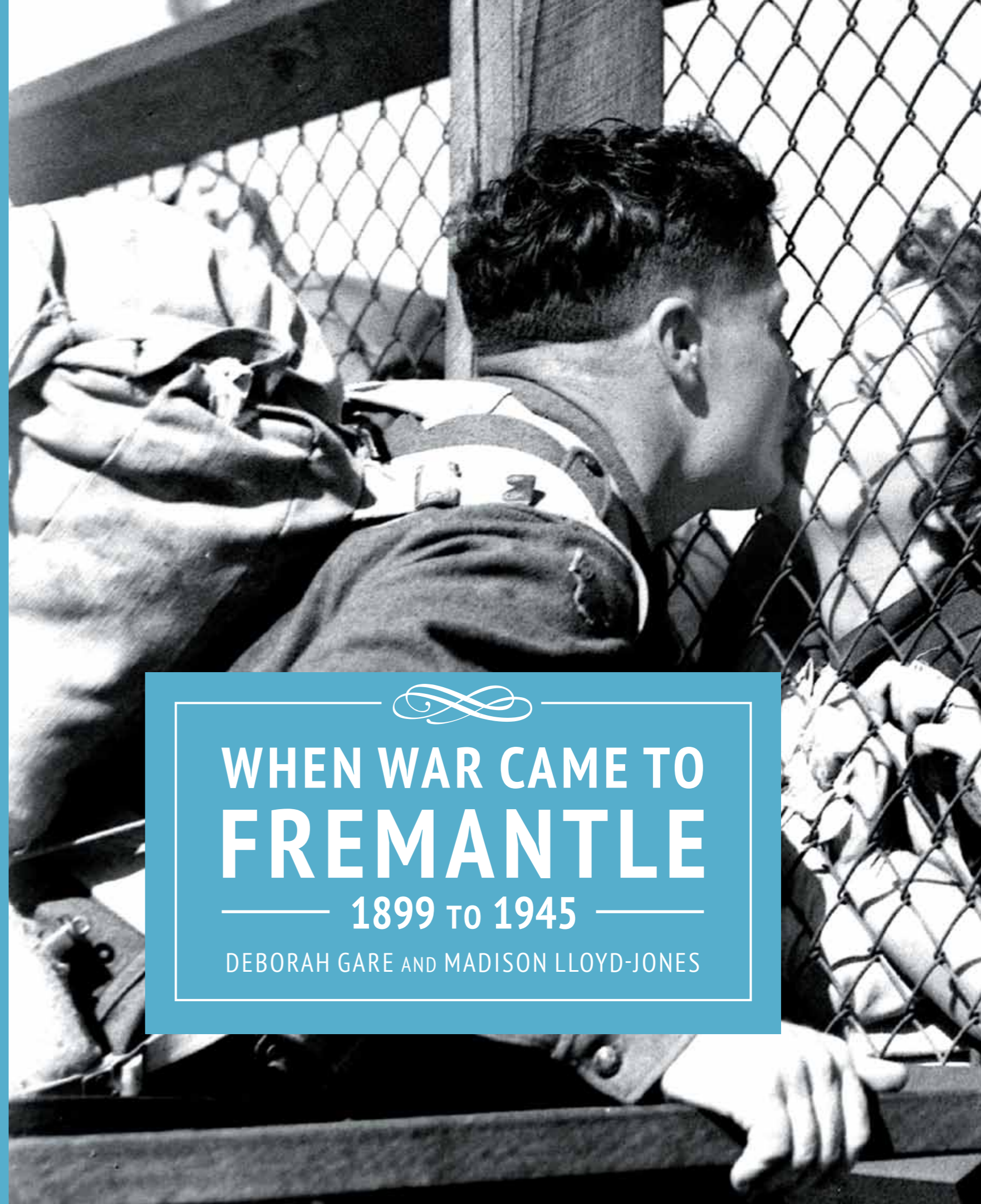


Fremantle's chronicle of war in the early twentieth century includes stories of departure and reunion, victory and celebration, grief and loss, and dissent and activism. These themes are brought to life in a photographic dossier that imparts a greater understanding of the human experience—our experience—in times of war.



WHEN WAR CAME TO FREMANTLE, 1899 TO 1945

DEBORAH GARE AND MADISON LLOYD-JONES



WHEN WAR CAME TO  
**FREMANTLE**

1899 TO 1945

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◀ Men from the 2/7th Field Regiment board the Stratheden in Fremantle, November 1940, destined to join the Australian Imperial Force's (AIF) 9th Division in the Middle East.





▲ Cheering crowds celebrated the departure of the 10th Light Horse Regiment from Fremantle in February 1915, though it went unreported in the press as a security precaution.



## ORIGINS OF ANZAC

### THE FIRST WORLD WAR, 1914 TO 1918

In 1911 the journalist and historian Ernest Scott advised readers of the *Round Table* that ‘England’s quarrels, England’s interests, are ours also,’ and that Australia ‘will be available for the defence of the Empire as a whole, wherever their services may be required.’<sup>1</sup> The nation had, by this time, been a Commonwealth for just a decade.

When war broke out in 1914, Australians enthusiastically supported Britain and its Empire. Australia then had a population of less than five million people (not including Aborigines, who at that time were not yet counted in the nation’s Census) and yet sent more than 416,000 volunteer troops. Of these, more than half were killed, wounded, gassed or taken prisoner.<sup>2</sup> In addition, around 2700 Australian nurses served in the war, most of whom worked in hospitals in the Middle East, Europe or India, and some of whom staffed base hospitals in Australia.<sup>3</sup>

The First World War was arguably the most costly in Australia’s history. It has also become one of the most defining influences on Australian culture and society, for it was here that the Anzac legend was forged.

At the announcement of war the Australian prime minister, Joseph Cook, declared:

*Whatever the difficulty and whatever the cost, we must be steadfast in our determination. Our resources are great, and the British spirit is not dead. We owe it to those who have gone before to preserve the great fabric of British freedom and hand it on to our children. Our ancestral home is the repository of great liberties, great traditions, and great piety, and we must cherish them. Our duty is quite clear, namely, to gird up our loins and remember that we are Britons.*<sup>4</sup>

