



“AFTERMATH”: AUSTRALIA AFTER THE GREAT WAR



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The Nameless Names: recovering the missing Anzacs

Mr Scott Bennett



Introduction

Few Australians realise that of the 62,000 Anzac soldiers who died in the Great War, over one-third are still recorded as missing.

Even though the war ended in November 1918, thousands of families continued their search for answers about their missing loved ones well into the 20s, 30s and 40s.

100 years on, we don't see each family's anguish, rather we see stone memorials that dot the landscape across Australian, France and Belgium and Gallipoli.

What I wanted to do in my book, 'The Nameless Names', was to reveal *The Human Faces Hidden Behind the Cold Stone*.

And cold stone and endless lists characterise is how we commemorate the dead and missing; you only need to visit the Menin Gate Memorial to see that.

Those listed soldiers were lost in Flanders mud; yet in commemoration they suffer the same fate – lost in a sea of tens of thousands of uniform inscriptions.

But behind each name, is a story. I focus on the years after the war and how three families – the Reids, the Pflaums and the Allens. I explore how they sought justice for the missing, how they grasped for answers, how they commemorated, how they remembered and how later generations remembered.



Why So Many Missing?

During the Great War, thousands of men were recorded as missing on battlefields such as Gallipoli, Fromelles, and Ypres. Poet laureate John Masefield provided some clues why, when he observed a battlefield plateau where thousands had died. He recorded that the

‘incessant shelling buried and unburied them, and then buried and unburied them until ‘no bit of dust was without a man in it’.

For every missing soldier, there was a distraught family back in Australia that received the tragic news. Not only was a son missing, but so too was information.

Being missing was an undefined social state, which precluded access to all the rituals and practices that society had developed to deal with such sadness. No funeral, no wearing black, no condolence cards.

These families were caught between hanging on and letting go.



After The War

Families bereft of answers during the war, placed their faith in the Australian government that promised that ‘all pains’ would be taken to identify and recover the missing.

A mammoth task confronted the government:

In Europe, of over 40,000 Australians killed in Europe:

- 21,000 had registered graves
- 11,000 had reported graves, although inadequately registered
- 8,000 had no known grave

On Gallipoli, of approximately 12,000 Allied soldiers who had died in the Anzac sector, about 4,000 lay in the cemeteries or in makeshift graves, while nearly 6,000 were unburied, scattered about the ridges.



'It was "well known in the battalion" that Mordaunt had been taken prisoner.'

The Reid Family

Mordaunt Reid and his wife Pauline lived in the outback town of Coolgardie, Western Australia

They spent their leisure time at the palatial Victoria Hotel, Kalgoorlie races and church events.

Mordaunt enlisted in late 1914 and landed on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

In the early morning of the landing Mordaunt and his party of 60 pushed inland toward the coveted Third Ridge. When Mordaunt's party withdrew under fire, a wounded Mordaunt was left behind.

Pauline Reid

Unable to find answers about Mordaunt, Pauline travelled to Cairo, and then London searching for answers

She steadfastly maintained throughout the war that Mordaunt was alive – she believed he was a prisoner-of-war held deep within Asia Minor.



Pauline remained in London until June 1919, welcoming back prisoners and interviewing returning soldiers.

By June, she had resigned herself that Mordaunt was dead and would never return home.

In 1920, Pauline Reid returned to Coolgardie. She discovered that the Coolgardie locals hadn't forgotten Mordaunt. Moving service to recognise Mordaunt

Pauline sought to move on with life; she started a hospital nursing business in 1920 with Mordaunt's 2 sisters.

In 1923 she remarried - no doubt she was careful to avoid the tag of a 'widow in a hurry' Newspaper conspiratorial tone: Never believe that a missing man is dead.

Pauline had an unbounded faith in women and their ability to play their 'part in the national as well as the domestic life.'

Pauline came out from behind her husband's shadow; previously known as Mrs Mordaunt Reid rather than in her own right – shifting, nursing, visit countries, driving - emboldened her to new possibilities.

Each new experience — shifting to Perth to nurse, travelling to Egypt, working with the Red Cross in London, visiting post-war France and Germany, and teaching herself to drive a motorcar.

Pauline later reflected that her experience cultivated in her an unbounded faith in women and their ability to play their 'part in the national as well as the domestic life' of their country.

Pauline was awarded Order of the British Empire in 1920 in recognition of her work with the Red Cross Prisoners of War Department.

Mary Reid's Letter to Base Records

'I depended upon my poor boys to support me during my declining years ... I would be very thankful for any defined pay of my poor boy — am I not entitled to a pension?'



Mary Reid

On the same day that Mordaunt Reid disappeared on April 25, his brother was reported Killed in Action.

Lindsay Reid's mother, Mary, received the sad news in June 1915. Newspaper implored that 'no eyes can so you weep.'

