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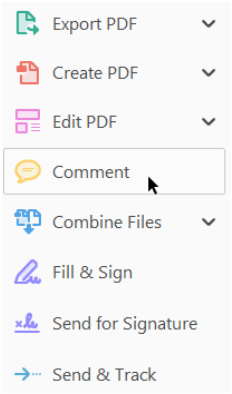


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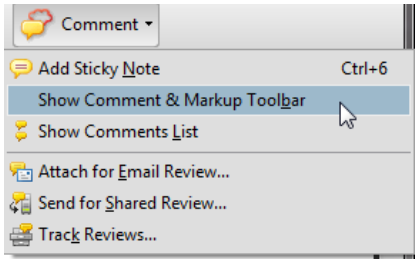


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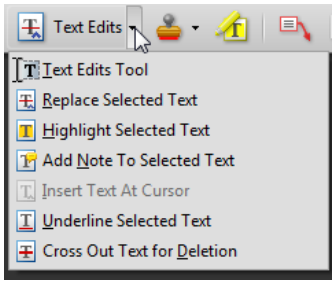


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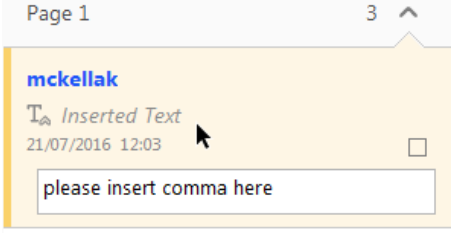


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**Fig. 1. Robert Henry Roper on his camel 'Zebediah'.**

# The Bush, the Suburbs and the Long Great War: a Family Memoir

## *by Michael Roper*

AQ1

In August 1980, a month before my grandfather's death, my grandparents and I went on a short holiday to the gold-mining town of Beechworth in North-Eastern Victoria where he was born in 1896. I was then twenty and studying History at Melbourne University. Earlier that year, as part of my Australian History course, I had interviewed him about his experiences during the Great Depression and the First World War – my first attempt at oral history.[1]

We drove back to Melbourne through the Great Dividing Range, passing close by the home of C. J. Dennis, whose 1915 book of verse *The Sentimental Bloke* was a best-seller among Australian servicemen in the First World War. I was driving granddad's car, a Leyland P76, the British company's much lampooned attempt to produce a vehicle for the Australian

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market. As we approached the highway back to their home in the Eastern suburb of Surrey Hills, he told me to turn off and take a route which wound through the hills north-east of Melbourne. I was a relatively new driver, it was getting dark, and it had been a long drive. Scenic though it was, I didn't fancy taking the lumbering P76 on the back road, so told him I was going to take the highway. An almighty row erupted: he ordered me to stop the car and get out. He would take the wheel. I pulled over and he continued to shout at me to get out of the driver's seat, but I refused. As a boy I'd seen granddad lose his temper with my father, but he had never raised his voice at me. When we stopped at the local shops in Surrey Hills to pick up fish and chips, granny tried to make light of it: 'you know your old granddad, always flying off the handle'.

This article locates the row between my grandfather and me within the history of the First World War and its domestic reverberations across the generations. The 'psychic legacy of the war brought back to... homes' forms an important part of Australia's postwar history, Janet McCalman observes, noting, however, that the topic is difficult to research, being buried in memory and the privacy of homes.[2] Focusing on three generations of my family, I want to investigate the war's private legacies and how they were connected to larger themes in Australian history: suburban domesticity on the one hand, and on the other, the bush as a place of adventure and independence, a symbol of national identity and a proving ground for masculinity. In focusing on the war brought home to the suburbs, I hope to connect histories which have often been construed as separate or even antithetical. On the one side are those who react against the celebratory, nation-building impulse in much Anzac commemoration, and who pursue 'hidden histories' of lives blighted by the conflict.[3] 'Few returning troops would evade psychological harm', write Stephen Garton and Peter Stanley in the *Cambridge History of Australia*.[4] The issues I am studying here will have resonance in the homes of all the belligerent nations, but it is no accident that Australians have pioneered this kind of study, for Australia had one of the highest per capita casualty rates among the allied nations, with more than two in three of the men who embarked for overseas service being killed or wounded (casualty rates were 68.5%, compared with 52.5% in Britain).[5] That loss was felt across the nation despite its distance from the battlefields: as Joan Beaumont observes, there was no 'emotional quarantine' between the war and home fronts.[6]

On the other side are those who wish to decentre the narrative of horror. Cultural historians tell us that trauma is a social construct, and that 'horrible histories' of the war are animated not just by the scale and violence of the conflict but by a contemporary fixation with disaster.[7] Some lament the way that trauma histories pass over other emotions in war, such as patriotism, while others argue that the First World War counts for too much in debates about national self-definition, and that the Australian public's

obsession with the world wars leave other areas of the country's past in the shadows.[8]

The approach I take here owes much to trauma theory, but at the same time seeks to broaden the study of 'aftermath' from the returned soldier and his circle to the urban, rural and domestic histories of peacetime Australia. My first memories of granddad's war date from a holiday in the seaside resort of Sorrento in the late 1960s when I was around nine. The freak deaths he described stuck in my mind, and in my interview in 1980 I encouraged him to put them on record: the roan horse who hit a broomstick bomb and whose belly fell to the ground while he and his rider galloped on for a further 100 yards; the man chatting about horse-racing when he was hit by a shell which fell through the hole they were boring in the roof of a trench; another whose jugular vein was severed by a fragment of shell and who 'fell back in to the arms of the Doctor & with a beautiful smile on his face'.[9] Growing up before the supposed 'age of trauma', I had a pretty strong sense of war's horrors.

In resuming research on my family two years ago, however, I wanted to consider not only the ways in which my grandfather was damaged by the war, but the recuperative capacities of home life, leisure and travel, and their place in the social and cultural history of mid twentieth-century Australia. I have tried to conceive of the war's presence, not as a totalizing 'aftermath', but as part of daily life and social and natural landscapes. If on the one hand such a history suggests that the war did not blight the lives of all returned soldiers, on the other, it suggests that the struggles of return were not discreet and time-bound, but would continue throughout their lives and those of their descendants.