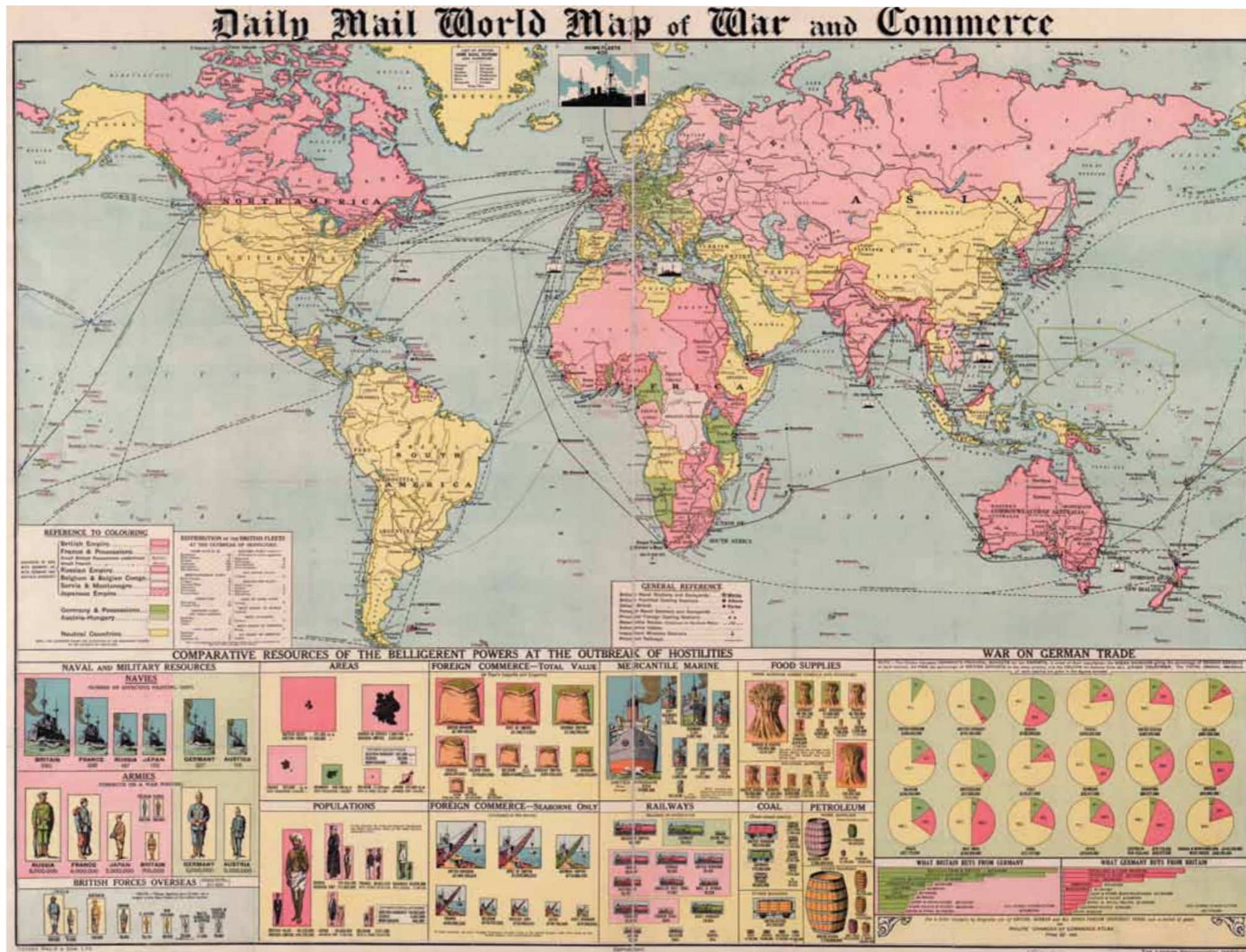


Imperial enthusiasm was infectious. Communities immediately offered goods and services to the war effort. Thousands volunteered to serve in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), the army established by the Commonwealth government in August for deployment in what was being called the Great War. From all over the country, wrote the *Sydney Morning Herald*, reports were emerging of 'Light Horsemen, infantry, ex-South African soldiers, and bushmen anxious to join the expeditionary force'.<sup>5</sup> Already the link between the Australian soldier and the bush was re-established.

What followed was a catastrophe. Estimates suggest that up to 65 million troops were mobilised by combatant countries in the First World War and that more than 37 million of them were either killed or wounded.<sup>6</sup> Though most leaders assumed the war would be finished swiftly, hints of its catastrophic potential were apparent from the beginning. Advances in military technologies in the decades preceding the war made this inevitable. Europe's great powers were now armed with high-powered explosives, chemical weapons and quick-firing guns, and moved their armies about with the swiftness of rail. Navies were equipped with torpedoes and telescopic sights.<sup>7</sup> Belligerent nations talked up their military capacities, fuelling the intensity of the conflict. At the announcement of war, France declared it had acquired a weapon that would 'modify military tactics, and render all defensive measures illusory. An enemy's forces ... could be annihilated by its use'.<sup>8</sup>

Australian troops and medical staff were deployed in the Great War under the command of the British. The AIF was dispatched to three significant theatres of war during the conflict: Gallipoli from April 1915, followed by the Middle East and the Western Front from 1916 to 1918. When they were deployed with the New Zealand army, as they were in Gallipoli, the troops were known as the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, or ANZACs.

► The Daily Mail's 'World Map of War and Commerce', 1917.







◀ Fremantle's Officer Engineer Richard Leonard, pictured with his mother. Leonard joined the Merchant Marine Service in the Great War. From June 1915 he was a crew member of the *Thistleban*, carrying troops and ammunition to Gallipoli. He survived two shipwrecks in the war: that of the *Thistleban* in 1915 and that of the *Thistleard* in the North Sea in 1917. He died of dysentery in July 1917.

▲ Tom Touchell, of Fremantle, became a signaller on the *HMS Kent* in 1918. He survived the war but died of pneumonia while still in service in 1919.

It was the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 that saw the real origins of the Anzac legend. A British war correspondent, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, breathlessly reported the 'thrilling deeds of heroism' displayed by Australian troops as they exchanged fire with the Turks. The new nation had proved its worth to the Empire:

*There has been no finer feat in this war than this sudden landing in the dark and storming the heights. These raw colonial troops in these desperate hours proved worthy to fight side by side with the [British] heroes of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres and Neuve Chapelle.*<sup>9</sup>

Large numbers of volunteers attempting to enlist in the early months of the war meant that AIF selectors could take their pick of recruits. The result was an army that lived up to the ideal of the Australian

bushman: tall, lean, bronzed and capable. John Masefield, the writer and poet, described the Anzacs at Gallipoli as:

*the finest body of young men ever brought together in modern times. For physical beauty and nobility of bearing they have surpassed any men I have ever seen; they walked and looked like the kings in old poems, and reminded me of the line in Shakespeare, 'Baited like eagles having lately bathed'.<sup>10</sup>*

In the months and then years that followed, Australian troops grew in experience and reputation. By the war's end they had reached the peak of their prowess.<sup>11</sup> Yet there were gruelling experiences in between: a nine-month, disastrous campaign at Gallipoli; three seemingly interminable and dirty years on the Western Front; and parched, perilous conditions in the Middle



▲ A graduating class of Australian Army nurses in Fremantle, including Cecille Deakin (back row, centre), c.1916.

East. By 1918, 60,000 Australians had lost their lives.

The community of Fremantle had thought itself ready for war in 1914. It had, after all, been deeply engaged in the war in South Africa so had that experience to draw upon. The prospect of war between the European powers, furthermore, had been discussed widely for months. Yet Australians were hopelessly naive and optimistic at the war's outbreak. They had not lived through centuries of conflict and upheaval as had the Europeans, nor developed fatalistic expectations of loss. When crowds in Fremantle cheered the departing AIF troops, therefore, it was with excitement and misguided enthusiasm.<sup>12</sup>

As a major port of embarkation, Fremantle witnessed the departure of thousands of AIF soldiers and nurses. The first left on 2 November 1914 on the troopships *Medic* and *Ascanius*. There had been huge improvements in the comfort and technology of troopships since the war in South Africa. The *Ascanius*, for example, carried nearly two thousand people

from Western Australia and South Australia and included a hospital. Among those on board were Dr Edward Brennan, resident medical officer at Fremantle Hospital, and two Western Australian army nurses.<sup>13</sup>

Newspapers wrote excitedly of the send-off for the first contingent. Crowds, they reported, were allowed to assemble alongside the vessels once the passengers had boarded safely. After leaving port the vessels paused just offshore in the sea channel of Gage Roads, where they were joined by British and Japanese escort vessels. The following evening, deep in the Indian Ocean, the Western Australian troops were met by other vessels carrying the AIF contingents. A soldier of the 11th Battalion described the 'glorious and historic sight':

*one that has never been known in the history of the world, and probably will not be seen again, at any rate, in our time. The whole of the ships carrying the Australian forces had now joined issue, together with their escort. In all there were about 46 vessels, 37 of which were troopships carrying approximately 35,000 men, the pick of Australasia, who were going abroad to assist the mother country in upholding the cause of the King and Empire.*<sup>14</sup>





The convoy's journey to Colombo, and then to Egypt, saw the first celebrated success of Australians in the Great War. Having picked up an SOS signal on 9 November, one of their number, the HMAS *Sydney*, left the company and steamed to the Cocos Islands where it destroyed the German raider *Emden*. As Australians celebrated this early victory and were congratulated by the leaders of other Allied countries, Western Australia's media gleefully claimed that the enemy's presence had been radioed to the convoy by a transmission from Fremantle's high-powered cable station.<sup>15</sup>

Locals prepared for the defence of the Fremantle port, though the risk of attack or invasion must have been small. Coastal artillery was installed at batteries at Fort Arthur Head and Fort Forrest (North Fremantle). Its gunners were housed at Victoria Barracks at Cantonment Hill, though the barracks were soon put to use as an early army hospital.

