VOICES from the TRENCHES

Written by
Martin Kerby

Illustrated by
Eloise Tuppurainen-Mason and Margaret Baguley
The Anzac Centenary is an opportunity for Queenslanders of all ages to honour the commitment and sacrifice of servicemen and women during the First World War.

From early childhood, educators tell us that the mateship and bravery demonstrated by the Anzacs is at the core of our unique national identity as Australians.

Storytelling helps connect the past and present to the future, allowing us to learn from others’ experiences. The Darling Downs has an important story to share which has now also been brought to life in the pages of this book. Together with an original music score and regional tour, this book will help a new generation to strengthen their connection to our Anzac heritage.

I wish to congratulate the University of Southern Queensland and all involved in producing the “Voices from the Trenches” project for their contribution to the 2014 – 2018 Queensland Anzac Centenary.

The Queensland Government, through the Queensland Anzac Centenary grants program, is proud to support this initiative.

Annastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier of Queensland
Minister for the Arts
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Awake! Arise! The wings of dawn
Are beating at the Gates of Day!
The morning star has been withdrawn,
The silver vapours melt away.
This hairy meteor did announce
The fall of sceptres and of crowns.
Australians will stand beside our own to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling.
The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.
Keep the home fires burning, while your hearts are yearning.
Though the boys are far away they dream of home.
I have become fed up generally with our stay for such a long period here. We have been on the job for about six months and haven’t had so much as a shot fired … tell all at home I’m quite safe – too safe for my liking worse luck.
They did not wait for orders, or for the boats to reach the beach, but sprang into the sea.
But Anzac stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship, and endurance that will never own defeat.
The worst things here are the flies in millions, lice and everlasting bully beef and biscuit and too little water.
Not only muffled is our tread
   To cheat the foe
We fear to rouse the honoured dead
   To hear us go
Sleep sound, old friends – the keenest smart
Which, more than failure, wounds the heart
Is thus to leave you – thus to part
Comrades, farewell.
The Windmill site marks a ridge more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth.
It is impossible of description. Not a tree is alive, not even a blade of grass.
Dear Mother, If I should die, think only this of me. That there's some corner of a foreign field that is forever England. There shall be in that rich earth a richer dust concealed; a dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware.
Bent double, like old beggars under sacks. Knock-kneed, coughing like hags we cursed through sludge. Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs, and towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Along the crest of the ridge, the flashes of exploding shells, the multi-coloured signal flares from the opposing front lines and the sheets of flames from the discharge of the guns, stabbed the darkness.
On every variety of ground: mountain, plain, desert, swamp or jungle, the Australian Light Horseman has proved himself equal of the best. He has earned the gratitude of the Empire and the admiration of the world.
In all that great army it is doubtful if a single man entered Jerusalem for the first time untouched by the influence of the Saviour ... for a brief moment the soldier knew again the pure and trusting faith of his early childhood.
We can truly say that the whole Earth is ringed with the graves of our dead. In the course of my pilgrimage I have many times asked myself whether there can be a stronger argument for peace upon Earth than these silent witnesses to the desolation of war.
What these men did nothing can alter now. The good and the bad, the greatness and smallness of their story will stand.
Awake! Arise! The wings of dawn/Are beating at the Gates of Day!/
The morning star has been withdrawn/The silver vapours melt away.
(George Evans, 1901)

Before 1901, Australia was made up of six British colonies which were partly self-governing. Many people believed that it would be better if Australia united as one nation. After a long campaign the Commonwealth of Australia was declared on 1 January 1901. Sir Edmund Barton was the first prime minister. This image is of the Citizens’ Arch which was built in Melbourne in 1901 to celebrate the opening of Parliament and a visit from members of the British Royal family. The poem is part of an ode written by Toowoomba resident George Evans to celebrate Federation.

This hairy meteor did announce/The fall of sceptres and of crowns.
(Samuel Butler, 1663)

Comets have often been seen as portents of disasters or of some great historical change. The most famous one is Halley’s Comet, which is visible from Earth every 74–79 years. Halley’s Comet appeared in 1910, four years before the beginning of WW1 which ended in the destruction of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian monarchies and weakened the power of Europe.

Australians will stand beside our own to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling. (Andrew Fisher, 31 July 1914)

In 1914, most Australians considered themselves Australasian Britons. Many had been born in Britain and still thought of it as home. Australian leaders were not consulted about the declaration of war but the country was very loyal to Britain and the Empire. Andrew Fisher, the prime minister from 1914-1916, made this famous statement in an election speech to describe how loyal Australia would be if war broke out.

The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time. (Sir Edward Grey, 3 August 1914)

On the evening of 3 August 1914 the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey was standing at the window of his office watching the sunset across St James’s Park in London. As the lamps were being lit he made this statement to a friend to express his fears about what a war would mean for the peoples of Europe. The next day Britain declared war which meant that Australia was also at war.

Keep the home fires burning, while your hearts are yearning. Though the boys are far away they dream of home. (Ivor Novello and Lena Guilbert Ford, 8 October 1914)

I have become fed up generally with our stay for such a long period here. We have been on the job for about six months and haven’t had so much as a shot fired … tell all at home I’m quite safe – too safe for my liking worse luck. (Sergeant William Allen, 9th Battalion, Egypt, 14 February 1915)

The Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was formed on 15 August 1914. The first convoy of troops departed from Albany in Western Australia on 1 November 1914. They were at first headed to England but it was decided that they would stay in Egypt to defend the Suez Canal against the Turks.