## BUSH, SUBURBS AND WAR

In his 1958 book *The Australian Legend* Russel Ward charted the rise of a national mythology based around the figure of the bushman. It was, he said, a form of frontier legend with particular characteristics: the bushman was not a squatter (a landowner who had occupied Crown land), but an itinerant labourer, whose outlook was anti-authoritarian, irreligious and egalitarian. Ward saw the legend as having taken shape among pastoral workers in the second half of the nineteenth century, reaching its apogee in the late nineteenth century due to the literary efforts of Sydney bohemians like Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson and to the radical publication the *Bulletin*.[10]

For Ward, the bush legend was nostalgic from the beginning, writ large as a national story just as the consolidation of the population in urban centres along with improved transport and communications depopulated the countryside and lessened its remoteness. Ward's thesis has animated generations of Australian historians.[11] Graeme Davison argues that the legend was created by disaffected literary types living in the city, who found in their imaginings of the bush an antidote to their present troubles.[12] Similarly, for

veterans such as my grandfather, the bush could serve as a location for fantasies of escape, as we shall see below.

In her 1987 essay 'The Politics of Respectability' Marilyn Lake argued that the Australian legend had a gender dimension hitherto ignored. It was, in essence, a 'masculinist' myth. The *Bulletin* writers criticized marriage for putting the 'hobbles' on men, and celebrated gambling, drinking and smoking as male pastimes. Theirs was not just a flight from the city, but from women and domesticity.[13] Lake sees domesticity and the bush as associated with profoundly different ideals of masculinity, the nomad and the family man, and concludes that by the 1920s the former was in retreat. The powerful interwar figure of the Anzac hero, who embodied the independence, toughness and mateship of the bushman, was little more than a 'mythic reparation' to the hen-pecked husband.[14] The breadwinner may well have succeeded the bushman as a dominant ideal of masculinity, but as Ward himself had noted, the bush legend has deep roots.[15] My uncle could recite Paterson's 'The Man From Snowy River' off by heart as a small boy, my grandfather having read it to his sons before bed.[16]

Yet in some ways, contrary to Lake's thesis, the bush gained salience as a source of masculine identity and a place of recuperation after the First World War. On the one hand, the image of the bushman became further entrenched in national culture. In proselytizing for the Australian soldier, C. E. W. Bean and fellow journalists drew on the bushman's presumed traits: tough and self-reliant, loyal to his mates and having disregard for authority and formalities.[17] A story often told about the Camel Corps (including by my grandfather) sums up the credo. When their slouch hats were taken away and pith helmets issued in their place, the men conspired to throw away this uppity symbol of English colonialism, appearing bare-headed on parade next morning.[18] (Fig. 1)

On the other hand, the bush was promoted as a place of refuge and recovery. The 1920s saw the construction of many 'weekender' huts around Melbourne's hills, and day trips to places like Healesville and Lilydale gained popularity. Rather than harsh outback, the bush was now reconceived as a landscape of ferny glades and timbered vistas.[19] In a country where around half the returned soldiers carried physical or mental signs of the damage inflicted by the war, the 'healthful holiday' and the country as a place of 'emotional and spiritual rejuvenation' held considerable appeal.[20] The naturalist Charles Barrett evoked this in his popular 1919 publication *In Australian Wilds*, which was promoted as 'the heartfelt product of a returned soldier, come to seek peace in his old bush haunts'.[21] During the Second World War Barrett gave lectures on practical bush lore to the troops in Northern Australia and New Guinea, and in 1941 he published *Australia: My Country*, a guide to native flora, fauna and landscapes, dedicated to the serving soldier and interspersed with reminiscences about coming across old comrades from the First War while in the wild. Being on overseas service, he

remarked, 'made Australia more than ever seem the only place worth living on earth'.[22]

Not just leisure, but labour in the bush was thought to have health-giving benefits, a view reflected in the postwar schemes to settle returned soldiers on the land. The assumption was, as Kate Murphy puts it, that they would 'crave the open air, empty spaces, and independence of farming life after their traumatic war experience', a view reflected in the fact that over half the settlers had war injuries.[23] Running somewhat counter to the notion that soldier-settlement would help debilitated men to recover, at the same time it was believed that, having proved themselves in military service, returned soldiers would possess the physical and mental toughness necessary to succeed as smallholders.[24]

Of course, the symbolic importance of the bush after the war bore a complex relationship to the realities, Australia being 'precociously suburban' by the First World War, and Victoria its most urbanized state (42.7% of its population lived in Melbourne).[25] Australia's cities had relatively low population densities by international standards: by 1891, Melbourne covered an area equivalent in size to London, though its population was less than an eighth of London's.[26] The bungalow and the quarter-acre plot became the preferred form of housing, underwritten by government sponsorship of utilities, transport and communication. As Bean considered the war's legacies and Australia's future in 1919, he thought the extension of home ownership and gardens would provide the key to progress, the healthful suburban life having made the Australian soldier the man he was.[27] The villa ideal, however, was actually an English import, the architects of the bungalow drawing their inspiration from the Victorian villa and its garden lawns and plants.[28]

Suburbia was thought to be good for the veteran not just because it promised space and access to the outdoors, but because of the domestic arrangements that came with it – the home a sanctuary from the worlds of work, war and politics, and the wife a helpmeet. Like the villa, these ideas harked back to Britain and the Evangelical nonconformism of the early nineteenth century.[29] The perceived value of domesticity in the aftermath of the First World War is suggested by the marriage rates among returned soldiers, which were higher than for civilians in the same age range.[30] Marriage was thought to have a settling effect on men who had lived outside civilized mores and been through gruelling experiences, and women were encouraged to do their bit. '[W]omen take in hand this labour of love', declared William Fitzpatrick of the Victorian State War Council in 1917.[31] My grandmother could feel proud to marry an Anzac, a veteran of Gallipoli and the Middle East campaigns; it was part of her patriotic duty.

In contrast to the prewar image of the bushman, the settler was imagined as a married man in official discourse about the soldier settlement schemes.[32] Indeed, the relatively small size of soldier-settlement holdings

and the unpredictability of yields and prices tended to make marriage a necessity, as soldier-settlers depended on the labour of their wives and children to make the scheme sustainable.[33] As a result, rather than bolstering a man's status as a breadwinner who could support his dependents, soldier settlement could undermine it. Around one in three settlers in New South Wales failed within ten years, and it was often wives who negotiated with the Repatriation officials over the family's fate.[34] What began as an ambitious scheme to enhance the masculine capacities of the veteran ended up for some in a piteous spectacle of financial ruin and humiliation.

