Anzac Centenary Queensland 2014–2018
Marking 100 years since our involvement in the First World War

Stories from staff
This publication is a Queensland Government Department of Housing and Public Works initiative.

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This publication can be viewed online at My HPW http://mydpw/corp/AnzacCentenary/Pages/home.aspx

Cover image: Gunner Andrew McDowell (with newspaper), Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey, 1915 (Australian War Memorial, P03557.004)

Above right: Celebrations in London at the end of the First World War, 1918 (Photo by Corporal Roy McClure, Australian Imperial Force, Great Uncle of staff member Norrie McClure)

Above left: Private Tom Davies (Grandfather of staff member Brooke Davies), British Army Medical Corps, transporting patients after the sinking of Germany’s battleship, the Bismarck, 1941
Foreword

From 2014 to 2018, Queensland and Australia will commemorate the Anzac Centenary, marking 100 years since our involvement in the First World War. The Centenary is an opportunity to reflect upon and learn more about our military history.

The Department of Housing and Public Works has had significant involvement in wartime and post-war activities in Queensland. From building a military hospital in Townsville during the Second World War to addressing a severe housing shortage in its aftermath, the department and its staff have risen to the challenges that war brings to a nation.

Our staff have also made personal sacrifices. During the First World War, 15 employees enlisted for active service abroad. Five were killed in action, whilst two were wounded and gassed.

Today, these courageous former employees, along with tens of thousands of veterans of the First World War, only exist in our and their families’ memories.

In the remarkable and moving tributes on the following pages, current staff share their own family’s experience of war and military service. In their own words they pay homage to the bravery, resilience, service and sacrifice of their loved ones.

I hope these stories provide you with a greater insight into war, its costs and its impacts, and most importantly the families who have been affected by it.

Neil Castles
Director-General
Department of Housing and Public Works
Warrant Officer John ‘Buster’ Salter 1924–1996

Grandfather of Alisha Jones, Senior Communication Officer, Corporate Services

My pop, John ‘Buster’ Salter, served for a total of 34 years, which included service in two armies and active service in three hostile theatres of conflict. He attained Warrant rank twice, a truly remarkable achievement.

John joined the British Regular Army in 1938 at the age of 14 years and three months. He was enlisted as a bugler and a scholar and was paid two shillings and sixpence a week. When war broke out he was too young for active service, but eventually worked his way into the first Airborne Division as a paratrooper and was paid sixpence more a week. When one of Buster’s mates told him about a movie that he was going to see about a bridge in Arnhem (Netherlands), Buster replied, “No, I’m not going to see it, I was in the original production”.

After the war, Buster saw service in Singapore, Palestine, India and Iceland and became a warrant officer. When talking about sharing a tent in Iceland for two years with another soldier, he was asked what the fellow’s name was. He replied, “I don’t know, we had a job to do. I don’t think I asked him. It was too cold to talk.”

After migrating to Australia in 1952, Buster enlisted as a private soldier, volunteered to serve in the Korean War and arrived just after Armistice was signed.

In 1956, he felt that he was getting a bit long in the tooth for infantry and transferred to Ordnance. He was posted to Bandiana, Victoria, for the next eight years where he coached many a tug o’ war team to victory.

In 1967, Buster, now a sergeant, headed for Vietnam where he served for three years. After returning to Brisbane in 1970, he left for Singapore, his last overseas posting and final rank as a Warrant Officer Class 2.
Private James Mackie 1895–1915

Great Uncle of David Mackie, Principal Appeals and Complaints Officer, Corporate Services

My great uncle, James Mackie, was part of the 6th Battalion Australian Imperial Force. He enlisted when he was just 19 years old.

The 6th Battalion was among the first infantry units raised in Australia during the First World War. It was recruited from Victoria and together with the 5th, 7th and 8th Battalions, formed the 2nd Brigade.

The battalion was raised within a fortnight of the declaration of war in August 1914 and embarked just two months later. After a brief stop in Albany, Western Australia, the battalion proceeded to Egypt, arriving on 2 December.

James took part in the Anzac landing in Turkey on 25 April 1915. Nine days later he was shot in the chest and died.

When I think of the sacrifice my great uncle and others made at Gallipoli, I remember his oath on enlistment.

“I James Mackie swear that I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lord and King in the Australian Imperial Force from 30 November 1914 until the end of the War...and that I will resist His Majesty’s enemies and cause His Majesty’s peace to be kept and maintained; and that I will in all matters appertaining to my service, faithfully discharge my duty according to law. SO HELP ME GOD.”

Today, James lies quietly on a beach cemetery at Gallipoli overlooking the water. His tombstone reads “Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom”.

Top left to right: Private James Mackie’s final resting place, Gallipoli, Turkey, 2012; Private Mackie’s grave, Gallipoli, Turkey, 2012

Above: Originally buried with three others marked by a wooden cross, Private James Mackie is now honoured with his own grave, Gallipoli, Turkey, 2012
Warrant Officer Lawrence Woods 1922–

Father of Carolinda Van Uitregt, Principal Asset Registration Officer, Strategic Asset Management

During the Second World War, my father, Laurie Woods, was a navigator and bomb-aimer. His rank was Warrant Officer in the Royal Australian Air Force’s 460 Squadron of Lancaster aircraft.

During a bombing run over Germany in late 1944, Dad’s Lancaster was hit by heavy flak which entered the cockpit and lodged in the face of his captain, Ted Owen. Captain Owen kept the Lancaster on target until Dad released the bombs, before slumping unconscious and sending the plane into a dive.

Back at their base in Binbrook, England, the plane was reported as shot down over the target and last seen in a power dive.

In fact, Dad quickly made his way to the cockpit and took control over the Lancaster, despite having no flight training. He flew the aircraft back to England where Captain Owen was assisted back to the pilot’s seat for the landing. During the flight, the air speed indicator and artificial horizon failed due to icing but Dad kept on, straight and level and headed for home. An excerpt from Dad’s award recommendation sums it up.

“At no time was the Bomb-Aimer flustered and he displayed skill, initiative and determination of a high order. His course flying and ability to maintain height were extremely accurate and in consideration of his inexperience the whole performance was remarkable.”

Dad was recommended for an Immediate Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross and was promoted (commissioned) to Flight Officer. Dad’s bravery and coolness under pressure had saved him, his crew and their aircraft. His Immediate Award of a Distinguished Flying Cross was granted by King George VI “for outstanding service in the face of the enemy.” He returned home to Australia soon after as his tour of operations was complete.

Dad never spoke about his war service when I was growing up although I met Captain Ted Owen and saw his scars. My parents bought a history book of the war that mentioned the story and Dad’s actions.

