



THE SIMPSON PRIZE



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To what extent have the Gallipoli campaign and the Western Front overshadowed other significant aspects of Australians' experience of the First World War?

Australia annually commemorates the 16,000 Anzac soldiers who took part in the military failure of Gallipoli,¹ and a further 295,000 Anzacs who fought on the Western Front.² These campaigns developed national identity through the Anzac Spirit, defined as "endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour and mateship."³ However, this is often glorified into a mythical status that "simplifies complexity and smooths historical contradiction,"⁴ and can also "obscure other, important, chapters in our history."⁵ These two campaigns have significantly overshadowed other vital aspects of Australia's military, social and political experiences of the First World War, which are crucial to understanding the history and identity of Australia today. Some of these aspects include the first military engagement in German New Guinea, German internment camps in Australia, and the efforts of suffragettes during the conscription debate. The study of history, and the acknowledgement of these overshadowed events allows us to rediscover their profound impact on Australia's experiences in the First World War.

Shortly after Britain declared war on Germany,⁶ Australia was called to assemble troops and overtake colonies in German New Guinea.⁷ Contrary to popular perceptions, the battle of Bitia Paka in German New Guinea was Australia's first military engagement, not the landing at Gallipoli.⁸ On the 11th of September 1914, thirty-five brave men fought in this first battle.⁹ Among these men was Able Seaman Williams, who fought and died alongside Captain Pockley, who sacrificed his life in an effort save Williams.¹⁰ In total, there were six deaths and four casualties.¹¹ Williams and Pockley, like the 2000 other soldiers involved in this campaign, were excited with the enthusiasm of men who had never known war.¹² Through their naivety, these men displayed comradeship to an outstanding degree, serving each other selflessly.¹³ Additionally, they were successful in their mission of dismantling German wireless stations, and New Guinea was administered by Australia until achieving independence in 1975.¹⁴ This battle was crucial for later campaigns, as the wireless stations had the ability to "[transmit] signals to the German East Asian Cruiser Squadron, a link Australia wanted broken before troopships started leaving for Europe and the Middle East."¹⁵ Despite this significance, the landing at Gallipoli is depicted as the birthplace of the Anzac Spirit.¹⁶ We need to recognize that the Anzac Spirit of comradeship

¹ National Museum Australia (2021), *Gallipoli landing*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/gallipoli-landing>>

² Queensland Government (2021), *Australia on the Western Front*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://anzac100.initiatives.qld.gov.au/remember/western-front/index.aspx>>

³ Australian War Memorial (2020), *Anzac spirit*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/anzac/spirit>>

⁴ Professor Marilyn Lake (2018), *BEYOND ANZAC: WHAT REALLY SHAPED OUR NATION?* Accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/beyond-anzac-what-really-shaped-our-nation>>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ National Archives (n.d.), *Why did war break out in 1914?* Accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g2/backgroundcs1.htm>>

⁷ Simpson Prize Source 9: Map relating to Australia's first military engagement of the First World War, Australian War Memorial (2021) *Enemy on the Doorstep*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/simpson2022>>

⁸ DVA (Department of Veteran's Affairs) (2021), *Capture of German outposts in the Pacific 1914*, accessed 3rd November 2021, <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/where-australians-served/captured-german-outposts>>

⁹ Veterans SA (2019), *The Battle of Bitia Paka – How the Australians Captured New Guinea, by One of Our Boys*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://veteranssa.sa.gov.au/story/the-battle-of-bitia-paka-how-the-australians-captured-new-guinea-by-one-of-our-boys/>>

¹⁰ John Perryman (n.d.), *The Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force – First to Fight, 1914*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/australian-naval-and-military-expeditionary-force-first-fight-1914>>

¹¹ State Library New South Wales (n.d.), *Papua New Guinea: forty years of independence*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/papua-new-guinea-forty-years-independence/papua-new-guinea-and-world-wars>>

¹² Michael Rowland (2014), *World War I: Bitia Paka and the day German New Guinea came under Australian control*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-07/world-war-i-relatives-remember-gallantry-battle-bitia-paka/5721738>>

¹³ Perryman, op. cit.

¹⁴ State Library New South Wales (n.d.), *Australia's global connections - Papua New Guinea*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/learning/australias-global-connections-papua-new-guinea>>

¹⁵ Rowland, op. cit.

¹⁶ Australian War Memorial (2019), *Dawn of the Legend: The Anzac spirit*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/dawn/spirit>>

and courage¹⁷ was born before Gallipoli, as it was an attitude displayed by the brave soldiers who first fought in battle. This exhibition of the Anzac Spirit, and the heroic efforts of the men who fought is neglected by history and overshadowed by the Gallipoli and Western Front campaigns. It is imperative to commemorate the lives of those who fought in Australia's first conflict, to remember that these courageous men did not fight and die in vain.