## GRANDDAD'S EARLY LIFE AND WAR

Born in 1896, Robert Henry Roper was one of eleven children. His father was a market gardener for the Beechworth mental asylum. The family were poor and according to my father, grandad's mother 'had him snouted' (to 'snout' is Australian slang for holding a grudge), on one occasion sending him off to school in the snow in bare feet while his brothers and sisters stayed at home.[35] Granddad left home at twelve and his mother deserted the family home shortly afterwards for Melbourne. During the next six years granddad was often on the move, clearing land, ploughing, harvesting, driving horse teams and droving sheep and cattle across Eastern Australia. His life was the stuff of the bush legend and he liked to tell us stories about the bullock drivers, their colourful language, and how they used to tie logs to their drays to slow them on the mountain descents. When contented, he would sing bush ballads in a tuneful falsetto. However, he was not so much a bushman himself as a fellow traveller, his periods as an itinerant labourer being interspersed with clerical jobs at the Beechworth and Kew asylums. His dual identities as white-collar and manual worker are indicated on his demobilization form, which lists membership of both the powerful Australian Workers' Union whose heartland was the pastoral industries, and the Clerical Workers Union.

Granddad enlisted in Sydney on 24 April 1915. It was a portentous date and one which he would often repeat: the eve of the Anzac Landing which announced the country's bloody entry to the Imperial struggle and the world stage. The news of the Landing would break in Australia a week later, so Granddad was one of the very last volunteers to enlist with no knowledge of the war he was about to enter.

After the voyage to Egypt, his entry to the Gallipoli campaign was abrupt and brutal. He was in the first line of attack at Lone Pine, little more than a day after arriving on the peninsula. Although the assault was only a diversion, it has a prominent place within Australian memory because of its ferocity, there being around 9,000 casualties over a couple of days of fighting on a front of barely more than 100 yards.[36] Granddad's unit occupied Turkish trenches and they killed a number of retreating soldiers at close range. He became separated from his unit and was told by an officer to guard a forward area and make a barricade out of the bodies strewn about.

Rejoining his comrades the following morning, he learned that he was one of twenty-three survivors among the 150 men from the Second Battalion's sixth reinforcement who had gone into battle. In his memoir of Gallipoli granddad writes:

> I bedded down alongside Snow Reynolds, tried to think of what happened since we arrived on Gallipoli about seventy hours previously. I remember sobbing like hell and being wakened from a heavy sleep at 8 or 9 am – 'For God, King and Country?' Why? Breakfast – Bacon, hard biscuits, liquid apricot jam. Tea.

Twice he says 'I was numb & did not care much what happened'.[37] Two weeks later he went to the field ambulance doctor complaining of vomiting and diarrhoea, and he was admitted again to hospital at the end of October 1915 with 'febrite [sic] diarrhoea', returning to his unit a month later.[38] His memoir records a depressing Christmas in 1915, spent on a troopship en route to Egypt, eating bully beef and 'bloody awful' Christmas pudding, and mourning the dead comrades they had left behind on the peninsula.[39]

On 29 January 1916 granddad transferred to the newly formed Australian Battalion of the Imperial Camel Corps. For the itinerant labourer who had been pinned to the cliffs at Gallipoli for the past four months, the nomadic life held therapeutic promise:

> Tomorrow we catch the train to Tel-el-Kebir & start getting to know our Camels. I feel glad I am leaving the Infantry & being burrowed up like Rabits [sic] like we were on the Peninsula. Even the Desert will be something like our northern open spaces. Plenty of room to move around.[40]

Granddad spent the next sixteen months with Number Two Company, patrolling the Libyan and Sinai deserts. Their lives resembled the bushman's, surviving in fierce heat, mounted and on the move, sometimes obtaining supplies by stealth from the Bedouin. Their attitude to military authority was suspicious and hostile, an attitude which, the war correspondent Frank Reid observed, had been sharpened by their 'baptism of fire' at Gallipoli.[41] Two months into the desert campaign the men in Number Two Company drew their rifles on their commanding officer after he threatened to shoot a Lance-Corporal who had refused to mount his camel and do ceremonial drill.[42] His successor wrote to his superior officers in June 1916 telling them that 'I have had several bad cases of either disobedience, obscene language or even violence to NCOs this week. I have one court martial pending, and have applied for another. At the general's request I have forwarded to him a list of men who cannot be trusted to carry out patrol work…'[43]

On 19 April 1917 granddad was involved in a dismounted attack at the Second Battle of Gaza, which Gullett and Barrett described as 'the bloodiest our men have known in their Palestine fighting'. Overall casualty rates in the Australian Camel Corps stood at around seventy percent but Number Two

Company was first in the line of fire and suffered particularly heavy losses.[44] Granddad was hit in the back and narrowly escaped having his little finger amputated. He believed that the Commander of the Australian battalions, George Langley, had deliberately put them in harm's way to punish them for their insubordination, recounting a parade shortly before the battle where Langley 'said five words that hurt. "I will fix this Company"'.[45]

Langley's actions confirmed granddad's belief that his officers were not just incompetent but malign, and his anger did not abate with the war's end. During the 1920s and 30s, he and his best mate, the fellow Camelier Stan MacCallum (after whom I believe my father was named), refused to join the Anzac parades and reunions. Stan MacCallum would not be in the same room as Langley.[46] The war had left them feeling bitter, he told me in 1980:

> See I know this much, that in the army, I never got promotion, the whole of the [war].[47] And officers told me that I wouldn't get [it]. Because, I was not the right type... You see, as a chap told me... he said 'you know', he said, 'that you would never take to discipline', and he said, 'I've got your pedigree', and he said, 'you'd never leave your mates'. And I said 'no, and I wouldn't leave them now'. .... See that you, you had to be ruthless, and you had to leave your mates. But there were some fellows that, well I don't know, I thought of them anyway, and they thought the same as me, we were mates, and we just got the wrong end of the stick. And we learned to, you know, we learned to hate.[48]

Granddad remained with the Camel Corps until it was incorporated into the Light Horse in June 1918, a delicious irony for the Cameliers, who had often ridiculed the gentlemanly pretensions of the Light Horse.[49]

## FROM SOLDIER TO CIVILIAN

Granddad disembarked in Melbourne in September 1919. Judged by a Medical Board to be 'about a stone underweight', and still suffering from the malaria he had contracted in October 1918, he was invalided out of the Army in 1920 and awarded a partial pension.[50] After demobilization he struggled to find his place. He took a job as a clerk in Central Melbourne and tried his hand as an estate agent in Prahran – it would be hard to imagine a job for which he was less well fitted, having had no fixed address for the past dozen years – and when that failed he applied for unemployment benefit. He applied to the Repatriation Department for a grant to study book-keeping, wishing, he explained, to 'better my present situation' and 'increase efficiency', his phrases juxtaposing the Victorian values of self-improvement and the modern language of the bureaucracy. He seems only to have completed the first year of the course, and instead contemplated returning to the bush. He obtained a Certificate of Mixed Farming and, in early 1921, applied for land through the soldier-settlement scheme, but the Deputy-Commissioner turned him down the grounds that he had already

received funding for his night school course.[51] The period following his return seems to have been one of 'strange unrest', as it was for many other veterans.[52]