“Top left to right: Staff member Carolinda Van Uitregt as a child with her father Laurie Woods, Brisbane, 1963; Carolinda with her parents, Laurie and Barbara, Government House, Brisbane, 2008"
Dad didn’t march as a veteran on Anzac Day for many years after the war, preferring to march with the town band in Ballina, New South Wales, where he played trumpet and I played saxophone. He and Mum moved to Brisbane in 1980 and reconnected with some of his squadron mates. He began marching with them each Anzac Day and joined the 460 Squadron Association (Qld), eventually serving as their president for many years and attending many reunions.

Dad is a sprightly 92 years young. He has written several books of his war experiences and continues to promote the contributions of Bomber Command in the Second World War. He has been awarded the rank of Chevalier in the French Legion of Honour which “honours veterans who fought for the liberation of France”.

This year he was also recognised in the 2015 Australia Day Honours List as a Member of the Order of Australia “for significant service to veterans through the preservation of military aviation history”.

Top left to right: K2 aircraft ‘Killer’; Warrant Officer Lawrence Woods (bottom right of group), Binbrook, England, 1944; Warrant Officer Woods, Royal Australian Air Force, 1944
Trooper Neil Thorne 1894–1921

Great Uncle of Geoff Abel, Senior Housing Officer, Townsville Housing Service Centre

**Marriage is more dangerous than war**

My great uncle, Neil Thorne, enlisted in the military on 5 October 1915 in Rockhampton, initially serving with the 5th Australian Light Horse Regiment (ALHR).

He embarked for Egypt on 11 March 1916, taken on strength with 2nd Double Squadron on arrival.

Neil was transferred to the 17th Company Imperial Camel Corps on 8 February 1917 and was at Beersheeba for the now famous charge by the 4th ALHR on 31 October 1917.

Neil transferred to the well-known 4th ALHR on 27 August 1918 and remained with that regiment until returning home.

Neil returned to Australia on 3 September 1919, recommencing work as Head Stockman on ‘Lestree Hill’, an outstation of the main ‘Surbiton’ Station near Alpha, Queensland.

In the months that followed, Neil met a girl who was employed as a housemaid on ‘Surbiton’ and they became engaged.

The wedding was set to take place in Rockhampton. However, in an unlikely twist of fate, Neil drowned on 2 July 1921 while travelling to the ceremony. He was swimming his horse across the Belyando River in a spot known as George’s Hole when the tragic accident occurred.

Neil was buried on ‘Surbiton’ Station where he now lies peacefully.

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Top left to right: Neil Thorne on his return to ‘Lestree Hill’, Alpha, circa 1920; Staff member Geoff Abel; Trooper Neil Thorne, Australian Light Horse Regiment, Rockhampton, 1915.
Captain Acting Major Bert May 1906–1980

Grandfather of Jason Black, Planning and Program Manager, Building and Asset Services

**The sandy track**

My grandfather served in the Second World War. When I was younger, he would often tell me stories from those days. One story, in particular, sticks in my mind.

Whilst serving overseas during the Second World War, it was part of the daily schedule for the servicemen, including my grandfather, to walk the same sandy track from the camp to the beaches and back again.

My grandfather said these times were good as he was surrounded by friends who served with him—having a joke and telling stories to take away memories of war. He said it was an honour to walk with his mates along this sandy track.

On this one particular day as they were returning back to camp, the group passed an area of the track no different to any other—an area they had passed hundreds of times before. Shortly after, there was an explosion on the track. One of my grandfather’s mates had stepped onto a landmine and was killed, along with several others.

I remember my grandfather saying you could never take life for granted as it could change in the blink of an eye.
Sergeant Andrew McDowall 1891–1964

Grandfather of John Lawrence, Senior Civil/Structural Engineer, Building and Asset Services

Andrew McDowall, my grandfather, served in the 7th Battery, 3rd Brigade, of the Australian Expeditionary Force in the First World War. According to his Certificate of Discharge dated 19 March 1918, he completed three years and 209 days of military service, with 146 days served in both Gallipoli and France.

Andrew was the second son of Peter Dowell, a sea captain from Sandness in the Shetland Islands, and Alexandrina Mackay, the daughter of a forester from the Wolfelee Estate, Roxburghshire, near Jedburgh in the Borders district of Scotland. Peter and Alexandrina met and married in Brisbane.

Andrew was born in 1891 in Townsville when his father worked for Burns Philp, the trading company, as a labour recruiter bringing South Sea Islanders to the cane fields in north Queensland. The family changed their name after Peter Dowell separated from his wife and went to live in Daru in Papua, Indonesia.

My grandfather enlisted in the military in August 1914 and was one of the many young men on the ‘Rangatira’ that left King George III Sound at Albany on October 1914, as part of the first Anzac convoy of ships to Gallipoli. He served there in a gun battery in 1914, was wounded in 1915 and evacuated to Cairo. In November 1915, he returned to Gallipoli and remained until the final evacuation.

In 1916, my grandfather was sent to France via Marseilles and served at Fromelles. Promoted to Sergeant, he was wounded a second time in 1917 and recovered in England.

On 14 August 1917, he was awarded a Military Medal by King George V for action in France. Due to recurring malaria, he was finally repatriated to Australia, returning to Brisbane in February 1918.

My grandfather returned to his employment as a warehouse department manager with S. Hoffnung and Company, a large wholesale department store, located in Charlotte Street, Brisbane. He had first commenced employment there as a 12-year-old washing bottles. He rose to be one of the chief salesmen for the company.

My grandfather married Marjorie Scott from Wynnum in 1921 and they had two children, Betty Lawrence (nee McDowall) and Ian McDowall. Ian, an artist, served in the Parachute Rigger Battalion in the Second World War but was killed in an aeroplane accident in the mountains of West Papua on his way home in 1945. He was 23.

Betty married Denis Lawrence, an airline pilot with Trans Australia Airlines, in 1947 and I am their eldest son. Both I and my brother David lived with our grandparents during our schooling and the bond between our grandfather, Pa, and us was strong and loving.

My grandfather was a kind, generous and amusing man with a great sense of humour. He, like nearly all servicemen, never spoke of his time in Gallipoli or in France. Those years were best never discussed.
The Greber brothers


Relatives of Allan Davis, Senior HR Consultant, Corporate Services

Three of my relatives participated in the First World War. They were brothers and the grandchildren of German migrants who came to work in the vineyards of the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, and of British convicts convicted of petty crimes and transported to the Colonies for their sentence. They were part of the 15 children of Christian Greber and Mary Ellen Collins of Rous Mill near Lismore.

Ernest Greber enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 30 August 1916. He was 27 years of age and a farmer of Rous Mill. His unit was the 31st Battalion 8th Australian Field Ambulance and during the war they were stationed on the Western Front.

In 1918 he was awarded the Military Medal at Warfusée-Abancourt, France for showing an absolute disregard for his personal safety during battle—he not only carried out his own men but men of the 2nd Australian Division who were either wounded or deceased. He set a wonderful example of courage and endurance to his comrades.

On 30 September 1918, a party of 12 stretcher bearers, including Ernie, was sent forward to the battle for the Hindenburg Line, as casualties were mounting up. Ernie was shot in the leg and therefore returned to England before being transported on a hospital ship to Australia in January 1919.