"Nations create the history they need,"¹⁸ and often we ignore the aspects of history where Australia is the villain, not the noble 'hero,' as perceived in Gallipoli and the Western Front. These major battles tend to "figure most prominently in Australian memory of the war,"¹⁹ as we choose to forget our wrongdoings. One of these lesser-known aspects of Australia in the First World War is the 7000 German Australians who were detained in internment camps on Australian soil. This was a driving force for the White Australia policy and had major implications on the thriving German Australian culture. 'Enemy aliens' were seen as a classified threat or security breach, despite many being born Australian or naturalized as British citizens.²⁰ They were detained, and prohibited from writing or speaking in their native tongue, which makes the later discovered artifacts written in German particularly fascinating.²¹ A carefully crafted satirical picture book from the time shares the simple and hauntingly honest story of the "Travel adventure of a good German in the land of the kangaroo."²² The story is of a humble German who came to Australia seeking a better life but was captured and sent to live in a 'concentration camp' as they were known at the time.²³ While this author paints himself as innocent, Australian, British, and French war propaganda depicted all Germans as Huns or evil monsters.²⁴ These depictions, coupled with horrific treatment in internment camps, caused extensive damage to German-Australian culture, including future generations.²⁵ Australia's "vision of its present and its future was more narrowly 'British' than ever before"²⁶ and not only did this have significant impacts on non-British Europeans, but on all efforts for multiculturalism. This resolute dedication to White Australia also had severe ramifications on returning Indigenous soldiers,²⁷ and somewhat reflects our modern-day treatment of refugees. These atrocious involvements in the First World War are shamefully hidden amongst the heroics of Gallipoli and the Western Front. In response to Afghanistan war crimes, many have claimed that we are shielded from our own atrocities because of the myth of the Anzac Spirit, that was ingrained into us from Gallipoli and the Western Front.²⁸ Although this uncomfortable aspect of our history in the First World War is conveniently overshadowed by the inspiring Anzac Spirit, we need to acknowledge these events to move forward with integrity. We need to learn these broken, uncomfortable parts of history because they have moulded our nation today, being the roots of prejudices that exist in our national identity.

Throughout the First World War, almost ten percent of the Australian population enlisted to fight.²⁹ However, Australian soldiers were in desperate need of reinforcement after extensive casualties at Fromelles and Pozieres, as well as a

¹⁷ DVA (2021), *The Anzac legend*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/personnel/anzac-legend>>

¹⁸ Peter Stanley (2008), *Why does Gallipoli mean so much?* Accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-04-25/why-does-gallipoli-mean-so-much/2416166>>

¹⁹ Simpson Prize Source 7: Book Extract, Peter Monteath, *Captured Lives: Australia's Wartime Internment Camps*, National Library of Australia Publishing, Canberra, 2018, p.99

²⁰ National Archives of Australia (n.d.), *Wartime internment camps in Australia*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/immigration-and-citizenship/wartime-internment-camps-australia>>

²¹ The Conversation (2018), *In their own words: internees tell of life in our German detainment camps*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://theconversation.com/in-their-own-words-internees-tell-of-life-in-our-german-detainment-camps-103328>>

²² State Library New South Wales (n.d.), *Reise-Abenteuer eines braven Deutschen im Lande der Kangaroo*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74VvzKwAZ7Nb/a7mjlkQpV6xBO>>

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Alex Collin (2018), *10 Anti-German Propaganda Posters from World War One*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.historyhit.com/anti-german-propaganda-posters-from-world-war-one/>>

²⁵ Nicole Chettle (2014), *World War I: Fighting 'the Huns' on the home front - German internment camps for 'enemy aliens'*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-05/world-war-i-germany-fighting-the-huns-on-the-home-front/5638066>>

²⁶ Monteath, op. cit., 99

²⁷ Tim Lee (2019), *'They were back to being black': The land withheld from returning Indigenous soldiers*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-14/land-withheld-from-indigenous-anzacs/10993680>>

²⁸ The Conversation (2020), *The Anzac legend has blinded Australia to its war atrocities. It's time for a reckoning*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://theconversation.com/the-anzac-legend-has-blinded-australia-to-its-war-atrocities-its-time-for-a-reckoning-151022>>