My grandfather met my grandmother Alice at the Victoria Barracks in Melbourne (Fig. 2). Her family was a cut above his. They were Methodists, whose view of domesticity echoed the Evangelical ideal, though granny's mother supported the suffrage campaign. They were also patriots: Alice's older brother Dave enlisted early in the war, and after her younger brother Tom persuaded his parents to let him enlist at age eighteen the family home in Canterbury was renamed 'Makarina' after the troopship that took him to France. Both men were wounded in France, and I recall Tom, who was shot in the head in 1917, as a quiet and slightly vacant man. Like her brothers, Granny, who was seventeen when the war broke out, wanted to do her bit and abandoned her typing course for a clerical job at the Barracks. Her decision caused arguments at home, where, being the elder of the two daughters, she was expected to help her mother.

When I turned on the tape recorder at Kent Road in 1980, it was *granddad's* story I was after. After all, he was the Anzac hero. But almost as soon as we got going I was forced to reckon with granny's war. The recording starts with her remembering a local businessman who used to knit socks in the train whilst commuting to work: total war, it seemed, required men and women on the home front to take new roles. The first news of the casualties at Gallipoli is etched in granny's memory and her voice registers the trauma sixty years later. The Anzac veteran and protagonist of my interview becomes a listener as granny describes the impact on people back home:

> Granny: The first casualty list came out on Saturday night, and I was in town with Doris.
> Mike: That would have given people a shock, wouldn't it?
> Granny: Oh, the casualty lists. See, they'd always put them up in the newspaper offices, and people would go in, because there's no radio. And then they'd put out extra papers, and the lists, oh, there'd be page. . ..
> Granddad: . . . Pages
> Mike: That would be really hard to imagine.
> Granny: Well, it was a terrible shock for people. Although I suppose the Second World War was just as difficult.[53]

Granny's patriotism, sparked by her brothers' sacrifices and those of local families who had lost sons, was probably also a factor in her courtship with my grandfather. I think she was attracted not just to the romance surrounding the Anzac hero of two campaigns, but to the idea of creating a home for him. Hers was a common enough impulse among young women at the time, her two best friends having also married returned soldiers. But as she indicates here, for women of her generation the anxiety of waiting for news and the shock of loss was not confined to the First World War: she spoke not

**Fig. 2. Alice Fisher and Robert Henry Roper courting in Sunbury, where his father was Asylum Warden, c. 1922.**

**Fig. 3. The Roper sons in uniform. My father Stan, granddad, granny and Lin in the front garden of 35 Kent Rd, Surrey Hills, c. 1945.**

just as a daughter but a mother whose two sons had served in the Second World War (Fig. 3).

## FAMILY LIFE BETWEEN THE WARS

My grandparents' first home after their marriage in 1923 was in Birdwood St, Frankston, one of many roads to be named after the war in honour of the Commander of the Anzacs at Gallipoli.[54] They were quick to establish a family: my uncle Lin was born nine months after the wedding, and my father Stan in 1926. Their lives were, by comparison with my grandfather's prewar roaming, remarkably settled. Granddad joined the Victorian Railways, where he worked until his retirement in 1961. In December 1923, with the help of a State Bank loan for ex-servicemen, they bought a weatherboard house in Frankston. Twenty-five miles east of the city centre, at the end of the railway line and the edge of the Mornington peninsula, Frankston was on the outskirts of Melbourne but not yet part of it. Dad recalls that 'we were more or less in a bush setting, like we didn't have any immediate neighbours'.[55] However, the foundations of suburbanization had been laid by the establishment of the railway line in 1882 and its electrification in 1922, and as an operating porter servicing the growing number of commuters my grandfather played his part in its spread. Frankston's social geography conformed to his worldview. The workers mostly lived on the flat close to the town centre, many of them railwaymen and unionists who had also 'learned to hate' in the war, while in the hills above lived rich folk like the newspaper owner Keith Murdoch ('the peanut Murdoch', to my grandfather), and his wife Elizabeth.[56]

My grandparents' lives as a young married couple were thoroughly modern in some respects. They may have been quick to start a family, but they practised limitation: Dad remembers stealing into their bedroom once to discover Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (1918) in a bedside cabinet alongside the 'black book', granddad's war diary which recorded the misdeeds of his officers. Granny was keen to breast-feed, but was severely chastized by the family doctor after my father failed to take to the breast. Talking to me in 1980, granddad wanted his prospective audience to understand what a good wife she had been too: 'Yeah, and you can tell them that granny never let me go away from home without a feed. Sometimes I used to have to be at work at two o'clock in the morning. I'd go to bed about six o'clock, and she'd get up and give me a feed before I went'.[57] They were proud of their thrift. They bought some Australorps hens and sold the eggs to the local grocers. They had a small market garden, and sold lettuce and other produce to friends and neighbours.

Despite the appearance of domestic solidity there were difficulties. Granddad suffered from bouts of malaria, fits of hiccoughs and vomiting, and chronic indigestion which the Repatriation doctors accepted was due to his war service and led to a cholecystectomy in 1951.[58] I recognize him in Janet McCalman's description of returned soldiers who were 'by turn

remote or morose or who shouted all the time'.[59] His temper could be short and his moods unpredictable. The objects of his hatred were often distant – bosses like Murdoch, the Liberal and Country Parties, and the Labour 'turncoat' Joe Lyons, who joined the National government during the Great Depression.

His family also bore the brunt of his temper. At home he was the bully, and his victim was Lin – according to my father a rather dreamy boy, who used to fall asleep in the chook yard. Lin went missing on one occasion when my father was around seven. Granny and dad searched for him and eventually granddad left his shift at the station, joining the search with his station lamp. They found Lin asleep in the privet hedge, and granddad dragged him inside for a beating. The experience made a deep impression on my father, who hid under the dinner table as granny tried to get between father and son.[60] As a teenager, Lin's reluctance to shave infuriated granddad, who thought it unmanly, and when Lin was in his late teens granddad laid into him, but Lin refused to fight back.