While the First World War did not refashion the Australian home front to the extent that the Second World War subsequently did, its impact on communities was nevertheless profound. Families felt the first brunt of the war as thousands of young men left home. Many young women who cheered departing husbands from 1914 were widows by the war's end. Their numbers grew so noticeably that they changed the social landscape in Australia: war widows became society's respectably needy, dependent on state welfare for their livelihoods and future security.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the number of war widows swelled to such an extent that even before the war's end the government was referring to the 'Widow Problem'.<sup>17</sup> Theirs is arguably the untold story of the Australian home front. In a climate of harsh economic realities and strict moral codes, many widowed women found it difficult to survive the war. At first pensions were given only to war widows who were considered dependent on their husbands, but by 1918 all married and de-facto widows were provided with financial support until they remarried.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the

Minister for Pensions, G.N. Barnes, declared widows to be a 'problem'. He was reported to be:

*disinclined to give a hardy young woman much money, because it would be better for herself and for the State if she worked; but if she were not hardy, and especially if she had children, she should have £1 a week, so enough to care for her children properly.*<sup>19</sup>

Elizabeth Young was among them. Her husband, Charles, was sent from Fremantle to France where he was a company runner. He received the Military Medal in January 1918 for bravery in battle but in April was reported missing. Elizabeth, in desperation, turned to the Red Cross for assistance in finding her husband. Other soldiers reported that they had seen him dead in the chaos of Villers-Bretonneux; one recorded that he had found Young dead near the wire, showered with machine-gun bullets; another that he had buried Young under a cross in the graveyard of the town.

◀ *George Fuller, a butcher from Beaconsfield, signed up with the 39th Infantry Battalion in 1916. He departed Fremantle on the HMAT *Persic* with the 6th Reinforcements. Fuller was killed at Passchendaele in October 1917, aged 19.*

▶ *Charles Bogie Young, pictured with his wife Elizabeth and son John, departed from Fremantle in 1916 and was killed in action at Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918. Elizabeth spent months searching for confirmation of his death with the help of the Red Cross.*

▼ *Grace Rule with her son Cyril. Their home at 19 Elizabeth Street, White Gum Valley, was built during the war in 1915.*



The Red Cross reported back to Elizabeth that:

*Young was a company runner. He was born in Scotland but enlisted in W.Australia. He was 5'5" in height, fair and about 24 years old. At Villers Bretonneux on April 24th '18 about midnight in the attack Young was killed near our wire by machine gun bullets. I saw him lying dead near the wire ... He had been killed instantly.*<sup>20</sup>

Marjorie Cruite, like her husband John, did not survive the war. After his death at Gallipoli, probably from typhoid,<sup>21</sup> Marjorie lived in Perth with her four young children. Nearly two years later, in April 1917, she found herself pregnant and in great distress. The circumstances of her pregnancy are unknown—she may have commenced a relationship with another man, she may have been taken advantage of or assaulted or, like many other women, she may have turned to prostitution to raise money for her family.





◀ Three-year-old Leo Charlton, dressed in an AIF uniform by his mother in 1917. His father, A.O. Charlton, was a photographer in North Fremantle and regularly captured the portraits of departing troops and their families.

Regardless, the identity of the father of her unborn child was not disclosed. In desperation, Marjorie Cruite sought to end the pregnancy that by then she perceived as an affliction. Attempting to abort the baby herself she became crippled with peritonitis and later died in Perth Hospital. Her doctor, reporting to the coronial inquiry that investigated her death, announced that he had treated seven other women in Perth for the same issue in the past week alone.<sup>22</sup>

Women on the Australian home front were vulnerable indeed. They were exploited by imperialists and dissenters alike—one side exhorting mothers to sacrifice their sons to the war for the sake of the Empire while the other appealed to the feminine instincts of women to be pacifists. ‘I did not raise my son to be a soldier,’ sang Cecelia John and Adela Pankhurst. ‘I did not put a musket on his shoulder to kill some other mother’s darling boy.’ Others responded by insisting that such sacrifice was ‘the Australian way’:

*This call that makes my peaceful son a soldier  
A Higher Source must know than earth supplies;  
Then why should not my stricken heart be bolder  
To give with cheerfulness my richest prize?*<sup>23</sup>

Australia’s home front in the Great War was no place of peace. In Fremantle, a women’s recruiting committee was established to help drum up volunteers as the numbers of recruits declined in the later years of the war. The success of local communities in the recruiting effort was regularly reported: in March 1917 it was noted that Perth had sent 118 soldiers in one week and Bunbury thirty-eight, but that Fremantle had only raised thirteen.<sup>24</sup> The AIF urged parents to do their bit in sending their sons to war. In Cottesloe, reluctant mothers and fathers were aggressively reminded that their sons must contribute their share to winning the war, else they would forever be mindful that the peace and prosperity they enjoyed had come at the expense of others.<sup>25</sup> Recruitment rallies were held in the suburbs around Fremantle where pacifists were warned that they were guilty of ‘noble and chivalrous apostasy’.<sup>26</sup>

Australians’ unity of purpose did not survive the war. Instead, the home front became bitterly divided over issues of patriotism, empire, dissent, conscription and labour activism. Catholics and Protestants were divided over the issue of conscription, particularly when prime minister Billy Hughes’ referendum on the matter coincided with violent protests against British rule in Ireland. Trade unions lobbied for fair work practices even in times of war. In Fremantle, port workers became suspicious that grain supplies were heading to German markets. This provoked a bitter waterfront dispute in 1917 that was described as a ‘mad act of rebellion’ by the unionised work force.<sup>27</sup> Outraged civilians complained that the port’s ‘lumpers’ (wharf labourers) were undermining the Empire’s war effort and preventing necessary grain supplies from reaching Australian troops. Wives and mothers of soldiers wrote furiously to the local

▶ Eight players and their trainer from the South Fremantle Football Club enlisted in August 1915: trainer W. Carter and footballers C. Wetherall, M. Corkhill, W. McGilvery, N. Giles, Cleave Doig, B. Cooper (team captain), P. O’Donnell and S. Motherall.



newspapers, offering their services at the waterfront. One Fremantle mother declared that she would do ‘anything’ to thwart the lumpers; another that:

*I am willing to offer my help in any way if it is to assist our brave boys at the front. I am a mother of seven, and am willing to help load wheat on the wharves for the boats, so that our heroes fighting shall not be in want of food. If the Fremantle lumpers were in Germany they would find themselves at the front or else shot down for going on strike, and good enough for them. Is there not enough sorrow now without going on like spoiled children because they could not have their smoke-oh? If the women of Great Britain are doing their bit to win the war, making ammunition, surely we women of Australia can guide bags of wheat on a shute [sic]?<sup>28</sup>*

The impact of the war was felt keenly by local communities at home. Dispute and dissent created general ill feeling, while the sudden departure of a generation of men devastated business, agriculture and manufacturing. It also curtailed many of the state’s sporting events. The Western Australian Football League debated whether to suspend its season in 1915, having lost both players and public support to

the war. At a contentious meeting of the clubs that year, the East Fremantle Football Club demanded to know, ‘What did a premiership mean’ when a war was underway?<sup>29</sup> After bitter wrangling it was proposed that the season should be terminated immediately. In its place, locals cheered on the Empire and celebrated those troops who left to fight for the ‘home team’. The South Fremantle Football Club proudly photographed its players who had enlisted for the war.