²⁹ Jakeb Lovejoy (2020), *Australia's involvement in WW1*, accessed 3rd November 2021 <<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/487b208cd36643a5b73d6991c7d5d1ca>>

decline in volunteer rates.³⁰ Because of this, Prime Minister William Hughes sought to introduce conscription.³¹ The efforts of suffragettes during this conscription debate are another overshadowed aspect of Australia's involvement in the First World War. Through the eyes of propaganda, women were viewed as damsels in distress and helpless fretting mothers, however, there were several instrumental women who were driving forces of the debate.³² Vida Jane Goldstein was raised to be a strong leader: she displayed this as she adopted a strong pacifist stance during the First World War. While her publicity dropped, her determination grew as she continued campaigning and lobbying with politicians for her anti-war cries to be heard. Goldstein founded and organized the Women's Peace Army in 1915 with Adela Pankhurst.³³ Pankhurst, like Goldstein, was raised a radical suffragette and a strong public speaker; she thrived in situations where she loudly spoke up for the antiwar movement.³⁴ The suffragette movement grew like wildfire; women were taking jobs in place of the men who were at war, while building impressive political profiles and connections. The Women's Peace Army cried mottos and songs such as "we war against war,"³⁵ as well as "I didn't raise my son to be a soldier,"³⁶ while men in the Middle East and Europe continued fighting, some unaware of the tensions building within Australia.³⁷ Grace Wilson was part of the Australian Army Nursing Service, and stood, with just as much fervour, on the opposite side of this controversy. She was an experienced nurse who served in many hospitals and institutions³⁸ including a small Greek island, nursing soldiers that were injured from Gallipoli.³⁹ She had a feisty spirit, spreading the message that "any man who stays unless absolutely prevented from going isn't much"⁴⁰ while lobbying to enforce conscription across Australia. Despite these strong words, the efforts of those such as Wilson and Prime Minister Hughes were rejected overwhelmingly in two referendums.⁴¹ Regardless, these women spoke up at a time they were at a loss, with a looming fear of war, and numerous other hardships. Strong women came from both sides of the conscription debate, with the hope that the lives of their men were not being lost in vain. When the men returned from war, however, the efforts of these women were degraded, and forgotten by history. To this extent, the campaigns of Gallipoli and the Western Front significantly overshadowed their efforts, both at the time and as we look back through the eyes of history. We need to tell their stories to acknowledge their efforts in having major implications on Australia's experiences in the First World War.

In reflecting on the battle of Bitia Paka, a push for White Australia by creating German internment camps, and the determined movements by key women during the conscription debate, it is fair to say that a piece of Australia's history has disappeared in the focus on Gallipoli and the Western Front. These campaigns brought national identity through the Anzac Spirit, something that has the potential to not only exaggerate the noble efforts of Gallipoli and the Western Front, ignoring the grotesque aspects of these campaigns, but also to undermine the efforts of other battles fought. These overshadowed aspects of Australia's experiences in the First World War all had strong ramifications on the history of Australia, and we need to continue to uncover these stories to learn from the past and remember the service of brave

³⁰ Peter FitzSimons (2016), *Fromelles and Pozieres: A tragically ill-conceived plan from the start*, accessed 3rd November 2021, <<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/fromelles-and-pozieres-a-tragically-illconceived-plan-from-the-start-20160715-gq6960.html>>

³¹ Norman Cramp (2015), *From Frontier to Frontline*, Darwin Military Museum, Darwin, p. 31

³² Old Treasury Building (n.d.), *Women and the conscription debate*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://www.oldtreasurybuilding.org.au/women-and-the-conscription-debate/>>

³³ Simpson Prize Source 2, Australian Dictionary of Biography (n.d.), *Goldstein, Vida Jane (1869-1949)*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldstein-vida-jane-6418>>

³⁴ Old Treasury Building (n.d.), *Adela Pankhurst (Walsh) (1885-1961) and the conscription debate*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://www.oldtreasurybuilding.org.au/adela-pankhurst-walsh-1885-1961/>>

³⁵ Trove (2009), *Women's Peace Army. (1915-1919)*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/people/728075?c=people>>

³⁶ Simpson Prize Source 1, Australian War Memorial (2017), *1917: The worst year*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/awm-poster-2017.pdf>>

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Australian Dictionary of Biography (n.d.), *Wilson, Grace Margaret (1879-1957)* accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wilson-grace-margaret-9137>>

³⁹ Virtual War Memorial Australia (n.d.), *WILSON, Grace Margaret*, accessed 22nd October 2021, <<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/187519>>

⁴⁰ Australian War Memorial, *1917: The worst year*, op. cit.

⁴¹ Australian Living Peace Museum (n.d.), *The Conscription Referendums*, accessed 3rd November 2021, <<http://www.livingpeacemuseum.org.au/omeka/exhibits/show/ww1/ww1-referenda>>

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men and women. Studying overshadowed elements from our experiences will lead us to a broader, more concise view of history, acknowledging the complexity and the diverse aspects of the First World War.

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