Granddad's temper always had to be managed, and over the years granny, my father and Lin formed an alliance which protected them but probably also inflamed granddad's resentment. But she also let granddad vent his spleen, accepting that there were grounds for his anger.[61] Scates and Oppenheimer note that there was often a close relation between physical and psychological complaints among returned soldiers.[62] This fits with my grandfather, whose bilious attacks, outbursts about the bosses and the Establishment, and moods at home were connected. According to the Repatriation records he used to go out to the garage when he had indigestion, and writhe around in pain on the floor.[63] Perhaps the attacks felt harder to contain indoors and he preferred to endure them alone.

In 1934 the family left Frankston for the tiny settlement of Watchem in the dry region of the Malley, 300 miles from Melbourne. The motivation was partly financial: granddad had been reduced to the rank of Operating Porter during the Great Depression, and wanted to regain the post (and status) of Assistant Station Master. The life suited him, as they used to go on family walks, and he could go rabbiting and collect and chop his own firewood. Being up country was exciting for the boys, who had grown up with their father's outback stories, although the move was possibly also daunting for my eight-year-old father, who recalls the local boy who suffocated after falling into a grain silo. But for granny, who was as my father put it a 'city girl', it was 'cruel really'. The house was primitive, with poorly lined walls, no sink in the kitchen, and an outside dunny. Dust storms, exacerbated by the over-use of super-phosphates, were a regular occurrence: 'Mum's bane was, of course … all the washing … erm … would have to be done again. Everywhere! Get in your ears, eyes … oh yeah, it was terrible'.[64]

In 1937 they came back to Melbourne, as granny wanted to be closer to her bereaved mother. They bought a 'moderne' brick bungalow at 35 Kent Road in Surrey Hills, eight miles east of the city centre and a couple of miles

up the road from Makarina and Camberwell station, where granddad was now Assistant Station Master. (Fig. 4) Initially developed in Melbourne's boom in the 1880s, Surrey Hills expanded again when the tramline was extended after the First World War. This was literally a move up in the world, the eastern edge of the suburb commanding views over Melbourne. Its interwar houses had generous plots with private gardens, and grassed nature strips with deciduous trees. Its respectability was signalled by its numerous local parks with 'nostalgic plantings' of oak and elm, and street names – Sussex, Essex, Durham, Kent, Arundel, Middlesex, Suffolk – which, like the neighbouring suburb Canterbury, evoked the English countryside celebrated by war poets like Thomas and Sassoon, and lent an air of establishment.[65]

Living in Surrey Hills and working in Camberwell, granddad found himself at the heart of Conservative suburbia. The region was staunchly Methodist, with strict controls on drinking and prostitution, and rigid observance of the Sabbath.[66] It was from the Canterbury Returned Soldiers' League Memorial Hall, located between Camberwell and Surrey Hills, that the Liberal Party leader and later Prime Minister Robert Menzies would launch his election campaigns during the 1940s.[67] His choice was hardly accidental, for there was a close relationship between conservatism, citizenship and the memory of war in suburban Melbourne. As Paul Fox has shown, many of the architects of interwar housing were veterans. Raised in nonconformist suburban homes like Makarina, they emerged from the conflict with a sharpened impetus to improve social amenities, and an equally strong commitment to private housing as a brake on radical politics.[68] The hope expressed by Menzies in a radio broadcast at the height of the Second World War, that every Australian might one day possess 'one little piece of earth with a house and a garden', may well have had its basis in the suburban lives of his returned-soldier constituents in Camberwell and Surrey Hills.[69] My grandfather would never become the Liberal voting citizen that Menzies and the architects of suburbia wished to create, but he took advantage of the social opportunities afforded by his environment. Shortly after moving to Surrey Hills, he and my grandmother put my father forward for the scholarship exams at Wesley, Melbourne's premier Methodist school, where he completed his secondary education.

With his family now firmly settled in Surrey Hills, granddad made a last attempt to get back to the bush in the early 1940s, when Stan MacCallum decided to sell up his soldier-settlement plot in Lemnos (named after the island off Gallipoli). Stan's wife had left him, and like many soldier-settlers he could not manage the orchard without her help. Tempted as granddad was to take over Stan's plot – this was the life he had tried to sign up for thirty years earlier – he might also have recognized the risk to his own marriage. My father imagines the disappointment granddad must have felt in passing up the opportunity: 'that would have been a life that he would have loved, compared with the life he had'.[70]

**Fig. 4. Front garden at 35 Kent Road, 1960s. The porch with its square pilasters, and the cream brickwork across the façade, exemplifies the 'featurism' decried by Robin Boyd in *The Australian Ugliness* (1960).**

**Fig. 5. Spring 1973, soon after our parents' separation. My younger sister Cath sits on granny's knee in the backyard at Kent Rd, framed by the cherry blossom. Photo by the author.**

## SUBURBAN DREAMING: LATER LIFE

We never used the front door when we visited granny-granddad's (as we used to call them), but would walk down the path beside the house to the back garden, where you would often find granddad. In many respects their garden evoked the English ideal. There were rose bushes in beds along the front of the house and in the backyard a cherry tree bloomed magnificently in spring (Fig. 5). There were luscious green lawns back and front that had to be watered, fed and weeded. Granddad used a push mower, a Qualcast Model H with fourteen-inch wheels that were recommended for Australian conditions. In a typical colonial cross-over, the company's advertising made much of its English pedigree (Sheffield steel cutters and ball-bearings), but it was actually manufactured in Melbourne's Western suburbs.

My grandparents' garden was unlike ours out in the large new Jennings estate of Bundoora on Melbourne's northern fringe, which, following the trend among Australia's middle-classes in the late 1960s, was planted with native trees. To us the garden at Kent Rd seemed English, but it was Australian in its own way.[71] A prolific lemon tree greeted the visitor on entering the backyard, around which porridge scraps were thrown each morning to encourage the birds.[72] The backyard was a productive place, with a large area, fenced with tea tree saplings, where granddad grew his vegetables.

To mark his retirement from the railways in 1961, granddad and granny embarked on a year-long world trip. They spent most of their time in England, granddad finally making the journey that his brothers, brothers-in-law, and many of his Gallipoli comrades had made in 1914–18. The trip was in part, I think, a way of announcing their respectability in retirement, the English tour still being for Australians 'the paradigmatic means by which to acquire social status through holidaying'.[73] The cost – carefully calculated by my grandfather at £4,886-15s-4d – was equivalent to around five and a half years' average annual earnings in 1961.[74] Granny and granddad mixed in genteel social circles on the *Arcadia* and *Canberra*, and in England granddad arranged a ceremony to lay a wreath at the Camel Corps memorial at Embankment, taking tea in his club with the old Camelier (and incumbent Old Man of the Upper House) Lord Winterton. Their tour took in Kent, Stratford and the Welsh borders, regions that for some came to define the national landscape during the First World War, though granddad – ever the market gardener's son – kept an eye on the productive capacity of the land. On the bus to Canterbury they 'passed along cherry + apple orchards. Vegetable gardens + hops fields. The country is undulating, the scenery full of the English rich greenery, old + new villages'.[75] As Australia's middle-class gardeners began to turn to bush landscapes for inspiration, in later life granddad and granny seemed to go the other way, enjoying more English influences.