Albert Greber enlisted in the Australian Army on 3 December 1915. He was 25 years of age, married with a young son, and was the publican of the Linville Hotel in Queensland. His unit was the 3/49th Battalion Australian Imperial Force and he arrived in Egypt in June 1916.

On 24 September, he transferred to the 41st Battalion 3rd Reinforcements and proceeded to the Western Front in France. It was a bitterly cold winter and their time was spent repairing the parapets. At night, scouts patrolled no man's land and by day they dodged sniper attacks.

Sadly, Albert was killed on 5 January 1917. The day his brother Jim received word of his death, a baby was born to Jim and Lilly Greber. They named him Albert Greber in his uncle’s memory. He went on to serve in the Second World War and has just celebrated his 98th birthday. His uncle is buried at Bonjean Military Cemetery, Armentieres, France.

Alfred Greber enlisted in the Australian Army on 29 August 1916. He had only just turned 16 but he gave his age as 18 years and 1 month. His unit was the 52nd Battalion and he was a runner, taking messages from one command to another.

He was wounded in October 1917 in the leg and arm, and embarked to England for treatment.

In February 1918, he returned to his unit in France. At Viller Brettoneaux, the Germans made a counter attack and the action was most severe. On 25 April 1918 (Anzac Day), Alfred and his friend Edward O’Neill, also a runner, jumped into a shell hole but a shell burst inside the hole killing Alfred and wounding Edward.

Alfred is today remembered with honour at Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France. He was just 17 years old when he died.
The Cahill family


Signalwoman Doreen Cahill 1924–2013

Family members of Frances Cahill, Manager – Contract Management, Housing Services

Service and sacrifice

My grandfather, Mick Hoppe, served in the Australian Army in France and Egypt during the First World War. His lungs were irreparably damaged after being gassed with mustard gas in 1918 and he was honourably discharged in 1919. He suffered ill-health for the rest of his life but he provided home and protection to his wife and six children.

Both of my parents served in the army during the Second World War. My father, Jack Cahill, was a commando serving in New Guinea between 1939 and 1945, and my mother, Doreen Cahill, was a teleprinter operator serving in Australia between 1942 and 1945.

My parents were married in 1949 and had five children, of whom I am the youngest.

My father’s full military records were not available to us until 50 years after the war; such were the missions he had been part of. We were amazed to learn of some of the exploits he had been involved in, including his time on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea. One particular episode required him to winch down in mountainous terrain to retrieve documents from a downed aircraft.

My mother served in Australia as a signalwoman and, amongst other things, was involved in the sending of confidential military information and the interception of enemy transmissions. One part of her job that she found heartbreaking was sending, via teleprinter, letters home from soldiers serving overseas written on materials such as matchbox covers and bits of toilet paper.

My father passed away from a heart attack aged 51 and his death was attributed to injury/illness suffered during his war service. He was survived by Doreen and five children ranging in age from 6 to 16. My mother was given
War Widow status after my father’s death and was given medical and financial assistance during her life.

My mother passed away aged 89 in 2013 after suffering ill-health for a few years. As a family, we were thrilled when we were given permission for Mum to have her plot next to Dad’s at Nudgee Cemetery—it is maintained as a war grave along with his.

For me, Anzac Day has always been a day of reflection on the place Australia holds on the world stage and how that position was dramatically initiated 100 years ago. It is a day to commemorate the sacrifices made by many in fighting for principles sometimes obscured by time; a day when the returned servicemen and women are honoured for their commitment and service.

My mum marched in Anzac Day parades for most of her life, proudly wearing her medals and those of Dad’s.

One of the many values that was instilled in me from my parents and the one that still resonates in my adult life is the principle of service to others. This has been an enduring lesson that I have never unlearned and have passed on to my daughters. There is always something that can be offered to help someone else—be it a smile, an ear to listen, a bed for the night or a seat at the dinner table.

I have many memories of my family—my father bringing home a kitten and putting it in his pocket (briefly) for me to find and my mother hand-sewing clothes for the dolls she had made for us. The joy and pride of having the best truck collection passed down from my brothers and the freedom to build stuff from bits of wood under the house at Oxford Park. This is the stuff that made me who I am and I am privileged to be the daughter of this pair of ordinary Australians who did extraordinary things.

Top left to right: Sergeant Jack Cahill, Kokoda Track, New Guinea, circa 1943; Staff member Francis Cahill; Gunner Mick Hoppe, Australian Army, 1915; Signalwoman Doreen Cahill (rear left), Australia, circa 1943
My grandfather, Glen Kennedy, was one of five children born and raised in Croydon, Queensland. In September 1915, at 20 years of age, he joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) as a private with the 9th Infantry Battalion.

While a grocer by trade, my grandfather was also a crack shot with a rifle and hoped to enlist as a sniper. Once it was discovered, however, that he knew Morse code, he was placed with the 49th Battalion Signals Corps.

In March 1916, my grandfather was stationed in Egypt, where the 49th Battalion was raised as part of the “doubling” of the AIF. Approximately half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 9th Battalion, and the other half fresh reinforcements from Australia. The composition of the 9th and 49th Battalions was predominantly men from Queensland.

In August 1916, my grandfather was taken on strength to England where he was stationed for almost a year. In June 1917, he embarked to France, into the trenches of the Western Front.

Later in the year, the focus of the AIF’s operations moved to the Ypres section of Belgium. There, the battalion fought in the Battle of Messines and Polygon Wood. In the early hours of Anzac Day 1918, the 49th participated in the now legendary attack to dislodge the enemy from Villers-Bretonneux.

After the 49th Battalion was disbanded in May 1919, my grandfather returned home to North Queensland. He continued work on his shooting skills, winning many awards and trophies across Queensland.
It was at a Brisbane rifle range where he met and fell in love with Ursula Jones, who later became his wife (and my grandmother).

My grandfather passed away when I was just seven years old. He never spoke to us kids much about the war, but my father recalls his stories of repairing communication lines in no man's land while trying to avoid enemy fire. I wouldn't recommend it these days, but I remember taking a disarmed hand grenade to school for 'show and tell' which he'd brought home as a souvenir.

Of my grandfather's brothers, the youngest, Colin Kennedy, enlisted at the age of 19 as a private in the 1 to 8 Reinforcements. Colin was taken on strength on 1 April 1919, arriving in France just a month before the Armistice. He was lucky to avoid active combat in the First World War, but remained in the forces for a number of years after.

Kenneth Kennedy, my grandfather's older brother, had moved to the United States in 1911 before the outbreak of the war. A mechanic by trade, he enlisted in the US Army Aviation Section Signal Corps where he repaired and installed airplane motors. Ken also survived the war.

The photo to the left of all three brothers is very special to my family. It was ‘Photo of the Week’ at the State Library of Queensland during Anzac Day week in 2013.