Though Australia’s role in the Great War was always part of a larger international story, its official historian, Charles Bean, argued that there were times during the war when the Australian troops were ‘not without a conspicuous influence upon the result’.<sup>30</sup> Their impact at home was far greater, both then and since. After all, this was the war that saw the original Anzacs present themselves for battle, and the one in which the AIF, and by extension the Australian nation, was ‘tried and not found wanting’.<sup>31</sup> Reputations were made abroad and legends were forged at home. To the Australian people the war was profoundly significant. Families and communities were thrown into turmoil; conscription and religion divided the country; and dissent rattled the easy patriotism of the young nation.





▲ At least three German merchant vessels, the Thüringen, Greifswald and Neumünster, were surprised upon their arrival in Fremantle in 1914 with news of the war. Not only were the vessels impounded as war prizes, but their German and Austrian crews were declared prisoners of war. The photographer, Karl Lehmann, was detained with the rest of his crew at Rottneest Island where, with nearly one thousand other internees, they were forced to spend the first year of the war. The Rottneest prisoner-of-war camp was closed in 1915 and its internees transferred to New South Wales.<sup>32</sup>

► William 'Cleave' Doig, a 24-year-old footballer for East and South Fremantle football clubs and clerk at the Fremantle Wool and Hide Company, joined reinforcements of the 16th Infantry Battalion in 1915. In April 1917 he was captured by Germans at Bullecourt and transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp in Minden where he is pictured, on the left, with other prisoners. Desperate for help, Doig appealed to business contacts in London, beseeching them to send him food parcels while he was detained. Doig survived the war and was repatriated in January 1919. He later founded West Australian Tanners and Fellmongers Ltd and was president of the South Fremantle Football Club.<sup>33</sup>





## WAR WOUNDED

Fremantle Hospital's Dr Edward Brennan was dispatched with the first contingent of troops on the *Ascanius* to Gallipoli. Like other medics, he experienced challenging battlefield conditions in his treatment of the wounded and sick. His letters home described the environment in which the AIF's medical staff worked. At Gallipoli, Brennan wrote, wounded soldiers in the field were often treated in trenches while shelling continued around them. Most patients received attention for gunshot wounds and haemorrhaging; some for such diseases as typhoid.

As continuous shelling prevented the evacuation of the wounded, Brennan observed that:

*the greatest trouble we had in our part was the removal of the wounded. We could do practically nothing till dark, and even then there were snipers about. Many stretcher-bearers were wounded, and to make matters worse all day and part of the night the valley was swept by shrapnel ...*<sup>34</sup>

Brennan's exceptional bravery at Gallipoli and, later, in western France was noted by the AIF. In 1916 he was awarded the Military Cross and, in 1918, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.<sup>35</sup>

Doctors weren't the only medics to tend to wounded troops at the front. They were supported by orderlies in the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC). In addition, nearly 2500 Australian women served abroad in the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) or in Britain's Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. They were recruited locally and in small numbers throughout the war, trained nurses still being in short supply on the Australian home front. Two Western Australian nurses were on board the *Ascanius* when it departed Fremantle in 1914. Within months another sixteen trained nurses had been assembled in Western Australia for deployment with the AANS.<sup>36</sup>

Australia's nurses were deployed in base and field hospitals that spanned the broad stretch of Britain's Empire and its theatres of war, including such locations as the United Kingdom, France, the Mediterranean, Egypt and India. Nursing leaders faced ongoing tension within the army regarding their resources and independence of command.<sup>37</sup> As they had in the war in South Africa, Australia's army nurses experienced gender prejudices and implied assumptions that they were 'in but not of' the army. This did not stop some army officers from attempting to militarise the nurses and, therefore, to extend the army's control over these women: on the Greek island of Lemnos, Colonel Thomas Henry Fiaschi marched nurses from the No. 3 Australian General Hospital in single file over several rocky kilometres after their arrival on the island in August 1915. The following year, and against their own wishes, Australia's army nurses were awarded honorary AIF ranks as officers. The nurses' personal relationships and social activities were thereafter closely controlled—their

elevation to the rank of officer prohibited them from mixing with enlisted men.<sup>38</sup>

Western Australians, nonetheless, avidly followed the stories of those nurses serving abroad and sent them what comforts they could to improve their working conditions. Sister Lucy Tremlett wrote from the hospital she supervised in Cairo to Fremantle's Arthur Glover, appealing for help:

*Just at present we have 260 to 270 men. I am getting all I want from Red Cross, a fair supply of cigarettes and tobacco once a fortnight, but am writing to some of my friends who do Red Cross work to send me a box now and again, care of Red Cross, but addressed to me personally, to do what I like with. For instance, my orderlies are nice boys, several Western Australian boys. I like to be able to give them a couple of pairs of socks, a flannel shirt or two a handkerchief or two a package of cigarettes etc etc. [sic] There is so much red tape to be gone through when these little things come through the quarter-master's stores. In plain English have you any influence with the ladies around you? If so, could you induce them to send me a box of various things just for my staff?*<sup>39</sup>

Such stories as those of Dr Brennan and Sister Tremlett helped keep the idea of imperial adventure alive in the opening months of the war. Wartime naivety quickly died, however, with the arrival in Fremantle of the first of Gallipoli's wounded. Nearly five hundred men were returned to Australia on the hospital ship *Kyarra* in July 1915. A tour below decks shocked those journalists who joined the vessel. Beds of disabled, feverish, bandaged and shell-shocked survivors were stacked from floor to ceiling. Those who could walk unaided roamed aimlessly around the ship's decks. Concealed from cameras and public display were the most pitiful of all: those men whose minds had succumbed to the trauma of war.<sup>40</sup>

Waiting for the arrival of these men in Fremantle was a crowd of anxious women and children. A cheer raised by the wounded men went unanswered from the shore, it was noted, because 'the awaiting crowd was mainly composed of distressed women who were



◀ Once hailed as 'the flower of the physical man of the land', the first war wounded returned to Fremantle from Gallipoli in July 1915 on board the hospital ship *Kyarra*.<sup>41</sup>





▲ The No. 8 Australian General Hospital (known locally as the base hospital) on Fremantle's South Terrace. The building was later disassembled and rebuilt as the 'hydrodome' on South Beach.<sup>42</sup>

not equal to the task. Spectators waited impatiently for the ship to berth, some clutching photographs of the loved ones they sought among the returning troops or of whom they hoped to receive news. A journalist noticed an anguished woman on the wharf, nearly hidden by the crowd. 'Really I have no right [to be] here,' she sobbed:

*I should not have come. My son was killed, but I came down—I could not help it—just to feel what it would have been like if he had been coming back. I thought, too, that ... one of them perhaps who have met him, might tell me of him.*<sup>43</sup>

But no news was to be had for the mother, and no comfort.