Beyond her grief, her immediate concern was how she would survive without her son's much needed financial support.

Her application for a pension was rejected; Mary survived by cleaning houses; her health slowly gave way

After the war, Mary received news that Lindsay's burial location was unknown; like Mordaunt, he was also missing.

Wrote to Office of Base Records; the Base Records Deceased Section was still receiving 250 letter per week in 1922

Mary continually placed memoriam notices in the local papers on April 25. On the tenth anniversary of their deaths she placed a short notice in ‘loving memory’ of her sons

Then in December 1922 Mary received a note from Base Records informing her that an exhumation party had uncovered Lindsay’s isolated grave.

The Imperial War Graves Commission returned Lindsay’s identity discs and numerals to Mary, believing that while these effects were ‘of little intrinsic value and considerably impaired by long exposure’, they might be prized on account of their intimate association with the deceased.

Mary accepted the keepsakes with ‘deep gratitude’. ‘It is a great relief to find him, with his fellow comrades who fell at the landing, have been recognised after such a lengthened period,’ she replied in a letter. ‘It shows the goodness of the defence department to ease the minds of Australians.’



In 1923, Mary composed the following moving words for Lindsay’s pedestal tombstone

Lindsay was one of the last Anzacs recovered, identified, and reburied on Gallipoli.

Yet Mary still had an unanswered question: ‘We are still in doubt of what became of our elder son,’ she wrote to Base Records. Mordaunt’s body was still missing.

In 1923, Base Records updated Mary and Pauline on the commission’s efforts to recover Mordaunt’s remains, stating that an exhaustive search had been made over the battle areas; however, ‘in the circumstances, it must be reluctantly concluded that the Graves Service have not succeeded in locating his last resting place’.



The Pflaum Family

Family of German origin who owned a prosperous flourmill.

Theodor Pflaum, was the president of Blumberg’s recruitment committee

Only fitting that Theodor’s own sons enlist. Three brothers enlisted together – Tab, Theo and Ray.

Ray told his 10-year sister Helen to leave the homestead's British flag up until he returned home.

Within one week of landing in France, Ray disappeared in the attack at Fromelles on July 20 1916

Just over 12 months later, his brother Theo was killed at Polygon Wood

Tab returned home in 1919 – friends remembered that he never talked about the war

Even though the war was over, the family still sought answers on where Ray had died – in Germany or at Fromelles; and where was he buried?

'There is providence that shapes our destiny.'
Theodor Pflaum



Baptist family; accepted Christian mourning rituals – preparing the dead, wearing black, funeral procession, and burial in a grave marked by a tombstone – could not be performed on Ray's absent body.

These rituals provided emotional comfort to a shaken family, offered religious comfort, and ensured remains were treated respectfully. Served multiple purposes. These death rituals, practiced since the Stone Age, distinguished humans from animals.

In 1921, daughter Rose, channelled enquiries through Captain Charles Mills, a onetime prisoner-of-war who was sent to Germany after the War's end to find out details about deceased prisoners-of-war. No definite news uncovered by Mills

The endless correspondence fatigued Theodor. In one letter, his dignified tone gave way to despair. 'Surely they have given (to us) their valuable lives for King-Empire!' 'Could we not get some of their personal belongings which of course would be treasured by us in love? Would you kindly make further enquiry ... and kindly oblige the mother, and family (and father.)'

Base Records replied: 'No personal effects, except his discs, have been returned here.'

The local community commissioned a memorial monument in Birdwood that General William Birdwood unveiled in 1921. Birdwood was shepherded toward Mary Jane and a handful of other mothers during the ceremony. His words of comfort 'moved many to tears'. Mary Jane died in 1926 reputedly of a broken heart



A Pilgrimage offered the aspirant the hope of transforming from a state of wretchedness to beatitude;

A pilgrimage provided the opportunity to link a place to grieving

A slow trickle of pilgrims to Gallipoli, and the Western Front in the early 1920s. In 1920, the Australian Graves Service estimated that at least 30 Australians had travelled to the battlefields to visit graves.

Tab Pflaum visits Theo's grave in 1919 before returning to Australia; took a picture of Theo's grave to provide to his mother.

His sister, Helen, remembered Tab returning home alone after four years away. Helen's momentary joy subsided when she realised 'that the dear ones who sailed away with him would not return.'

Chairman of the Loxton Returned Soldiers League; Tab made sure that Anzac Day commemorations were marked with fun and celebration such as fancy dress competitions rather than solemn mourning

Kath Chapman would have like to have married Theo, however Theo’s mother, Mary Jane did not approve of the relationship; the relationship remained in the shadows.

Consequently when Theo died, Kath’s grief was unrecognised and unacknowledged.