At the same time however, they had more access than ever to the bush; if now as tourists. Granddad learned to drive in the 1950s (by then more than

half the adult population had a driving licence), and he acquired a baby Austin. As young children we went on holidays by car around the Mornington peninsula, the South Gippsland coastal resorts of Inverloch and Lakes Entrance, and Beechworth. The holidays stopped after an argument between my father and grandfather over dad's decision to allow me to bring my new football to the restaurant table on my tenth birthday.

Our grandparents took my mother and their three grandchildren on more ambitious vacations after my parents separated in 1972, hoping perhaps to restore to us something of the adventure that we had enjoyed in our annual family holidays at Wilson's Promontory. We drove to the Grampians north-west of Melbourne, Marysville and the Acheron Way, and Jamieson, not far from where granddad had worked as a boy. This was not the outback but the 'soft accessible bush' of waterfalls, verdant glades and big timbers, places that featured in coffee table books like Hurley's *Victoria: a Camera Sketch*.[76]

Granddad was always drawn to the deep bush, however, and there were rows on these holidays when he struck off the main road onto dirt tracks. He had a billy in the boot, and on one occasion made us billy tea with gum leaves, but granny's thermos was far more convenient. Remote though these car journeys may seem from the First World War, its legacy presented itself occasionally. Playing hide-and-seek among the gums with my sister during one of our morning tea stops, granddad warned me to keep my head down.

Relations between granny and granddad were sometimes stretched by his loyalties to his comrades, particularly to Stan MacCallum, who had moved to Melbourne after selling his soldier-settlement farm. Every Sunday morning, granddad would pick Stan up from the other side of the city and bring him back for lunch, and over time granny grew fed up with having to play host. Shared war pasts drew old soldiers into easy comradeship: on board the boat to Canada in 1961, granddad was delighted to discover that the two men on deck chairs either side of him were veterans, noting in his diary that fortunately, granny got on well with their wives.[77]

In old age, Granddad spent less time gardening and more time commemorating and writing about the war. Like his gardening, in some ways his attitudes to the war became more conservative. As the number of surviving veterans dwindled, he was more willing to take part in events like the wreath-laying at the Embankment, and keep company with men he might once have shunned. He began attending Anzac Day marches in the 1950s, and in the mid 1970s even accepted an invitation to join the march on horseback with the Australian Light Horse Brigade, into which the Cameliers from Australia, New Zealand and France had been absorbed. At around the same time, he was transposing the contents of his 'black book' into two memoirs of Gallipoli and writing a memoir on the Camel Corps, all of which maintained the anti-establishment spirit of the Digger and scorned the pretensions of the 'trouser'd, legging'd and Spurre'd' gentleman of the Light Horse'.[78] His account of the Camel Corps took the form of

a bush romance. Based on the log of dates he had kept in his diary, it plots No. 2 Company's movements through the Libyan and Syrian deserts, the chronology of travel giving a structure to the memoir which contrasts with the more fragmentary recollections of Gallipoli. It bears many of the hallmarks of the Australian legend: mateship, the rough ways of the men, chafing under sometimes unfair and unreasonable authority, exotic encounters with the Bedouin and soldiers from around the world, and curiosity about native customs, flora and fauna. The projection of the bush legend into granddad's account of the Middle-East helped salvage something from the humiliating defeat of Gallipoli:

> There were a lot of naughty boys in No 2 & many of us were not amenable to discipline, especially the Bull. S. type, but in danger, battle, and Blood bath, we had great confidence in one another & fully upheld the traditions of Anzac. We felt that we paid a little off the debt we owe the boys we left behind.[79]

Ensconced in Kent Rd, granddad's bush dreamings in old age were unlike those of Sydney's disenchanted bohemians a century earlier. His suburban home gave him the space and peace from which to reminisce about the war, and his wife supported his remembering. His imaginings were not so much a backward projection from a troubled present, as a way of addressing a troubled past, reimagining the war through the bush legend of movement and fellowship. Some of those troubles, however – like the mother who took against him and walked out on the family – predated the war. Granddad's personal feelings of injustice found a social and political location in the identity of the Digger, and were expressed in animosity towards officers, bosses and politicians who had failed to fulfil their responsibilities.

* * *

'Every return was different in its way', remarks Stephen Garton in the opening sentence of *The Cost of War*, his study of veterans in twentieth-century Australia.[80] It is not only the experience of war, or the circumstances of life afterwards, that makes every return different, but also the fact that each soldier goes to war with his own social and psychological history. This been a personal account of one soldier's return, but the sets of relations that it explores between prewar life, postwar domesticity and the bush can illuminate other returns. Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life* is in part an elegy to his wife, who had died shortly before he wrote his memoir. He had had, he said, 'two lives, miles apart. Before we married I was on my own. It was a lonely, solitary life – Evelyn changed that. After our marriage my life became something which was much more than just me'.[81] Facey's mother had deserted him as a boy, and like my grandfather, Facey was an

itinerant labourer before the war. Like my grandfather, Facey met his wife whilst recovering from the war, and in the interwar years both men travelled between the bush and city in search of work, eventually finding stability in public-transport jobs that kept other people on the move. Both ended up living in the suburbs, with wives whose domestic management ensured their family's comfort. 'My wife was truly a genius when it came to making money stretch', remarked Facey.[82] It was not only the rank-and-file soldier who sought solace in domesticity, and who juggled the pleasures of home and bush: C. E. W. Bean wrote the first two volumes of the Official History of the war between 1919 and 1924 in his bush property at Tuggeranong near Canberra.[83] He and Ethel, a nurse, were married in 1921 by A. E. Talbot, who had been a chaplain at Gallipoli.