Most of the *Kyarra's* passengers remained on board and were later shipped to their home ports in the eastern states. Quietly the crowd observed thirty-one 'sick, shell-shorn and bullet-pierced' Western Australians disembark to meet the governor.

They appeared weary and starkly different from the men who had paraded through the city before their departure: their uniforms were now dirty and torn, and makeshift clothing was shared among them so that no two looked alike.<sup>44</sup>

Many complained of the horrific conditions in which they had been nursed, particularly on board the hospital transport ships. Food was their major complaint. Bread and jam had been plentiful but most other food was considered unsuitable for convalescing men; some meals were unfit for human consumption. A soldier complained that meat on board the *Kyarra* was often spoiled; on one occasion the cook had poured kerosene over the meal to disguise its foul smell.<sup>45</sup>

Other wounded soldiers spoke with good humour of the bravery they had witnessed at the front. Fremantle's Jim Cruthers had led sixteen men to the landing at Gallipoli in extreme conditions. They fought ceaselessly without sleep and with little food.

► Sister Phillips nurses a soldier from the 11th Battalion at Fremantle's base hospital, c.1917.

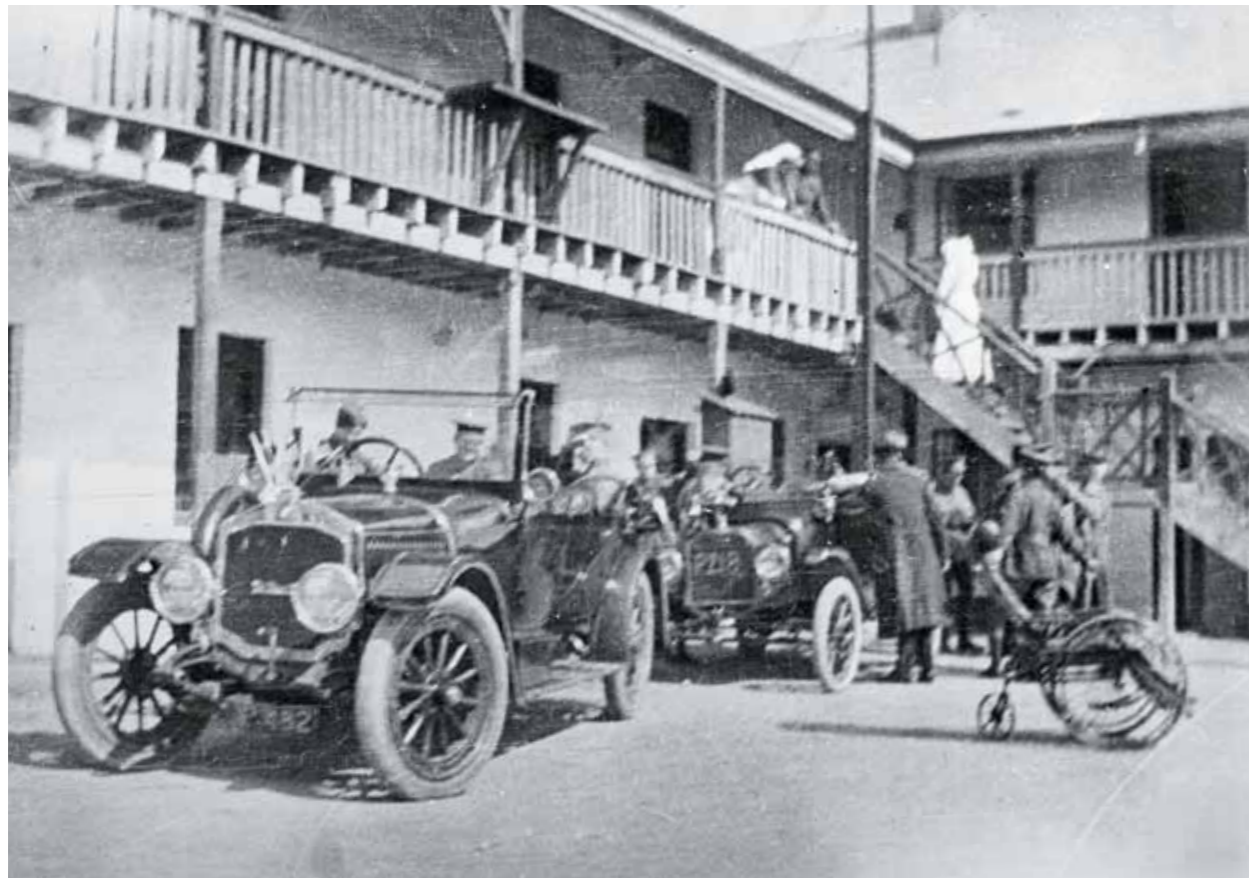
► Medical staff at the base hospital in Fremantle, including 'masseuses' (physiotherapists) Miss Hardeman (back row, centre) and Miss Parker (front row, left).





Cruthers was shot through the elbow three days into the landing while helping a wounded soldier to safety. By that time there was only one other left in his group.<sup>46</sup> At home, he cursed that his injuries would remove him from the war for a time, though he later returned to the Western Front where he was wounded again. (Cruthers was later awarded the Military Medal for gallant leadership at Meteren, France, in 1918.)<sup>47</sup> After being welcomed by the press and the crowds of women, the wounded Western Australians were ferried by motor convoy to the No. 8 Australian General Hospital in South Terrace, known locally as the base hospital.<sup>48</sup>

Western Australia's Red Cross Society worked diligently to prepare Fremantle's base hospital for the arrival of the war wounded. The building was



▲ In 1916, Nurse Cecille ("Cec") Deakin was working at the base hospital in Fremantle where she met a wounded soldier, Hubert Hall. He had sustained serious injuries while on a train in Egypt in January. A month later his arm was amputated and he was returned to Australia to convalesce. After his discharge in August, Hall began to court Nurse Deakin and the couple (left) were married the following year.

◀ Volunteers regularly provided patients at the base hospital with entertainment and excursions. Newspapers reported picnics and concerts held for their benefit. In this image, patients are being transported to an outing in a De Dion (front) and a Fiat (rear).

thoroughly renovated and included a well-furnished social hall, two pianos and a gramophone. Magazines, newspapers, books and fresh fruit were delivered regularly by members of the community. In the months that followed, and as more patients returned from the front, volunteers called to take the wounded soldiers on outings. In September the men from the base hospital were taken by a convoy of twenty-two motor cars to Kings Park for a picnic, and by the end of the year a series of cricket matches had been held at Fremantle Oval between the hospital's patients and the Fremantle cricket team. Community fundraising continued throughout the war to aid those returned soldiers who were receiving treatment at the hospital.<sup>49</sup>

By 1918 more than 150,000 Australians had been wounded in the war. While this number represented but a fraction of the 37 million casualties that had been sustained around the world, the care and rehabilitation of the war wounded was nevertheless a considerable drain on the developing Australian economy. It was even more so for families. As more than eighty per cent of AIF members had been unmarried when they enlisted, the burden of their care fell largely to their parents. Many of the wounded received ongoing treatment in such army facilities as Fremantle's base hospital, their rehabilitation continuing long after the war's end. In 1920, for example, 90,000 Great War veterans in Australia received a Commonwealth disability pension, and this number had only fallen to 77,000 when war broke out again in 1939.<sup>50</sup> The cost of war was etched deeply into Australia's history indeed.



## 'A HUNDRED THOUSAND WELCOMES'

By the end of the Great War the story of the Anzacs at Gallipoli was already legend in Australia. So powerful had Ashmead-Bartlett's promise been that the nation had been 'tried and not found wanting', and so haunting the reports of Charles Bean and other correspondents in Turkey, that the Gallipoli story surpassed any other that might have been born in the trenches of the Western Front.