**Lieutenant Ivy “Bartz” Schultz MBE (c) 1912–2006**

On a side note, the Kennedy brother's niece (daughter of their sister Ivy) went on to have a very proud military accolade of her own. Ivy (Bartz) Schultz MBE (c) was a lieutenant with the 109 Casualty Clearing Station during the Second World War.

She was mentioned in despatches for her “exceptional service in the S.W.P. (South West Pacific) area”. Later, she was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal (the highest international distinction a nurse can achieve).

In 1977, she received a Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for her services to nursing. Bartz, as she preferred to be called, passed away in 2006. Her contribution to nursing continues in the form of the book she wrote ‘A Tapestry of Service: The evolution of Nursing in Australia. Foundation to Federation, 1788-1900’.

*Top left to right: Colin, Kenneth and Glen Kennedy;*  
*A sketch of wild poppies growing in front of Mont Kemmel (Artist: Kenneth Macqueen. Image: Australian War Memorial, ART93950, circa 1917-1918)*
Captain Jesse Huggins 1896–1982

Father of Simon Huggins, Senior Property Project Officer, Building and Asset Services

In the early 1900s, my father, Jesse Huggins, was employed by the London County and Westminster Bank in England. The chairman of that bank was Viscount Goschen. My father certified in 1915 that he would enlist in the British Army as long as he could be posted to the 2/5th Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment), of which Viscount Goschen was the commanding officer.

On 17 November 1915, my father was posted to the Tonbridge headquarters of the Buffs in Kent. One anecdote he used to recount to me was that they had a real rotter of a training sergeant-major, and on the night before their embarkation to France, whilst the sergeant-major was sleeping, they cut off one side of his moustache, knowing that they would probably never see him again.

After embarkation to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force, my father fought in various battles on both the River Somme and later in the Ypres Salient area of Belgium.

In later years, presumably because the horror of the carnage was so bad, my father would reminisce very little about those harrowing times in the trenches. If anyone in the family complained about minor inconveniences he would tell them that they did not realise how comfortable they were, and that they would not complain if they had served in the trenches.

My father did mention that he suffered from trench feet. Whenever he returned to London, he would go to a Turkish bath to rid himself of the mud that had oozed into every pore.

In 1917, he was transferred to the Royal Army Service Corps Transport Unit, after being wounded by poison gas shelling at the infamous Hill 60 of the Ypres Salient.

My father recalled one particular event during his time with the Transport Unit when he was issued with a motorcycle. Whilst surveying parts of Belgium, he hit a shell hole and his motorcycle fell down into the hole. He was slightly injured, but later went back to the area to find that engineers had filled in the hole, along with the motorcycle. It’s likely that the motorcycle is still lying underneath that Belgium road!

My father’s colourful military service continued until 1921.

He kept in touch with his original commanding officer, Viscount Goschen, who went on to pursue a political career, becoming Governor of Madras and Acting Viceroy of India.

My father’s life was anything but ‘ordinary’ during a time of unbelievable hardship and horror. Now that his generation have passed away, I feel it is important that these stories are preserved for posterity and as a record of the most horrendous human conflict in the history of mankind.

My own military experience is extremely limited, the highlight of which must be the occasion when I rowed an admiral and a commander of the Royal Navy around our friend’s lake in South Devon, England during a party on their estate. I remember trying to interpret their orders of “to starboard or to port” and getting it confused on whether it was to my right or left facing the stern of the small boat!

I will be attending the centenary Anzac Day service at the Masonic Memorial Centre, Brisbane which was built in memory of those masons who fell in the First World War.

I feel that this will be a particularly poignant time and place to reflect on those brave soldiers who paid the ultimate sacrifice.
Leslie

(Relative of Corporate Services staff member)

All fair in love and war?

My grandpa, Leslie, enlisted in the Australian Army in July 1940 and was posted to Singapore with the 2/26th Battalion in August 1941.

He and his battalion were captured as prisoners of war on 15 February 1942. He would remain a prisoner of war for three and a half years, residing in the Changi prison, and being sent to work on the Burma Railway in Thailand.

Shortly after his capture, his wife Norma (my grandmother), was told that Leslie was missing in action and presumed dead.

Norma moved on with her life, and took up with a new man. They had two children within a couple of years. Her second baby, my mother, was born in December 1944.

Out of the blue, Leslie came home to Brisbane in August 1945, suffering dysentery, starvation and lice infestation. Norma had not been told that Leslie had been found in the Changi prison.

Leslie and Norma resumed their marriage, with Leslie adopting Norma’s first born child, but not her eight-month-old daughter. The baby girl, my mother, was raised by her paternal grandparents, believing until she was a teenager, that her mother was dead.

She was finally accepted into the family at age 16.

Top left to right: Army camp at Mt Isa during the Second World War, 1941 (John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Neg196240); A leaflet dropped over Changi prisoner of war camp, Singapore, 28 August 1945 (Australian War Memorial, 128460)
Private John MacDonnell 1897–1918

Great Uncle of Rosemary O’Hagan, Analyst, Office of the Registrar

Call of the Empire

John MacDonnell, my grandmother’s brother, enlisted to fight in the Great War because “the call of the Empire was too loud and insistent, and the quiet life of the analyst had to be exchanged for the arduous one of the soldier”.

The youngest son of Irish immigrants, John worked as an analyst with the Queensland Department of Health. His father was very active in soldier recruitment which may have put pressure on John Edward to support the war effort.

On 13 June 1917, at age 20, John embarked the HMAT Hororata bound for England where he undertook military training. While on leave, he visited his mother’s family in Galway, Ireland, who told him he needn’t go to war and could change his mind. Apparently a few Australians had done just that, and were living near Galway Bay. Needless to say, John went to war.

In late 1917, he wrote to his family from camp.

“Very heavy fighting has taken place and reinforcements are needed. I think I will be well in it by Christmas. The fighting has gone against Germany and there is an opinion amongst men from the front that the war will be over soon, Germany defeated.”

He was subsequently sent to France as a reinforcement for the 4th Pioneer Battalion on 23 January 1918. The evening before John first went into the trenches, an elderly French priest heard his confession and administered communion.

On the night of 4 April, the Pioneers were in no man’s land, and one of them had left a spade in the area. The Germans were using it as a ranging marker to bombard the Allied lines, so a call was made for volunteers to retrieve it. John, the youngest of the group, volunteered. He ran out to retrieve the spade and was wounded by a German shell in the left thigh and right ankle. He was invalided to a Canadian hospital but died the next day, aged 21. He is buried at Doullens Communal Cemetery Extension No. 1, Doullens, France.

My grandmother, Madeleine, wrote about receiving the news of his death.

Her sister’s fiancé arrived at Madeleine’s workplace and told her to go home.