Not all returned soldiers struck this kind of balance between roaming and domesticity, however. Frank Hurley met his twenty-two year-old bride-to-be while photographing the Australian troops in Cairo, and married her after a ten-day courtship.[84] He left for England straight afterwards and was absent for five weeks, this separation being 'the first of many across their married life', as his biographer puts it. Writing to Douglas Mawson after the war to ask if he might be planning an expedition to New Guinea, the Pacific or 'obscure Australia', he described himself as 'married but unanchored; and still long [ing] for another bout with the foe and to tread again the glamours [sic] of unbroken trails'. His children recall that on the occasions when he was not travelling, he was either working or gardening and was 'at best, an occasional father'.[85] Hurley was away from his Sydney home for six years during the Second World War, and in the last year of his life went 'gallivanting' on an 11,000-mile photography trip around Australia.[86] War service, Hurley explained in his 1955 best-seller *Australia: a Camera Study,* had stimulated his desire to 'portray the glory and life in our homeland', while his journeys around the country were a means of 'renewing former wartime comradeships'.[87] Hurley's photos from the 1950s and 1960s capture the domestication of the bush in shots of caravaners, camping grounds, caravan parks and tourist buses. But he remained a lone adventurer, and by the 1950s his wife had tired of his photography and travel.[88]

* * *

On the face of it, the bust-up with which I began this article had nothing to do with the Great War. Yet this was a domestic drama that my grandparents had played many times before, and it brought familiar feelings to the surface. We had come to an emotional as well as a geographical crossroads at Yarra Glen, with one way the bush and the freedom afforded by roaming, the other way the solidity and confinement of the suburbs.

Our argument was also borne of generational change. In the Gallipoli memoir granddad writes that 'I learned early to dislike Army discipline &

the officers & NCO's, who administered it'. He had been the one to issue the orders in his own home after the war. In his late seventies, after my parents' separation, he had helped me, a teenage boy, carry my new responsibilities, a situation familiar to him, consciously or unconsciously, from his own adolescence, when he had returned to Beechworth following his mother's desertion to help look after his siblings. But now I was approaching my majority, while his eyesight was deteriorating and he had chronic angina. A few months before our trip to Beechworth, he had mixed up the brake and accelerator when trying to park the P76. The car had surged forward into the double-brick walls of the house, its back wheels digging deep furrows into the lawn, until I ran to the driver's window and turned off the ignition. Having felt the house shake with the impact, and discovering a large crack in the plaster of their bedroom wall, Granny appeared at the front door shortly afterwards, unable to contain herself. He thought he had had a turn, but she was not at all sympathetic. Shaking her head, all she could say was 'all this time, and nothing has ever gone wrong with the house'. He had pushed through the veneer of solidity which she had preserved through almost half a century of careful housekeeping and tactful interjection.

In defying granddad, it felt as if I had crossed a line from which there could be no return. Seen in terms of his war, I was now acting in the high-handed and callow manner of a junior officer. But in another sense the boot was on the other foot. He was the one with blind authority, issuing unreasonable orders, just like his officers during the war. I suspect that he experienced my determination to drive down the main highway to Melbourne as a kind of mutiny, and perhaps it was.

This article has drawn on personal memory to compose an account of the Great War's presence across three generations of one family. Its vantage point is singular, but prompts me to reflect on other accounts of afterwards as we approach the centenary of the war's end. The domestic eruptions in the Roper family cannot be reduced to the war. They reflect an era in which paternal authority was often overbearing, and when physical violence between fathers and children was more accepted. At the same time, the war could sometimes be found in those eruptions, exposing the contract that my grandparents struck in this returned-soldier partnership, where the husband and father's authority in the home was a counterpoint to the discipline and oppression of work. When policy makers extolled the recuperative virtues of domesticity, it was perhaps not just because of the emotional stability but for the authority it offered. The postwar trope of the hen-pecked husband sits at odds with our family's memories of a man who ruled the roost.

My family's experience leads me to question the chronology as well as the emotional economies of return. In earlier social histories of the First World War (including my own), return was sometimes treated in a closing chapter, but the war 'brought home' is now emerging as a topic in its own right. Studies of disabled and traumatized soldiers reveal the role played in their care by children as well as wives, and how the war's damage could travel

across the generations.[89] My family's story, however, points towards less dramatic effects. Unlike my father, I never heard granddad's feverish shouts during his bouts of malaria, or saw him writhe around on the floor from the stomach pains that were a legacy of his war service. The war was in the background, apparent in our grandparents' stories, granddad's preoccupation with writing, his medals and war souvenirs, his participation in Anzac Day marches, and the occasional meet-up with comrades. Frightening though granddad's stories were, and frightening as he himself could be, our experience was not one of lives shattered by war. I knew nothing of the perceived therapeutic value for the veteran of the places and pastimes I enjoyed as a child: a solid brick house, a back garden good for sustenance, play and contemplation, and trips to the bush. My warm memories of Kent Rd are testament in itself to what those in the veteran's circle had absorbed after the war: Lin, the victim of granddad's scapegoating, Stan, who had to find a way to stay clear of his temper, and my grandmother, who had stood between them all. '[M]y father's rage', wrote my father in 2013, 'affected us all.'[90] Of course we cannot know how far it was the war which spawned my grandfather's furious outbursts, and how far they were due to hardship, neglect and his own bullying as a boy. Equally, while gardening and the love of bush-roving form part of the cultural history of interwar recuperative pastimes, the market gardener's son and itinerant labourer had worked these soils before the war.

It is sometimes possible to catch a glimpse of how the First World War was brought home to historians, in introductions or epilogues which seek to account for the author's interest in the field.[91] For some, this connection provides the emotional and analytical drive of the study. Nowhere is Patsy Adam-Smith's 1978 classic *The Anzacs* more powerful than when she describes her memories of growing up with the sight and smell of war wounds, and puzzling over what might have caused her father to risk his life in a war which everyone knew to be horrific. 'You were too close, nearness blinded, deafened, stupefied you with its immensity', she comments, a feeling which in later life prompted a wish 'to answer my own perplexities' through immersing herself in letters and conducting interviews with First World War veterans.[92] More recently, drawing on newly-released Repatriation files, Alistair Thomson has described the impact on his family of his grandfather's mental-health problems after the war, and the stigma which surrounded it, and Anthony Fletcher has written about the impact of his grandfather's death on his grandmother and his mother, who was a small child at the time.[93] Reflections such as these suggest that, a century on, intimate histories of return are not yet 'lost to historians' after all, as some have feared, but may yet be found on our doorsteps.[94]

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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51 'Application for vocational training', 5 Aug. 1920; 'Application for employment and sustenance', 25 Jan. 1921, Repatriation files: NAA, B73, H81128.