In November 1918 the first of the Great War troops were returned to Fremantle. In their midst was a large number of men who had departed four years earlier with the original contingents for Gallipoli. The press jubilantly celebrated the return of the first Anzacs. As thousands huddled on the wharf to embrace the returning troops, the *West Australian* recorded that:

*Tears of joy filled the eyes of mothers, fathers, wives, sweethearts, and children as they rushed forward and claimed their heroes. Most affecting scenes were witnessed as those who had been separated for four years met again under such happy and peaceful surroundings. The meeting, too, of old comrades—the wounded man who had returned earlier and his 'cobber' of the same battalion who had been more fortunate—were soul stirring ...*<sup>51</sup>

Fremantle's mayor, William Wray, greeted the troops as they assembled in the port's E Shed, tendering them 'a hundred thousand welcomes.' The people of Fremantle, he declared, were proud of those who had served.<sup>52</sup>

Parading troops passed beneath a triumphal arch on the corner of Cliff and Phillimore streets that proclaimed 'Gallipoli, ANZAC: Fremantle Gratefully Welcomes You.' The Gallipoli legend was already evident and enshrined. High above the arch the flags of Great Britain and France were flown from its masts, placing Australia firmly in the centre of a great wartime alliance.<sup>53</sup>

► *Fremantle's welcome-home decorations greeted those troops who first returned in 1918, many of whom were Gallipoli veterans.*



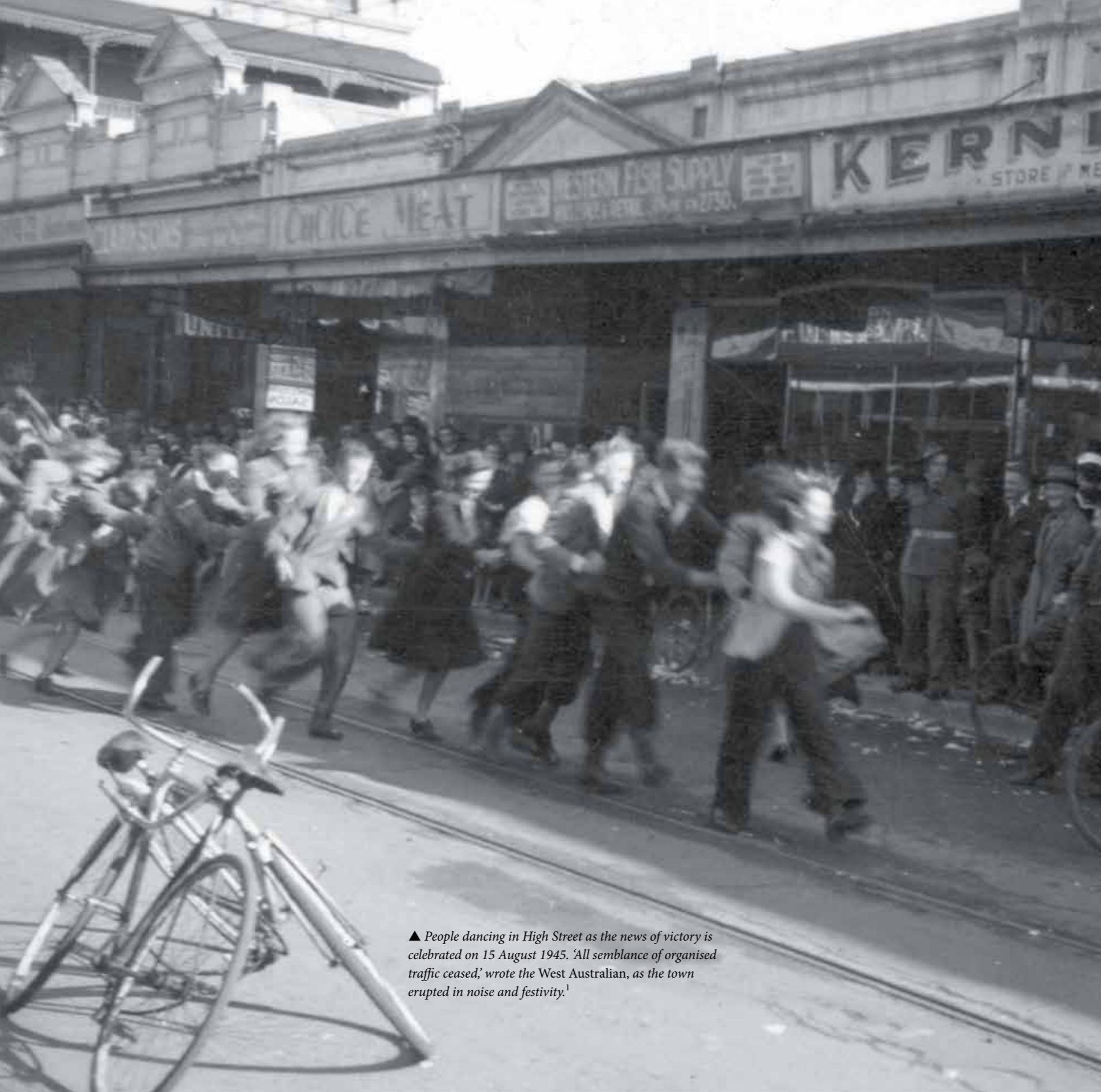




▲ Crowds greet returning troops on the HMT Main in Fremantle, c.1918.

◀ Crowds cheer at Fremantle's welcome-home parade as the first returning Anzacs are led by musicians up High Street in November 1918.





▲ People dancing in High Street as the news of victory is celebrated on 15 August 1945. 'All semblance of organised traffic ceased,' wrote the West Australian, as the town erupted in noise and festivity.<sup>1</sup>

# 07

## THE RETURN

### RESTORATION AND REPATRIATION, 1945

John Curtin was dead. So were nearly 40,000 other Australians who had served in the war and nearly one thousand Australian civilians who had perished in air raids on the home front.<sup>2</sup> Hitler's Germany had been knocked out of the war in May 1945 and, by August, Japan had also been defeated. Solid and dependable Ben Chifley was made prime minister, and on 15 August he declared that the war with Japan was over, adding:

*Here in Australia there is much to be done. The Australian Government, which stood steadfast during the dread days of the war, will give all that it has to working and planning to ensure that the peace will be a real thing ... Let us join together in the march of our nation to future greatness.*

*You are aware of what has been arranged for the celebration of this great victory and deliverance, and in the name of the Commonwealth Government, I invite you to join in the thanksgiving services arranged for, truly, this is a time to give thanks to God, and to those men against whose sacrifice for us there is no comparison.<sup>3</sup>*

Australians celebrated victory with relief and joy. In Fremantle this enthusiasm was tinged with the melancholy knowledge that their prime minister, Curtin, had not lived to see the war's end. Nonetheless, High Street filled with revellers as the news spread early in the morning. Young children rattled tin cans behind their bicycles, the sounds of whistles and trumpets filled the air, and adults gathered in the streets instead of reporting for work. Flags were hoisted and families filled the streets of surrounding suburbs to share in the news. Prisoners at the Fremantle jail were told they were to have two days' holiday to celebrate the war's end. The port itself became a riot of noise and colour: for more than an hour





◀ Peace celebrations for children were conducted in September 1945 at the Fremantle Oval, where games, activities and party food were shared.