“I asked why, even though I knew straight away that my brother had been killed. He said, ‘Your mother’s not well.’ I went and told my boss that I had to go home. It was terrible. I can still hear my poor father crying. My mother always prayed that he’d never kill anyone. She felt that his death so soon after going into the trenches provided some compensation in that he didn’t have to kill a German. My sister was getting married the week after we got word of John’s death. She had received a letter from him saying that if anything happened to him not to postpone the wedding. I was bridesmaid at a very quiet wedding with only two families. We were all crying more or less.”
Charles (aka ‘Bluey’) Woodlock, my great, great, great uncle’s son, was described as young, of medium height, with a lively disposition and a bright auburn complexion. I’ve never been able to find a photo, not even in the family.

Bluey was part of the Battle of Hill 60—the last offensive action of the campaign on the Anzac-Suvla front at Gallipoli. In 1924, Charles Bean, Gallipoli veteran and Australia’s official war historian, described the battle fought on Kaiajik Aghala (Hill 60) on 27 August 1915 “as one of the most difficult in which Australian troops were ever engaged”. Like many of the actions fought at Gallipoli, the battle was confused and inconclusive.

Most of Bluey’s brigade had been at Gallipoli barely 48 hours before being sent into this battle. They were ordered to “assault with bomb and bayonet only”.

The attack was undertaken by the New Zealanders, the Connaught Rangers Irish Regiment, and the 18th Battalion Australian Imperial Force who had made attacks on the same feature a week earlier.

The bombardment, although heavy by Gallipoli standards, was particularly ineffective. Australian infantry from the 18th Battalion charged uphill over broken ground into withering Turkish fire, towards the southern trenches on Hill 60 and the communication and fighting trench that linked it to Hill 100. For the second time in less than a week, they were cut down in waves.

On that same day, a bomber party from the 18th Battalion was attacked, and the entire sap (trench) was taken out. Bluey’s body was never found or recovered, and he still lies in the hills of Gallipoli. He is honoured by a plaque at Lone Pine Memorial in Turkey.

The summit of Hill 60 was never wrested from the Turks but, by holding the seaward slopes, the Anzac flank was secured and the link with Suvla opened. In 1920, Major Fred Waite, New Zealand’s historian of the Gallipoli campaign wrote, “The struggle near Kaiajik Aghala was the last pitched battle on the Peninsula”.

Bluey was one of 8,709 Australians and 2,701 New Zealanders who lost their lives at Gallipoli.

Personally, I’ve always had a profound appreciation for our defence forces. The Last Post always makes me tear up and reminds me of Bluey, his sacrifice and his courage.
The Monk brothers


Grandfather and Great Uncle of Adam Monk, Management Accountant, Corporate Services

Lewis Monk, my grandfather, was born in Taree, New South Wales, in 1897. At 18, he enlisted in the Australian Army with his older brother and was part of the 34th Battalion. Back in the day, they would have been colloquially known as a ‘fair dinkum’, being men who, knowing what to expect after the carnage of Gallipoli, still signed up for military service.

My grandfather and great uncle departed Australia in August 1916 and arrived in France in November 1916. It would only be a few months later that my grandfather was wounded for the first time on 16 March 1917 at Armentieres, France. Recovering in hospital, he returned to his unit on 28 April 1917.

A little over a month later, my grandfather fought in the Battle of Messines. You may be familiar with this battle—it features in the 2010 movie ‘Beneath Hill 60’ which is about Australian miners who tunnelled under the German’s position and created an explosion that could be heard as far as London.

The explosion on 7 June 1917 is what triggered the start of the battle, although the battalion had come under German gas attack before that.

My grandfather was wounded in action on the first day of that battle. He took six months to recover and returned to his unit in January 1918. There were over 50,000 casualties as a result of the Battle of Messines.

My grandfather’s brother was wounded in the second Battle of the Somme in August 1918 and due to the damage sustained, was discharged from the army as medically unfit in early 1919.

My grandfather actively served with the 34th Battalion until it disbanded in 1919. He received a letter from King George V thanking him for his services to a grateful mother country and wishing him a speedy recovery and return to normal home life.

I never knew my grandfather as he had passed away on 25 April 1966 (Anzac Day) from pneumonia. He was known as a quiet man but whenever he spoke people would listen.
My grandfather, Jack Lutteral, was in the 61st Battalion of the Australian Army. On the outbreak of the Second World War, the battalion initially undertook garrison duties in Australia. In 1942, they were deployed to New Guinea where they took part in the famous Battle of Milne Bay.

In late August 1942, unable to move further down the Kokoda Trail, the Japanese decided to make a second line of attack on Port Moresby. On 25–26 August, they landed at Milne Bay on the extreme eastern tip of Papua, about 370 kilometres from Port Moresby. Although under great logistical stress with the fighting on the Kokoda Trail, Allied forces were ready for them. Unlike the protracted Kokoda campaign, the Battle of Milne Bay ended in just over 10 days and the Japanese were defeated for the first time in a major land battle.

Field Marshal Sir William Slim summed up the battle in his account ‘Defeat into Victory’.

“Australian troops had, at Milne Bay, inflicted on the Japanese their first undoubted defeat on land. Some of us may forget that, of all the Allies, it was the Australians who first broke the invincibility of the Japanese Army.”

My grandfather was not granted leave to come home for the birth of his first child, my father, in 1942. However, he got to meet Dad when he was six months old after being sent back to Australia to recover after being shot through the ear by a Japanese bullet. A couple of centimetres to the right and the bullet would have hit him in the head.

My grandfather didn’t stay home long and was sent back to New Guinea a few weeks later to rejoin the 61st Battalion.

In late 1943, the 61st Battalion was withdrawn back to Australia for a period of re-organisation and training before being deployed overseas again in late 1944. This time they were deployed to Bougainville, where the Australian 3rd Division had taken over from the American garrison. The battalion joined the drive towards the Japanese stronghold at Buin in the south of the island.

Jack came home from the war in 1945, having just been promoted to the rank of Sergeant.
Private Alfred Hall 1913–1995

Grandfather of Brooke Davies, Communication Officer, Corporate Services

My granddad, Alf Hall, was a veteran of the Second World War. In April 1941, at the age of 28, he enlisted in the Australian Army after four years at home in Western Australia as a trooper with the 10th Light Horse Regiment.

Granddad became part of the 2/6th Battalion whose catch phrase was “nothing over us” after a well-known advertising slogan “nothing over 2/6” for Coles variety stores.

He was deployed to the Middle East, where he helped bolster a heavily depleted 2/6th Battalion. The battalion moved from Palestine into Syria but in March 1942, they were withdrawn from the area to help face the threat posed by the Japanese in the Pacific. A period of garrison duty was undertaken in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) between March and July 1942, where the battalion defended the island from possible Japanese attack.

It was here Granddad made the most unexpected of friends—a monkey. He and his curious companion soon became inseparable, and I’m sure it was this loveable creature that made my grandfather’s time in Ceylon bearable.