52 Garton, *Cost of War*, p. 3.

53 R. H. Roper, WW1 interview, p. 13.

54 Barry Humphries satirizes the suburban heritage of the First World war in his character 'Sandy Stone', who lives in Gallipoli Crescent, Glen Iris: Chris McConville, 'At Home with Sandy Stone: Conservation in Camberwell', *Australian Historical Studies* 24: 96, 1991, p. 88.

55 W. S. Roper interview, Sept. 2015, p. 6.

56 R. H. Roper, Great Depression interview, p. 1.

57 R. H. Roper, Great Depression interview, p. 2.

58 'Report from Caulfield Repatriation Hospital', 15 Dec. 1949: Repatriation files, NAA, B73, H81128.

59 McCalman, *Journeyings*, p. 81.

60 W. S. Roper interview, Sept. 2015, p. 8.

61 I asked my father who granny would side with when pushed:

I mean, she tried to be loyal to both . . . er . . . but obviously, you know, when Dad had a go at Lin, Dad was much . . . I mean, he was mature, Lin was still not physically . . . you know, at 18 . . . I mean, he could've hit back but, you know, there was no match, so . . . you automatically . . . Lin was the one who was attacked, so you automatically . . . your sympathies went to Lin. (W. S. Roper interview, Sept. 2015, p. 58.)

62 Bruce Scates and Melanie Oppenheimer, *The Last Battle: Soldier Settlement in Australia, 1916–1939*, Cambridge, 2016, esp. chap. 6.

63 'Medical Case Sheet', Nov.–Dec. 1949, Repatriation files: NAA, B73, H81128.

64 W. S. Roper interview, Sept. 2015, p. 31.

65 Lovell Chen Pty Ltd, 'Surrey Hills and Canterbury Hill Estate Heritage Study, 2012, p. 4; McConville, 'At Home with Sandy Shore', p. 90; Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920*, ed. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, London, 1987, pp. 62–88.

66 Davison, 'The Suburban Idea', p. 832; McConville, 'At Home with Sandy Stone', p. 89.

67 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 Nov. 1949.

68 Paul Fox, 'Architects and Garden Suburbs: the Politics of Melbourne's Interwar Suburban Landscapes', *Landscape Review* 16: 2, 2016, p. 8.

69 Quoted in Fox, 'Architects and Garden Suburbs, p. 8.

70 W. S. Roper interview, Sept. 2015, p. 59.

71 Holmes, 'Gardens', p. 153.

72 Cath Roper interview, Sept. 2016.

73 White, *On Holidays*, p. 89.

74 Average yearly wage rates for a worker in Victoria in 1960 were 349s 8d. Statistical Office, *Australian Year Book 1961*, p. 426. I assume that the trip was paid for through a combination of granddad's retirement lump sum and granny's inheritance from the Fisher family.

75 R. H. Roper diary, 3 Aug. 1961.

76 Newton, 'Domesticating the Bush', p. 78.

77 R. H. Roper diary, 30 Sept. 1961.

78 R. H. Roper, Camel Corps memoir, p. 17. Granddad sent a version of the Gallipoli memoir to the British military historian Peter Liddle, and it is now housed in the Liddle Collection at Leeds: https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/26377/roper_r_h?selection=Liddle%20Collection&query=roper&collectionGroup=Liddle%20Collection&resultOffset=1, accessed 18 March 2018. A second Gallipoli memoir is in the author's possession.

79 R. H. Roper Camel Corps memoir, pp. 13–14.

80 Garton, *Cost of War*, p. 1.

81 Albert Facey, *A Fortunate Life*, Melbourne, 1981, p. 322.

82 Facey, *Fortunate Life*, p. 309.

83 'Historian Charles Bean's legacy and Tuggeranong time honoured', *Canberra Times*, 30 July 2016.

84 Alasdair McGregor, *Frank Hurley: a Photographer's Life*, Camberwell, Victoria, 2004, p. 193; *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hurley-james-francis-frank-6774, accessed 18 March 2018.

85 McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, pp. 207, 286.

86 John Thompson, *Hurley's Australia: Myth, Dream, Reality*, Canberra, 1999, p. 10. Hurley, his publisher commented, 'knew Australia as intimately as most men know their front gardens'. Frank Hurley, *Australia: a Camera Study*, 5th edn, Melbourne, 1967, p. 5.

87 Frank Hurley, *Australia: a Camera Study*, 1st edn, Melbourne, 1955, p. 5.

88 McGregor, *Frank Hurley*, p. 398.

89 Crotty and Larsson, *Anzac Legacies*, p. 6; Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*; Marina Larsson, '"The Part we do not See": Disabled Australian Soldiers and Family Caregiving after World War 1', in Crotty and Larsson, *Anzac Legacies*; Michael Roper, 'Subjectivities in the Aftermath: Children of Disabled Soldiers after the Great War', in *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War*, ed. J. Crouthamel and P. Leese, London, 2016, pp. 165–91.

90 'Stan's Life Story – Frankston', 2013, p. 4. Author's possession.

91 Garton, *Cost of War*, p. viii; Beaumont, *Broken Nation*, pp. 1–4; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War, London*, 1998, pp. xix–xxiv; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Manchester, 2009, pp. 314–21.

92 Patsy Adam-Smith, *The Anzacs*, Melbourne, 1991, p. 6.

93 Thomson, *Anzac Legacies*, esp. chap. 10, 'Searching for Hector Thomson', pp. 257–80; Anthony Fletcher, *Life, Death, and Growing Up on the Western Front*, London, 2013.

94 Jen Roberts, 'The Front Comes Home: Returned Soldiers and Psychological Trauma in Australia during and after the First World War', *Health and History* 12: 2, 2015, p. 21.

## ABSTRACT

This article traces the legacies of the First World War across the twentieth century and three generations of my family in Australia. For my grandfather Robert Henry Roper, an itinerant labourer before the war, marriage in the early 1920s and domesticity helped contain the physical and mental toll of military service in Gallipoli and the Middle East. Yet the identities of family man and bushman remained in tension throughout his life. The husband and father living in suburban Melbourne continued to dream of the bush and make plans for his return. In old age, those escapes became literary: my grandfather's 1970s memoirs depicted his service with the Imperial Camel Corps, patrolling the Sinai and Libyan deserts, as a form of bush wandering. The history of the war in the Roper family suggests the limits of some histories of trauma, aftermath and intergenerational transmission. Each soldier went to war with his own personal past, and war alone did not determine the nature of return. Nor did it always shatter bodies and minds: its aftermath was often less total but more enduring than some historians recognize. The long Great War was to be found in everyday domestic life. My own suburban Melbourne childhood in the 1960s and 70s, half a century after the conflict, was still lived in its shadows.