▶ Servicewomen from the Volunteer Aid Detachment return with the 9th Division to Fremantle in February 1943.

its ships sounded their sirens in chaotic harmony, while their decks were dressed with bunting from stem to stern.<sup>4</sup> A hurriedly arranged thanksgiving service was convened at the Town Hall, presided over by mayor Frank Gibson and minister for education John Tonkin. They gathered, said Tonkin, 'to offer up thanks to God for deliverance from the great peril which threatened us.'<sup>5</sup>

Among the first to come home at the war's end were those rescued from Japan's South-East Asian camps. Thirty thousand Australians had been taken prisoner during the war, two-thirds of them captured by Japan in the first weeks of 1942. Among their number were forty nurses. Mortality rates of the prisoners were high: more than one-third died in captivity.<sup>6</sup> Those who survived were released gradually in the weeks that followed the war, first treated at army hospitals in Singapore and then returned on hospital troopships to Australia.<sup>7</sup> Their stories were incrementally leaked to the Australian press, confirming the wartime rumours of horrific prisoner-of-war conditions. Stories of Changi, Sandakan and Bangka Island spread dread

through the hearts of readers.

The first prisoners of war to return home were hand-picked by the authorities, intended to put an optimistic face to the repatriation prospects of others: they were the healthy ones, the men in good enough condition to survive a quick evacuation and a gruelling flight home. They landed by seaplane in Sydney's Rose Bay on 16 September 1945, surrounded by thousands of wellwishers who had descended on the water's edge to welcome them home.<sup>8</sup> Australian newspapers avidly reported their arrival. The *Sydney Morning Herald* shouted on its front page of the 'Joyous Welcome' those first returning prisoners of war received. As they stepped from the planes a roar swept over the harbour from the spectators cheering their arrival. The men looked shocked and embarrassed, but were quickly evacuated by waiting vehicles to hospital, where they were feted some more.<sup>9</sup> The real story, however, was to be found by the water's edge after the troops had gone, for it was there that the composure of the crowd collapsed. A journalist wrote movingly that:







*The writer has seen many poignant and dreadful scenes around the world but he cannot remember any which moved him more than the spectacle of these silent people, standing on the edge of a Sydney pavement in the dusk, their faces crumpled, their hands grasping bags, at little children as their tears fell unashamedly.<sup>10</sup>*

Michael McKernan explains the moment:

*They had been holding themselves together, you see, trying to kid the returning prisoners that they did believe the fiction: there was nothing wrong with these men that a month's loaf on the beaches wouldn't cure.<sup>11</sup>*

Thereafter, grim convoys of hospital ships returned surviving prisoners of war to Fremantle and other ports. In October 1945 the *Manunda* limped into Fremantle while ambulances waited grimly by the water's edge to transport those in most urgent need of medical attention. On board was Vivian Bullwinkel, the only survivor of the Bangka Island massacre. She had been on board the *SS Vynner Brooke*, one of the last vessels to evacuate Singapore in January 1942, with sixty-five other nurses. Two days later the vessel was sunk by Japanese aircraft near Bangka Island and its survivors shot at in the water. Bullwinkel made it to shore with twenty-two other nurses, a large group of civilians and, shortly afterwards, around one hundred British soldiers. Discovered by the Japanese, the men were herded together and shot on the beach. The horrified nurses were forced to wade into the water and then mown down by machine-gun fire. Bullwinkel was struck by a bullet and pretended to be dead until the Japanese left. Returning to the beach, the only woman alive, she discovered a lone surviving British soldier on the shore. They hid for twelve days before surrendering. The soldier soon died from his wounds and Bullwinkel remained in a prisoner-of-war camp until September 1945. She told her fellow prisoners of

◀ *Servicemen return to Fremantle on the Otranto in September 1945.*





◀ *The hospital troopship Manunda arrived in port with recently released prisoners of war in October 1945. Ambulances lined the wharf waiting to transport its passengers to hospital.*

▶ *After surviving the Bangka Island massacre in 1942, Vivian Bullwinkel was recaptured and forced to spend the rest of the war in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. She was among those who returned to Fremantle on the Manunda in 1945, where she and the other passengers were greeted with 'tumultuous applause'.*

the massacre, but none of them spoke of it again lest the knowledge place her in danger as a witness.<sup>12</sup>

Women were especially vulnerable as prisoners of war, and the Allies were aware of this before the loss of Singapore. Although they rushed the evacuation of the nurses from the island, it was rumoured that the British had also made contingency plans for the protection of any women left behind: the nurses themselves speculated that British soldiers had been primed to kill them rather than leave them to the awful fate of becoming sex slaves to the Japanese. Women in the camps later told of rapes and torture, and of incentives to work in Japanese brothels.<sup>13</sup>

More than twenty nurses, including Bullwinkel, were among those prisoners of war returned to Fremantle on the *Manunda* in October 1945. Hundreds were on the wharf to receive its passengers. As the Western Command band played 'Nursie', crowds broke through restraining barriers and surged alongside the vessel. Journalists reported that each prisoner of war was cheered with 'tumultuous applause' as they disembarked; Vivian Bullwinkel was swarmed by the crowd and her progress along the wharf seemed 'almost like a royal procession'.<sup>14</sup>

The war's end was not without its challenges, and that much was immediately apparent to politicians



and civilians alike. After six years of war, wrote the *West Australian*:

*during which our every thought and action seems to have been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the fact that our nation was engaged in the greatest struggle which the world has witnessed, most of us have found it difficult to re-orientate ourselves to a life in which this grim struggle no longer looms largely.*<sup>15</sup>

Like those of other communities, the people of Fremantle sought to support those around them who had experienced loss. At Christmas a picnic was held at Point Walter for children whose fathers had been killed in the war. The staff and patients of the 109 Australian Convalescent Depot invited more than nine hundred children and their mothers to the event, presenting each with Christmas gifts. Families attended the event from as far away as Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and Busselton, and were provided with 'almost unlimited supplies of ice cream, toffee apples and other good things to eat and drink'.<sup>16</sup>

Although the war itself was over, the prime minister conceded that there was 'much to be done' in the months to come,<sup>17</sup> not least of which would be the return of the troops. Between 1939 and 1945 nearly





one million Australians had served in the armed forces, including 66,000 women. Demobilisation had been taking place gradually since 1943, leaving 600,000 men and women in uniform at the war's end. Most were by then serving in Australia, but 224,000 were scattered across the Asia-Pacific and another 20,000, mostly members of the air force, were in Britain and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Their return was completed nearly a year later: it was not until June 1946 that most enlisted men and women were discharged in their home states, having exchanged their uniforms and weapons for chest X-rays and dental check-ups.<sup>19</sup> Returning to a sense of normality, for most, took longer still.

Meanwhile, Australia's war memorials were updated to acknowledge those who had not come home. Plaques and other items were added to

Fremantle's Fallen Sailors and Soldiers Memorial on Monument Hill to acknowledge the services of Australian men and women in the war, as well as those of the American and Allied troops who had helped to protect Australia.

▲ *Servicemen on the Mooltan return from the Pacific Islands to Fremantle in 1946 where they are greeted by family.*

▶ *A waterfront reunion of Dr McKenzie and his family as the HMAS Fremantle returns RAAF and AIF forces from Indonesia to Fremantle in December 1945.*





▶ Servicemen and civilians on the Aquitania return to Fremantle in December 1945.

▼ A Christmas picnic for children whose fathers were killed in the war was thrown at Point Walter by staff and patients of the 109 Australian Convalescent Depot and Legacy Ward, December 1945.<sup>20</sup>



▲ A father meets his son, possibly for the first time, as the Sontag returns RAAF personnel to Fremantle in October 1945.



