid,

¹⁰ Tibbitts, C. (n.d.) *Casualties of war*. (Australian War Memorial) [Accessed 6th November 2019]
<https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/article2>

¹¹Ibid,

¹² Medical Association for Prevention of War (n.d.). *Australian veteran’s health: WWI* [Accessed 7th November, 2019] <https://www.mapw.org.au/files/downloads/WW1.pdf>

¹³ Tibbitts, op. cit.,

¹⁴ Dr. Jones, E. (June 2012) *Shell shocked*. (American Psychological Association) [Accessed 7th November 2019]
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/shell-shocked>

¹⁵ McDonald, M., Brandt, M., & Bluhm, R. (2017) *From shell-shock to PTSD, a century of invisible war trauma*. (The Conversation) [Accessed 6th November 2019] <http://theconversation.com/from-shell-shock-to-ptsd-a-century-of-invisible-war-trauma-74911>

¹⁶ Poem: Palmer, V. (1918) *The Farmer Remembers the Somme*. Poet details: Australian War Memorial (n.d.) *1918: Australians in France - Home at last - the Australians return* [Accessed 6th November 2019]
<https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/1918/victory/returnhome>

stretching out to crush the globe.¹⁷ German culture was continually suppressed and names suggesting German heritage were changed.¹⁸ As Professor Gerhard Fischer said, the Australian Government sought to “destroy the [German] community as an autonomous, socio-cultural entity within Australian society.”¹⁹ Throughout the war, internment camps held around 7,000 people of German heritage. Many of these people were civilians, loyal to King and country, and interned without a trial.²⁰ In 1919, many inmates were deported to Germany.²¹ Evidently, challenges were not over for the German-Australian community. These attitudes and processes caused the disintegration of the Germany community,²² and a hatred towards Germans that did not abate when the war ended. Even German Australians who served the Allied Forces in the war did not escape prejudice. The weed of hate for “enemy aliens” was planted, causing decades of hostile views towards Europeans and other immigrants. In 1919, while global peace had been achieved, turmoil at home for German Australians was ongoing.

Allied victory did not resolve the struggles and suffering faced by Aboriginal servicemen and their families. Around 1,000 Aboriginal men fought in WWI.²³ During the war, these men received equal pay and treatment, often for the first time. While it seemed like this was the beginning of change and reconciliation, Aboriginal soldiers returned to live in the same poor conditions, experiencing the same discrimination they had always known. Aboriginal rights advocate Gracelyn Smallwood spoke of an Aboriginal veteran who returned only to be “denied his pay packet and pension” and “given the 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.”²⁴ James Arden, of the Gunditjmara people, was an Aboriginal serviceman who contracted meningitis at the Ballarat training camp in 1916. He was discharged medically unfit after serving 196 days in the army before going to war. Due to his serious condition, he was granted a pension of three pounds a fortnight. However, the rations and accommodation his family had relied on were taken from him.²⁵ He was accused of being lazy, rebellious to white authority, and a “great fat powerful man”²⁶ by the managers of the station he lived on. He was told his pension had to be “handed over to the Board to be utilized.”²⁷ In 1919,

¹⁷ Lindsey, N. (c. 1915-1918) ? (*interrogation mark*) (State Library Victoria) [Accessed 6th November 2019] <http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/node/467>

¹⁸ NSW Migration Heritage Centre (n.d.) *The German Australian Community* [Accessed 6th November 2019] <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/enemyathome/german-australian-community/index.html>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Moore, C. (2018). *The lost voices of WWI: German internment in Australia*. (The University of Sydney) [Accessed on 7th November 2019] <https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2018/11/20/the-lost-voices-of-wwi--german-internment-in-australia.html>

²¹ Chettle, N. (2014). *World War I: Fighting 'the Huns' on the home front - German internment camps for 'enemy aliens'*. (ABC News) [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-05/world-war-i-germany-fighting-the-huns-on-the-home-front/5638066>

²² NSW Migration Centre, op. cit.,

²³ Australian War Memorial (n.d.) *Aboriginal service during the First World War*. [Accessed 6th November 2019] <https://www.awm.gov.au/about/our-work/projects/indigenous-service>

²⁴ Simpson Prize Source 4: Quote. Smallwood, G., ‘The injustices of Queensland stolen wages’, 23 April 2008, *Koori Mail*, Issue 424, ‘Your Say’, page 25. [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/Simpson2020>

²⁵ Scates, B., Wheatley, R., & James, L., *World War One: a history in 100 stories*. (Penguin Group Publishers, 2015) p. 164-168

²⁶ Ibid, p. 166. A letter from Mrs Galbraith, n.d.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 167. A letter from the Board to James Arden, February 1917.

while Aboriginal people such as James Arden were willing to die for their country, the suffering associated with entrenched discrimination continued.

The evidence from 1919 suggests that Allied victory did not truly bring an end to war for Australia. Despite being a year of peace, global events in 1919 paved the way for the rise of Adolf Hitler and World War Two. The Treaty of Versailles demanded of Germany expensive reparation payments, forfeit of territory, and full accountability for the outbreak of WWI.^{28 29} These conditions proved humiliating for Germany and hampered her ability to revive foreign trade and meet reparation debt requirements, leading to hyperinflation of German currency.³⁰ Adolf Hitler gained popularity with promises to rebuild the nation and reverse the unpopular conditions of this treaty. The Treaty of Versailles, which was “literally ... an attempt to remake Europe,”³¹ can be viewed as an antecedent of war to come. Interestingly, at the Paris Peace Conference the Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes argued that Germany should pay the full cost of the war,³² believing that “Germany could have paid very much more than the Allies are asking her to pay.”³³ He did not believe Germany would remain defeated for long, saying he hoped no Australian would be “so credulous” to believe German Socialists were telling the truth when they claimed they had “cleansed their hearts ... and desire ... to live at peace with the world.”³⁴ However, he hoped that “the world, under the Treaty of Versailles, will be safe from new aggression by Germany.”³⁵ In 1919, while Australia celebrated, whisperings of discontent suggested that Allied victory did not truly bring an end to war for our nation.

It could be argued that the Treaty of Versailles and the celebrations that occurred across the nation show that Allied victory brought an end to war, suffering, and challenges for Australia and its people. However, these experiences are shallow when compared to the evidence of suffering and challenges in Australia in 1919, and early signs of future wars. Allied victory did not bring an end to the grief, pain, and challenges the civilians and veterans experienced in 1919. Nor did it stop further discrimination against German Australians and Aboriginal Australians. Allied victory and peace treaties could not keep the world at peace forever. While the Allied victory was supposed to end ‘The War to End All Wars’, the experiences of 1919 would show that war, suffering, and challenges were not over for Australia and its people.

²⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (n.d.) *Treaty of Versailles*. (Holocaust Encyclopedia) [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/treaty-of-versailles>

²⁹ National Museum Australia (n.d.). *Versailles Treaty*. [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/versailles-treaty>

³⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019). *Weimar Republic*. (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.) [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://www.britannica.com/place/Weimar-Republic>

³¹ Neiberg, M. quoted by Pruitt, S. (2019). *How the Treaty of Versailles and German Guilt Led to World War II*. (History.com) [Accessed 7th November 2019] <https://www.history.com/news/treaty-of-versailles-world-war-ii-german-guilt-effects>

³² National Museum Australia, op. cit.

³³ Historic Hansard (10 September 1919). House of Representatives, 7th Parliament, 2nd Session. *Treaty of Peace*. p. 12,163- [Accessed 6th November 2019] http://historichansard.net/hofreps/1919/19190910_reps_7_89/#debate-2

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

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