After the threat of attack passed, Granddad’s battalion returned to Melbourne where training began in preparation for the rigours of jungle warfare. By July 1943, Granddad was in New Guinea fighting a determined Japanese outfit.

At the time, my grandfather was engaged to be married to my grandmother, Patty Taylor, who was serving in the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force in South Australia. Granddad was keen to marry his fiancé but communication was difficult so he sent a telegram which simply said, “Get leave, getting married.”
Walking down the aisle at a time of hardship meant Gran could only afford to hire a wedding dress, with only two available for her to choose from.

After a brief honeymoon, both Gran and Granddad returned to their military duties. On leaving Western Australia on the train, my grandmother would later recall how she and my grandfather were assigned separate carriages, so the only time they could see each other was when the train went around a bend, and they put their heads out the window to wave to one another.

Granddad’s return to the frontline in New Guinea was short-lived as he fell ill with malaria and was repatriated back to Australia for treatment. Whilst in occupational therapy, Granddad made a little pair of blue booties—dreaming, I guess, of returning to an ordinary life with a wife and children.

Granddad recovered from his illness, although like a lot of soldiers, he suffered recurrent bouts of fever for some years after.

On his mother’s passing, Granddad completed his military service in 1944 and returned home to help his father on their beloved farm. He did get his wish of having a family, raising three children and living a peaceful life in rural Western Australia until his death in 1995.

He almost never spoke about his experience of the Second World War.
Major Paul Stanton

Previous role – Operations Officer 8th/9th Battalion, Australian Defence Force
(resigned after 23 years of service)

Current role – Operations Manager, Procurement Transformation

**Kibeho Massacre 1995**

No matter how hard I scrubbed, the blood would not come off my hands and uniform. It had dried to act as a constant reminder of what I and my fellow Australian Army comrades had endured. Witnessing the deaths of thousands of Rwandans, the screams and tears of men, women and children, and the now widely acknowledged inaction of the United Nations, was almost too much to bear.

During the week of 18–24 April 1995, I was stationed at Kibeho, Rwanda, as part of an Australian peacekeeping operation to support the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda. The mission was to aid the implementation of the Arusha Accords, signed on 4 August 1993, which were meant to end the Rwandan Civil War. Australia’s main role was to provide medical support to the country.
The Kibeho Massacre occurred in a camp for internally displaced persons near the small town of Kibeho, in south-west Rwanda, on 22 April 1995. Australian soldiers serving have consistently estimated that at least 4,000 people in the camp were killed by soldiers of the military wing of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), known as the Rwandan Patriotic Army.

When we arrived in Kibeho we were the heroes, the great white saviours. When we left, we felt like failures. We could do nothing but watch the events unfold. To the RPF it was a game, big tough men with weapons, picking on the weak and frail, killing at random and generally high on ganja.

There were bodies everywhere. I would have already moved up to 30 dead to the mass grave site when I came across a woman who was lying under a pile of rubbish. After clearing away the rubbish, I rolled her over onto her stomach. It was then I noticed that she had a baby strapped on her back which is how all the mums carry their children over there. The baby had no head and the machete was still lodged in the mother's back. Being the father of two beautiful children, this sight drove home the fact of how lucky we are in Australia.

After the massacre, I returned to Rwanda’s capital city, Kigali. It was the only night I have cried for what I had witnessed. I cried for those we could not save, for the friends and mates that felt as helpless as I had, and I cried for my two children in the hope that they would never have to succumb to or witness the same horrors.

How do you describe the looks on the faces of a mother who has lost her children, a father who has lost his little princess, a family that has been torn apart?

The team of 33 Australians were finally rotated out of Kibeho on 24 April with a new detachment of soldiers replacing us. The following day was Anzac Day and there was going to be a small ceremony held in Kigali for the Australian contingent and a few selected VIPs. As the sun rose and the Last Post played, I looked up and standing directly across from me was the commander of the RPF.
Private Hugh Webley 1888–1975

Grandfather of Lisa Edwards, Architect, Building and Asset Services

A changed man

Private Hugh Webley was my granddad. I was only six when he died aged 87 but I remember him as a very, very old man who didn’t smile much. It was only later that I began to understand why.

Granddad joined up in Brisbane in 1916 to fight in the First World War at the age of 28, his occupation listed as “labourer”. He was part of the 26th Battalion, a battalion made up of mostly Brisbane and Tasmanian recruits. He had spent his early adult years working as a jackaroo and farm worker, first in Canada and the United States, then in western Queensland.

Both my grandfather and grandmother were from large families who emigrated from England and built homes on what was then newly settled land in the suburbs of Bardon and Ashgrove in Brisbane. Nanna would remind us that as sweethearts, she and Granddad would walk long distances to meet each other at the Jubilee Terrace bridge over Ithaca Creek.

Granddad and his battalion fought in the trenches of France and Belgium in places like Amiens and Villers-Bretonneux, and the 26th Battalion was also credited with capturing the first German tank taken by Allied forces, ‘Mephisto’.

Granddad’s life changed forever only three months before the war ended. He suffered a catastrophic bullet wound to his leg when his unit advanced from their trench towards enemy lines in Amiens, France. As the rest of his unit moved forward, he lay in the dirt in incredible pain and anguish for a long time, waiting for the stretcher bearers to bring him to safety. When he finally made it back to the Allied lines, he was in a casualty ward for four days before his leg was amputated below the knee and he was shipped back to England. I can only imagine what kind of conditions they operated in.

When he returned to Australia after being discharged in May 1919, like so many other men who came back from those places of suffering in Europe, Granddad was a changed man.

He and Nanna married and had three children, but he was plagued with bouts of depression and anger, on top of the pain of walking with a prosthetic leg.

During the Great Depression, Granddad worked as a bootmaker and repairer from his workshop in the cool timber-battened space under the family’s lovely home on Ashgrove Avenue. He also got a job at the prosthetic limb factory which made his wooden leg. There were two wooden legs hanging in the hall cupboard at Nanna’s place and when the adults were busy, my brother and I would open the cupboard door and regard them with silent fascination.

Granddad was a stern father who shunned his family’s Methodist religion, and disliked music in the house which must have been a disappointment to Nanna who was a talented pianist before the war. To cope with the pain of his leg, he became increasingly dependent on medication. The large Webley family and my Nanna’s family, the Carrs, must have done their best to give him support and, for the most part, my mother and her sisters had a happy childhood with her grandparents and lots of loving aunties living nearby.

Anzac Day is also my birthday, but it is always tinged with an underlying sadness for me. My Dad fought in the Second World War in New Guinea and Borneo with the New South Wales Lancers, but that’s another story, for another day.

On 25 April, I think of Granddad, and Dad, and the spouses and families that nurtured the men and women who returned from those conflicts with their lives so profoundly altered.
BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

The Queen and I wish you God-speed, and a safe return to your homes and dear ones.

A grateful Mother Country is proud of your splendid services characterized by unsurpassed devotion and courage.