## WAR BRIDES

The deployment of foreign troops across the various theatres of war brought with it the foreseeable consequence of romance and marriage on Allied home fronts. What was surprising was the haste with which some of these took place. One of the first Australian war brides to marry an American did so in Melbourne in February 1942, having met her husband just a week before.<sup>21</sup> And Fremantle's air force hero, Wing-Commander Hughie Edwards, married Englishwoman Cherry Beresford in London after a 24-hour engagement. 'It was all so sudden,' Edwards confessed to the *Australian Women's Weekly*. 'I have just cabled my people. You see, we only fixed up to get married yesterday, and the wedding is at noon tomorrow.'<sup>22</sup>

By the war's end up to fifteen thousand Australian women had married American servicemen. A few more married men from other Allied countries including Britain, the Netherlands and New Zealand.<sup>23</sup> Not all wartime marriages had happy endings. It was an issue that alarmed Western Australian senator

Dorothy Tangney, who attempted to dissuade Australian women from marrying Allied troops in haste.<sup>24</sup> Make 'full inquiries into the legal position before marrying', she urged young women, noting that abandoned wives were 'precluded from divorcing their deserting husbands in Australia.'<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, brides of American servicemen were not at first entitled to a portion of their husband's salary, nor to a pension in the event of his death.<sup>26</sup> This was a particular risk for women with children. Rumours spread through the Australian home front of bigamous marriages, and families began to fear the unknown histories of those men who married their daughters.<sup>27</sup>

Authorities were clearly concerned, especially after a flurry of marriages took place in the first months following the arrival of American troops. Clergymen spoke out against rushed weddings, some refusing to perform such ceremonies.<sup>28</sup> Authorities soon required American servicemen to have the approval of their commanding officer and a six-month 'cooling-off period' before marriage, which appeared to improve the success rate of those in Western Australia.<sup>29</sup>



◀◀ Wing-Commander Hughie Edwards married Pat (Cherry) Beresford, the 21-year-old widow of his friend, in London in 1942. The couple had a hasty engagement, lasting barely 24 hours, and he was shortly afterwards presented with a Victoria Cross medal at Buckingham Palace. Fremantle-born, Edwards was later appointed governor of Western Australia.

◀ John Freund and Sophie Haddow were married on 3 January 1944 at St John's Church, Fremantle. Sophie was one of just twelve Australian women married to Dutch sailors who departed with seven hundred other Australian war brides in July 1946 on the aircraft carrier HMS Victorious, destined for Britain. The Freunds later resettled in Fremantle.

▶ Western Australian wives and fiancées gathered at Assembly Hall in December 1945 to urge the American government to provide them with transport to the United States. Further delays would 'lead to smashed marriages', declared Gwen Millsteed. Some women hadn't seen their husbands in more than three years. Many had returned to work, but those with children could not.<sup>30</sup>

Fremantle's Dorothy Christensen married George Monek, a dental surgeon with the United States Navy, on 15 May 1944. She understood that these protocols offered a form of protection for local women. Allied troops were 'coming off ships they had been on for a long time', she agreed, and 'might have married anybody'.<sup>31</sup>

An added complication of wartime marriages was that American citizenship wasn't automatically conferred on brides of US troops.<sup>32</sup> When Australian Kathleen Hodgson married US serviceman Bill Poularis on 12 July 1945, she had to collect comprehensive documentation relating to her marriage and her assumed intention to move to the United States. This included a police clearance, a health report, character references and a statement from the USS *Orion* to Bill's commanding officer swearing that both parties had been interviewed and 'the problems of a marital status have been explained'.<sup>33</sup> Far from being the result of rash



decisions, these marriages were the product of hard work and numerous obstacles.<sup>34</sup>

Despite such precautions, the numbers of deserted wives climbed during the war years and after. Inconsistent Australian laws on divorce and maintenance became problematic and the Commonwealth was forced to consider legislative reform. Some Australian women faced the terrible realisation that they had been divorced without their knowledge or with no right of reply through proceedings undertaken by their husbands in America.<sup>35</sup> Tangney continued to campaign for their cause and in 1947 the minister for health and social services agreed that Australian war brides who had been deserted by serving American men would be supported by the state as if they were widows.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, the plight of Australia's deserted war brides was venomously discussed within the community. One correspondent in Perth denounced them as 'silly girls' who:



*have all sown wild oats, had Yankee money spent on them, hectic times till early hours of the morning, walking round clutched so affectionately by 'Buddy'. Now parents want the public to help them to take off the crop of wild oats. My opinion is that they have only to thank themselves for their present position.*<sup>37</sup>

A correspondent from Fremantle, by contrast, demanded that authorities help instead those wives whom Australian servicemen had married while overseas.<sup>38</sup> As many as 25,000 Australian men had married foreign women during the war. These brides came from as far away as Britain, Canada, Egypt, Japan and Switzerland.<sup>39</sup> Many were still waiting to be brought to Australia, the availability of passages being hindered by transport shortages. Our men 'are not wife deserters', the Fremantle correspondent angrily claimed. Rather, they had paid good money for their wives to be returned with them to Australia. In many cases, families were still waiting to be reunited.<sup>40</sup>

The departure of those women leaving Australia to join their husbands abroad added another dimension to the casualties of war. For just as thousands of Australian troops were repatriated at the war's end, many thousands of young women were bidding their families farewell. Mothers complained that they had lost their sons to war and were now losing their daughters to foreign husbands.<sup>41</sup> It was a long and difficult process for many as transport shortages added a further obstacle to the reunion of married couples.<sup>42</sup>

Betty Kane's story later inspired her granddaughters, Vicki and Donna Simpson, to compose the song 'The Bridal Train'.<sup>43</sup> Betty left Fremantle to join her husband in the United States in 1946. She was among one thousand other Western Australian women.<sup>44</sup> She boarded a train in Fremantle for the eastern states, the most common route initially taken by Western Australia's departing war brides. Women, children and overstuffed suitcases were transported on what was euphemistically called the 'Perth Perambulator' on a five-day trek across the country, stopping in various towns and cities

including Southern Cross, Kalgoorlie, Tarcoola, Adelaide and Ballarat. They then took a sea voyage from Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane to the United States.<sup>45</sup> Passages were occasionally unreliable, some brides finding upon arrival in the eastern states that their place on board a migrant ship had been taken by a serviceman or VIP.<sup>46</sup>

Others were more fortunate. The *Fred C. Ainsworth*, the only bridal ship to depart from Western Australia, carried 245 women and 181 children from Fremantle to the United States in May 1946. This was the largest group of Australian children ever delivered with war brides to the United States. Social workers and Red Cross volunteers were on board to care for the women and children.<sup>47</sup> When the ship arrived in San Francisco the news was excitedly reported at home: none of the wives had been deserted. Rather, a husband was waiting on the wharf for every woman on board. Marjorie Timothy, vice-president of the American Wives and Fiancées Association in Perth, believed that this was because 'West Australians took marriage more seriously than some other Australians'.<sup>48</sup> The higher success rate of Western Australia's wartime marriages, however, was more likely due to the fact that they were the result of longer-term relationships. Allied troops in the eastern states were most often transient marine corps; those in Fremantle, by contrast, tended to be attached to the submarine base for the duration of the war. These men's ongoing presence in the town provided them with the opportunity to forge more stable relationships before being separated from their brides by the war.<sup>49</sup>

► *Some of the earliest war brides to leave Western Australia did so in September 1945 on a train bound for Brisbane, from where they sailed to the United States. There were forty-one women and twenty babies on board, crammed into a second-class carriage. The journey was uncomfortable and the women were disgusted at the arrangements made on their behalf by the Australian authorities.*<sup>50</sup>