Kath often visited the Pflaum homestead after the war, perhaps it was a way to keep memories alive

Kath Chapman saved her pennies and bided her time and visited Theo’s grave in 1921.

Kath never married, perhaps fearful to love, what could be taken away.



The Allen Family

William and Sarah Allen of Gin Gin had 13 children. Their sons Ernest, Ned and Josiah enlisted in 1916, while William Allen remained at home to care for their sugar cane selections.

Josiah and Ned were listed as missing on 6 June 1917 at Messines Ridge; they were reportedly buried in unmarked soldier’s graves the evening after the battle.

Ernest Allen was killed on April 25 1918 at Villers Bretonneaux, and buried in soldiers grave.

Even though the war was over, the family still sought answers about their son’s burial site. The Allen family sought dignity in death.

The Allens didn’t harbour grand ambitions to build triumphal monuments to their sons; rather, they simply wanted to ‘find the spot’ where they were buried and to appropriately mark it.

They approached veteran Charles Rudder for help; the only clue were some map coordinates contained in a letter

In April 1919, Rudder wrote to the 1st Military District Headquarters. He admitted that he ‘had no idea who he should write to for this information’. Notwithstanding this, he explained that he wanted to locate the spot where Ned Allen was buried, and quoted the cryptic map coordinates of his grave.

Despite the fresh information, the Allen family heard nothing more about Ned’s grave.



William Allen sought his son's kit – he wrote to Base Records seeking his sons' personal belongings. His correspondence stretched into 1922. Base Records confirmed that, beyond Josiah's identity disc and keys, which were shipped in March 1918, there were no other belongings.

Willie Allen and family sought to commemorate the brothers in a monument Willie Allen expressed his strong opinion on the subject in a letter to the Bundaberg Mail. 'As the brother of three fallen heroes', he favoured a statue of lasting design that would remind 'future generations of the heroic stand taken by our brave lads'.

Willie also feared that a memorial hall would quickly lose its connection to the fallen soldiers, fall into disrepair, or degenerate into an entertainment club. Willie's impassioned plea swayed the community toward a statue.

Fittingly, mother Sarah Allen turned the first sod for the memorial, with a symbolic silver shovel.

After the memorial’s unveiling, William lamented: ‘If only one had returned safe back to us, we would have felt satisfied.’ Sarah Allen died in 1926, reputedly of a broken heart

The names of Sarah’s three sons were engraved upon her tombstone.

A portrait of the three brothers hangs today in the Gin Gin District Museum.



Connecting and Commemorating

Australian Graves Detachment

The detachment commenced work in March 1919.

When the detachment’s work prematurely concluded in August 1919, the government admitted that 30,000 burials had yet to be verified or traced.

Despite this, the government limited the mandate of Detachment’s successor, Australian Graves Service’s to ‘helpful inspectoral’ work.

In September 1921, the British secretary of state for war officially ended the search for the missing in Europe, citing that the battlefields had been searched at least six times

Australians visiting the battlefields were shocked – bodies and makeshift graves were still scattered about the battlefields.



George McQuay

Emma McQuay always believed that her son George would return home from France, even though he had been listed as missing since 1916.

When the war ended, Emma attended every Anzac Day service. As she watched the veterans march by, she found herself staring at their faces. This ritual seemed to lift her spirits. She always returned home with a renewed strength, convinced that George would return one day.

In 1928 a journalist visited Emma and told her that her son was indeed alive. He explained that George had languished in Callan Park Mental Hospital, ever since he had been found

wandering aimlessly about the battlefield. Authorities organised Emma’s passage to the asylum. Upon arrival, the superintendent delicately explained to Emma that George suffered a severe psychiatric condition with no chance of recovery.

George had only been identified after the asylum’s superintendent shared his photograph with newspapers. What had followed was a sad procession of hundreds of parents to the asylum, who had cherished through the years the flickering hope that perhaps their boy might have been wrongly reported as missing.

It was the flickering hope that Emma had harboured for George’s return. And it was the same flickering hope that compelled thousands of mothers throughout Australia to maintain their missing son’s bedroom exactly as they had left it: linen freshly laundered, flowers displayed, and clothes laid out for that improbable day they returned home. Unlike George, they never did.



The Imperial War Graves Commission pledged to commemorate every dead and missing soldier on behalf of the Empire

They chose significant battlefield sites where men had gone missing to commemorate them

Families longed to suitably commemorate their sons, yet the Imperial War Graves Commission would dictate to them the tone and shape of all empire-funded memorials.

One mother, Alice Averbury upset, ‘It is a grave injustice that we should not be allowed to do as we like for the memorials for our sons and even if they chose to erect elaborate, more or less hideous memorials over their dead it cannot and ought not be anyone’s affair out in France any more than it is in our graveyards at home.’