George R.I.

Top left to right: Hugh and his wife, Annie Webley, Brisbane, circa 1956; A letter from King George V to Private Webley at the end of the First World War, 1945
Major Kevin Gillett 1946–

Father of Elizabeth Green, Support Officer, Housing Services

From a proud ‘Army Brat’

I used to be called an ‘Army Brat’. This was just part of life, travelling across Australia, with a father who served in the military. What a life it was though—seeing the Nullabor twice, the Great Ocean Road, going to new schools, making new friends, the list goes on.

The only downside was being the youngest of a family of seven and having to sit backwards in a car from Townsville to Perth with a golden retriever puppy, and two years later with a bigger golden retriever on a ‘bus seat’ in a Range Rover.

This was my life, for the first eight years anyway. Every two years we packed up and moved.

My dad joined the army in 1963 as a 17-year-old, eventually serving as Corporal Patrol Commander in Recce Platoon 7RAR in Vietnam.

His tour started in February 1970. In July that same year, on one of his leave periods, he flew 8,000 kilometres from Vietnam to Australia to get married. His groomsmen picked him up at the airport, he got changed in the car, and my mother finally got to see him for the first time since he had left, at the end of the aisle on their wedding day. Dad returned to Vietnam after seven days leave and continued to write to Mum every day until he came home in 1971.

In 1986, my dad decided, after having five children and being posted in Sydney, Townsville, Perth and Brisbane, to finally retire. He had served 25 years in the Australian Army.

I remember this day well. I got a new red bike, and got to see Dad more.

I come from a family with a long military history. My great great great grandfather, born in 1844 to a British soldier and his wife serving in what was then Van Diemen’s Land, brought the family to Albany, Western Australia in the 1890s. Three of his sons went to the Boer War with two serving in the Permanent Coastal Artillery Battery in the Forts overlooking the town.
One of my favorite stories is about my grandfather, Leslie Gillett (1917–1994). In 1939, my grandfather, a leading hand, went to Asia and back protecting troop ships and convoys on board HMAS Sydney and later, on board Mine Sweepers.

In November 1941, my grandfather was taken ill and sent to the Flinders Naval Hospital for treatment. The next day HMAS Sydney sailed without him and sunk with all hands! What a feeling knowing that if my grandfather had been healthy, I wouldn’t be writing this today.

Anzac Day holds many memories for me. I remember my dad, after retiring from the army, opening a shop called the ‘The Regimental Shop’ close to the Enoggera Army Barracks. This is where he started war medal mounting. The shop eventually moved back home and with five children on hand, Dad recruited us to be the secretaries.

We never saw much of our parents when Anzac Day was approaching as they were ‘sewing’ medals for weeks. I luckily got to hold some copies of the most highly distinguished medals, a Military Cross and a Victorian Cross. The countless male and female veterans that walked into our home and shared stories will never be forgotten.

Dad went back on his second ‘tour’ of Vietnam in 2004 with my older brother. I was so proud of him for going back and now his stories about Vietnam also involve my brother.

Dad continues to be part of the veterans’ community—whether it’s organising military memorabilia auctions, giving the Dawn Service address on Anzac Day at Enoggera, or holding the flags and leading his battalion on the Anzac Day Parade with us proudly watching on.

There’s a whole other story on my mother’s side of the family, but that’s for another time.

Private Walter Messenger 1896–1917

Uncle of Graham Messenger, Manager Major Projects, Strategic Asset Management

On April 10 this year, it was the 119th anniversary of my Uncle Walter Messenger’s birth in Nelson, New Zealand.

My uncle enlisted in the First World War while living in the Empire Hotel in Blenheim, New Zealand. We believe that Walter was a shepherd at Molesworth Station in South Marlborough at the time.

Walter enlisted on or about 17 April 1915. It seems fairly certain that when he enlisted he gave his date of birth as 10 April 1895, when in fact he was born on 15 April 1896. We can only assume he added a year to his age in order to enlist. In truth, he was 19 at the time of enlisting.

Walter embarked for Egypt as part of the Canterbury Infantry with the 6th Reinforcements of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) on 15 August 1915, with less than four months’ training. He arrived in Mudros on the island of Lemnos, Greece, in late September 1915. By November, he was fighting at Gallipoli in the weeks before the evacuation. By April 1916, he had arrived in Marseilles headed for the fighting on the Western Front.

The New Zealand Division moved to the frontline trenches near Armentieres on 13 May 1916. It went into action on September 15 at Flers, then Morval and Le Transloy. It left the Somme on November 10 and spent the winter on the River Lys. After the Battle of Vimy Ridge (early April 1917), the New Zealanders’ next major action was the Battle of Messines, starting on 7 June 1917.

My uncle’s actions in this battle resulted in his award of a Military Medal (MM).

It was at Messines that, according to the citation published in the London Gazette on 16 August 1917, Walter showed the courage that earned him the Military Medal. The citation states that Walter “ably assisted” Lance-Corporal Harry Waterworth Minnis in laying out the necessary lines to establish communications during the attack on the first day of the battle.

“We had many breaks in the lines but [Walter Messenger] was always ready to accompany Lance-Corporal Minnis and mend the breaks, in many cases under heavy shelling from the enemy. Thus our communications were kept up and it was largely due to those two men.”

Walter was wounded on 22 July 1917 as the NZEF prepared a feint attack on Lille, France in the early skirmishes before the third Battle of Ypres (Battle of Passchendaele) and died on the same day.

Walter is buried in the Pont d’Achelles Military Cemetery near Nieppe, France. In 2007, my wife and I had the privilege of paying tribute to Walter Messenger at his grave.
Private Albert Horrace Smith 1894–1916

Great Uncle of Margy Smith, Senior Business Support Coordinator, Building and Asset Services

My great uncle Albert, known as Horrace, was born in 1894 in Waterloo, New South Wales. He enlisted for service in the First World War, aged 21.

Horrace sailed on 5 January 1915 from Sydney aboard the RMS Osterley destined for the battlefields of France via Alexandria, Egypt. He departed from Alexandria on 19 June 1916 aboard the HT Caledonia and arrived in Marseilles, France on June 29.

He died just a few weeks later in Fromelles.

The message my great grandparents received after his death simply said, “Pte. Horace, 4526A. 54th Battalion. Australian Infantry was killed in action 19th/20th July, 1916. Age 22”.

He was buried on 19 July 1916 in Ration Farm Military Cemetery, La Chapelle-d’Armentieres, France.

Last year, my son Ben and I had the privilege of visiting the Australian War Memorial. We found Horrace’s name on the honour board and placed a poppy near it. We were honoured and grateful that he fought for our country.

I hope someday to visit the final resting place of my courageous great uncle Horrace.

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Below: Private A.J.H. Smith honoured at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 2014
Air Sergeant Dorothea Calder 1923–

Mother of Vanessa Byrne, Application End User Administrator, Strategic Asset Management

Dorothea Calder is my mother and she was born Dorothea Berry-Robinson. The Second World War broke out when she was 16 and living in Queenstown, South Africa. She was just 17 when she decided to enrol in the South African Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) with friends.