They did not wait for orders, or for the boats to reach the beach, but sprang into the sea. (Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, 8 May 1915)

The first newspaper report about the landing on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 was written by the English journalist Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett. His description of the courage and skill of Australian and New Zealand troops is often thought to have marked the birth of the ‘Anzac Legend’. Many people at the time believed that the only way a nation could prove itself worthy was in war. The performance of Australian soldiers meant that many people felt we now had passed a great test.

But Anzac stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship, and endurance that will never own defeat. (Charles Bean, 1946)

The word Anzac was created as an acronym for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The term became popular largely due to the work of the official correspondent and historian Charles Bean.
The worst things here are the flies in millions, lice and everlasting bully beef and biscuit and too little water. (Captain Campbell, 5 Field Artillery Brigade, 11 August 1915)

By May 1915 the official ration for each soldier per day was a third of a kilogram of tinned meat, half a kilogram of hardtack biscuit, 100 grams of bacon, 70 grams of cheese, a quarter kilogram of onions or potatoes, 14 grams of tea, 115 grams of jam, 90 grams of sugar, 14 grams of salt, two grams of mustard and one of pepper. Water was always in short supply and often each soldier had only one litre per day for drinking, cooking and washing.

Not only muffled is our tread/To cheat the foe/We fear to rouse the honoured dead/To hear us go/Sleep sound, old friends – the keenest smart/Which, more than failure, wounds the heart/Is thus to leave you – thus to part/Comrades, farewell. (Sergeant Alfred Guppy, 14th Battalion, 19 December 1915)

The most successful part of the Gallipoli campaign was the evacuation of the troops on 19–20 December 1915. Over the course of the eight months on Gallipoli the Australians suffered 26,111 casualties, including 8,141 deaths. Guppy was sad to leave so many comrades buried there so far from home and wrote this poem while waiting to be evacuated.

The Windmill site marks a ridge more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth. (Charles Bean, 1946)

After the evacuation from Gallipoli most Australian soldiers went to fight in France and Belgium. In 1916 they fought at a French village called Pozieres. In less than seven weeks the AIF suffered 23,000 casualties. Of these, 6,800 men were killed or died of wounds. It was almost the same number of casualties suffered at Gallipoli.

It is impossible of description. Not a tree is alive, not even a blade of grass. (Harry Gullett, 30 December 1917)

The Western Front stretched 700 kilometres southward from Belgium to the Swiss border. In the course of four years the combatants would dig a staggering 40,000 kilometres of trenches and would defend or attack them at the cost of 13.5 million casualties.

If I should die, think only this of me/That there’s some corner of a foreign field/That is for ever England./There shall be/In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;/A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware … (Rupert Brooke, 1914)

Rupert Brooke’s poem ‘The Soldier’ seemed to sum up the idealism of the men who volunteered for service. His very positive view of being a soldier and the risks of being killed now seem very old fashioned given the conditions endured by troops on the Western Front. Though an English poet, ideas like this were very widely held.

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks. Knock-kneed, coughing like hags we cursed through sludge. Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs, and towards our distant rest began to trudge. (‘Dulce et Decorum est’ by Wilfred Owen, 8 October 1917)

Wilfred Owen was an English poet and soldier whose work is widely considered to be among the best poetry of the war. He was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in 1918 but was killed a week before the end of the war. Owen used the work of the Roman poet Horace who wrote ‘Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori’ which translates to ‘How sweet and honourable it is to die for one’s country’. In his poem Owen describes that belief as ‘the old lie’.

Along the crest of the ridge, the flashes of exploding shells, the multi-coloured signal flares from the opposing front lines and the sheets of flames from the discharge of the guns, stabbed the darkness. (Martin McEnery, 25th Battalion)

Modern weapons meant the soldiers could not survive long if they were exposed above ground. They dug trenches to try to protect themselves from explosions and machine gun fire. The area between the opposing trenches became known as ‘no man’s land’.

On every variety of ground: mountain, plain, desert, swamp or jungle, the Australian Light Horseman has proved himself equal of the best. He has earned the gratitude of the Empire and the admiration of the world. (General Edmund Allenby, 1919)

After Gallipoli the Australian Light Horse stayed in Egypt to fight the Turks. They established a reputation for being excellent horsemen and courageous soldiers. The mounted charge against the town of Beersheba in October 1917 is still very famous.
In all that great army it is doubtful if a single man entered Jerusalem for the first time untouched by the influence of the Saviour … for a brief moment the soldier knew again the pure and trusting faith of his early childhood. (Harry Gullett, 1923)

Harry Gullett was an Australian war correspondent in the Middle East. He later wrote the history of the Australian Light Horse. He was present when Jerusalem was captured by Allied forces on 9 December 1917. After 674 years, Jerusalem was again in the hands of a Christian power, offering to the Allies their only victory in 1917.

We can truly say that the whole Earth is ringed with the graves of our dead. In the course of my pilgrimage I have many times asked myself whether there can be a stronger argument for peace upon Earth than these silent witnesses to the desolation of war. (King George V, 11 May 1922)

The Commonwealth War Graves (CWG) Commission was established in 1917 to care for the graves of British Empire soldiers. It now commemorates 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces killed during the two world wars. Graves and memorials are in 23,000 locations in 154 countries. This text was part of a speech delivered by the King at Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium. With 11,965 burials it is the largest CWG cemetery in the world.

What these men did nothing can alter now. The good and the bad, the greatness and smallness of their story will stand. (Charles Bean, 1942)

This famous statement is often used to emphasise how important the experience of Australian men and women in wartime is to our sense of national identity. It helps explain who we are and who we want to be.
DEDICATED TO THE MEN
OF THE 25TH BATTALION
~ The Darling Downs Regiment ~

Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum
(Never a Backward Step)