My mother's first night in the WAAF was spent in huge army huts. She says that it was very frightening. The next day she was posted to a radio college in Tempe, Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State, South Africa. The camp was half built and security guards monitored the area as there were only 20 females to 5000 airmen in the camp next door.

The daily routine during this time included roll call at 6am (in freezing conditions) and PT (physical training) before returning to shower and dress for parade. The women would be led by a pipe band to the parade ground. After parade they went to lectures and were taught Morse code and radio procedures.

After six weeks of training, my mother was posted to the town of Port Elizabeth to a Royal Air Force (RAF) camp based at the airport. She worked as a radio operator and would communicate with crash boats, aircraft and all RAF stations based in South Africa. The crash boats were sent out to look for survivors when radio calls were received advising of ships or planes shot down.

Mum worked day and night duty, 64 hours a week. She really wanted to become a Cipher Officer (writing and deciphering code) but was told that she was too young. She did do Met duty, which involved taking down the weather reports in Morse code.

My mum first met my dad at the RAF base. He was a RAF flight trainer from England who trained air gunners and radio operators. He was not liked much as he was the person who forced the airmen to go back up in planes after they had crashed or been shot at. Dad would send messages using what they called Bagdad Morse. Everyone else hated working with his code as they couldn't read it, but Mum was able to. Dad would also come into the radio station to confirm flights.

In 1943, my parents married. Two years later, the war ended. For her service, my mum was awarded Honours in the Victory New Year Honours list and she received a certificate from King George VI which was signed by General Jan Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa. She also received a small protea to attach to her ribbon for her radio work in the WAAF.

At the end of the war, my dad left South Africa for England to finish his 10-year contract in the RAF. My mum followed on a troop ship which travelled in total blackout and had no seats to sit on. She says it took a long time to get to England. There were 15 females in each cabin so it was very crowded. The ship was a dry ship but a tankard of rum was smuggled on board which was consumed on the journey.

My mum and dad stayed in England until my dad's contract ended. They then returned to Africa and lived in what was known as Southern Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe. In 1986, my parents immigrated to Australia.

Today, my mother lives with me and still enjoys an active life.

Top left to right: Air Sergeant Dorothea Calder, South African Women's Auxiliary Air Force, circa 1943; Air Sergeant Calder outside her bungalow at the Artisan Women's Auxiliary Air Force camp, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, circa 1943
Private Albert Watson 1900–1960

Great Great Uncle of Bart Watson, Indigenous Engagement Officer, Housing Services

My great grandfather’s brother, Albert Watson, was a veteran of the First World War. Up until now, I didn’t know a lot about his service in the war so it has been fascinating to learn about his experience and to get to know a little bit more about my family’s history.

Albert was an apprentice pastry cook at the outbreak of the First World War. On 11 May 1916, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force at Ballarat in Victoria and became a private in the 39th Battalion. He was just 15 years old but recorded his age as 18 years old.

Albert was sent to France where he was wounded in action on 12 October 1917. He was transferred to the 14th General Hospital in Wimeraux, suffering gunshot wounds to the left eye and ear. It was not the last time he would see the inside of a hospital as he suffered a number of ailments during his service.

Interestingly, when reading Albert’s war record, I noticed it mentioned that he committed a crime. It turns out the “crime”, for which he was punished, was that he dared to walk out not wearing a waist belt or his colour patches.

Despite all of the hardships Albert faced during the war, he made it through, and left England on 21 June 1919, arriving in Australia on 13 August 1919.

For his service, he received the Star, Victory and British War Medals.

Above: Private Albert Watson, Australian Army, circa 1916
Private Francis (Frank) Newton 1894–1983

Great Grandfather of Kate Shorter, Principal Communication Officer, Corporate Services

Mutiny on the Western Front

My “Poppy” Newton was born in 1894. The beginnings of his life were fraught with difficulties. At the age of just four years old his mother died and he and his two siblings were placed in foster care. After some years, his father learned that the foster father was an alcoholic and would beat the children. By the time Pop was a teenager, he had returned to live with his father.

Pop joined the Australian Army on 1 May 1916, aged 22, and was recruited into the 37th Battalion, 4th Reinforcement, Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

After training in both Australia and Britain, the battalion moved to France in November 1916. Within a week, it had begun to occupy trenches on the Western Front, just in time for the onset of the terrible winter of 1916–17. During this time, Pop’s division was heavily involved in raiding the German trenches. It was in these trenches that Pop was gassed, which made him blind in one eye and left him with minimal sight in the other.

Pop fought in the first major battle of the 37th Battalion at Messines in Belgium, from 7–9 June 1917. This battle was a successful British assault on the Messines-Wytchaete Ridge, a strategic position on the Western Front, which had been held by the Germans since late 1914. The offensive operation was the product of long preparation, detailed planning and sound training.

The 37th Battalion fought in another two major attacks in this sector and Pop was wounded on several occasions. Belgium remained the focus of the 37th Battalion’s activities for five months, until it was rushed south to France in late March 1918 to meet the German Army’s Spring Offensive.
In September 1918, several battalions were ordered to disband to provide reinforcements for others. The 37th was one such battalion. Its commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Story, wrote letters to all of his superior commanders (including the Prime Minister) arguing against the disbandment. He was then dismissed for questioning the order.

The men of the battalion (including my Pop) subsequently mutinied against the order to disband. Mutiny was one of only two charges for which AIF soldiers could be executed.

The British General in charge said “they are disobeying orders – put them into the field and shoot them”. Lieutenant General Sir John Monash said “they are Australian soldiers and we do not treat our men that way – they will be punished in other ways”. No charges were ever laid for the disbandment mutinies. Seemingly to avoid the application of the death penalty, all were tried with desertion and not mutiny. In any case, the end of hostilities caused Monash not to enforce the sentences. John Monash saved my Pop’s life that day.

On 12 October 1918, the 37th Battalion (which started with 1000 officers and men), then with a fighting strength of 90, disbanded.

The war ended a month later (on 11 November) and those who had mutinied were sent to Germany with the occupation forces. Due to serving his punishment for partaking in the mutiny on the Western Front, my Pop didn’t return to Australia until 3 March 1919, missing the passing of his father by just a few weeks.

For his war service on the Western Front, he was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His battalion was awarded 14 Battle Honours.

Pop married my nana in January 1928 and my grandmother was born nine months later on 22 October.

Poppy, who had had a hard childhood and a difficult life, had a lot to be angry for, but he was the most gentle of souls who never complained with what he had been dealt in life. Pop passed peacefully on 7 June 1983, aged 89 years. My nana followed in 2005 aged 103. They rest side-by-side in the Wangaratta Cemetery, Victoria.

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Above: Private Newton, Australian Army, circa 1916