Menin Gate Memorial

Menin Gate unveiled in 1927; 6,000 of the 55,000 names listed on the memorial are Australians – The Allen brothers – Josiah and Ned are listed together missing Australians

The Memorial divided opinion. Siegfried Sassoon quote he bitterly declared, ‘Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime / Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime.’

Mrs Barbara Jeffries, whose son disappeared at Passchendaele, disagreed with Sassoon. After visiting the Menin Gate, she returned to Australia with a message for all mothers: ‘I am able to appreciate the feelings of mothers whose sons were never found and I am glad of the opportunity to bring to them this message that there are few more beautiful memorials to missing men than Menin Gate.’



Australian National Memorial

In 1938, King George VI unveiled the Australian National Memorial.

Its panels contain the names of 10,000 missing Australians, including Ernest Allen and Raymond Pflaum (not commemorated at VC Corner)



Lone Pine Memorial

The Lone Pine Memorial was completed in September 1924. It carried an inscription in lasting memory of the 3,268 Australian soldiers and 456 New Zealand soldiers who fought on Gallipoli and have no known graves.

The Lone Pine Memorial was completed in September 1924, but never officially unveiled, which rankled many veterans groups.

Mordaunt and Lindsay Reid are both commemorated there, just within 100 metres of each other. Mary composed Lindsay's epitaph: 'Just a loving sweet remembrance, just a memory fond and true.'

Fitted the Imperial Framework, however, parents were drawn to the symbolism of the pine cone – within years, pine trees flourished throughout Australia

The Australian Unknown Soldier

'The presence of Australian badges and uniform confirmed that the substantial skeletal remains were those of an Australian. One observer noted that the soldier's boots appeared good enough to walk in ...'



Remembering

Unknown Australian Soldier

The Unknown British Warrior was interned on November 1920.

In 1990, historian Bill Gammage gently nudged the nation on the issue. He thought it would be interesting to see, after the last Anzac had joined his mates, **whether ‘that empty space’ at the centre of the Australian War Memorial’s Hall of Memory would be occupied by ‘the grave of an unknown Australian soldier’.**

What was missing in 1993 was the agony of fresh bereavement, so evident among the millions of mourners who had honoured the Unknown Soldier in London seven decades earlier.

In Canberra, curious onlookers who awkwardly clapped the passing limber replaced grieving mothers such as Amelia Bromley, who symbolically welcomed her Cecil home.

Australian Red Cross inquiry bureau
*'In 2010 the Australian War Memorial
retrieved 305 dusty cardboard boxes from
its archives ...'*



Australian Red Cross inquiry bureau

In 2010 the Australian War Memorial retrieved 305 dusty cardboard boxes from its archives.

In these boxes were 32,000 files - each containing the harrowing correspondence between the Australian Red Cross inquiry bureau and an anguished family of a missing soldier.

What was remarkable about the bureau's letters to families, was that tens-of-thousands of them carried Vera Deakin's signature. Each month the bureau dealt with 3,000 incoming enquiries and sent back 4,000 reports to the Australian Red Cross branches

Vera was the bureau's honorary secretary throughout the Great War, firstly in Cairo and then in London. Vera and her volunteers unrelentingly searched for answers on behalf of families of missing soldiers.

Sadly, after the war Vera's selfless story was largely forgotten - until the war memorial decided to digitize those 32,000 files and make them available to all Australians.



Battlefield Pilgrimages

Lesley Bath, grandniece of the Allen brothers, is one of thousands of Australians who visit the battlefields each year to commemorate their distant relatives

Lesley recalls that her grandmother, Lily, confided that she ‘never got over the death of her three brothers’ and firmly believed that her own mother, Sarah, had ‘died of a broken heart’.

Here they attach a poppy to Ned and Josiah’s name.

Many of the descendants of the Reid family have visited Gallipoli, many of the Allens Ypres, and many of the Pflaum descendants have visited Fromelles.

The connection is obvious, when seeing the heartfelt messages on the memorial wreaths that line its stairwell. They remind us that the pain for later generations is still raw. Some read:

- ‘We pay our beloved respect to granddad who died on this day 100 years ago,’
- ‘Have waited eight years to make this journey,’
- ‘Grandpa Jack, we understand now.’



A recurring theme in remembering the deceased is linking feelings and memories to a physical location.

Locating the vicinity that Mordaunt disappeared.



Fromelles Discovery

Over 2008 and 2009, Fromelles missing uncovered and recovered

In March 2010, Geoffrey Baker received a request for a DNA sample. Geoffrey's mother, Helen, was the youngest daughter of Theodor and Mary Jane.

In the early morning of 16 March 2010, Geoffrey received a call from the Fromelles project team, confirming 'our hopes that Ray would be among the soldiers'

Although Geoffrey was elated when Ray's remains were discovered, he did carry one regret: 'I only wish my mother was alive so I could tell her.'

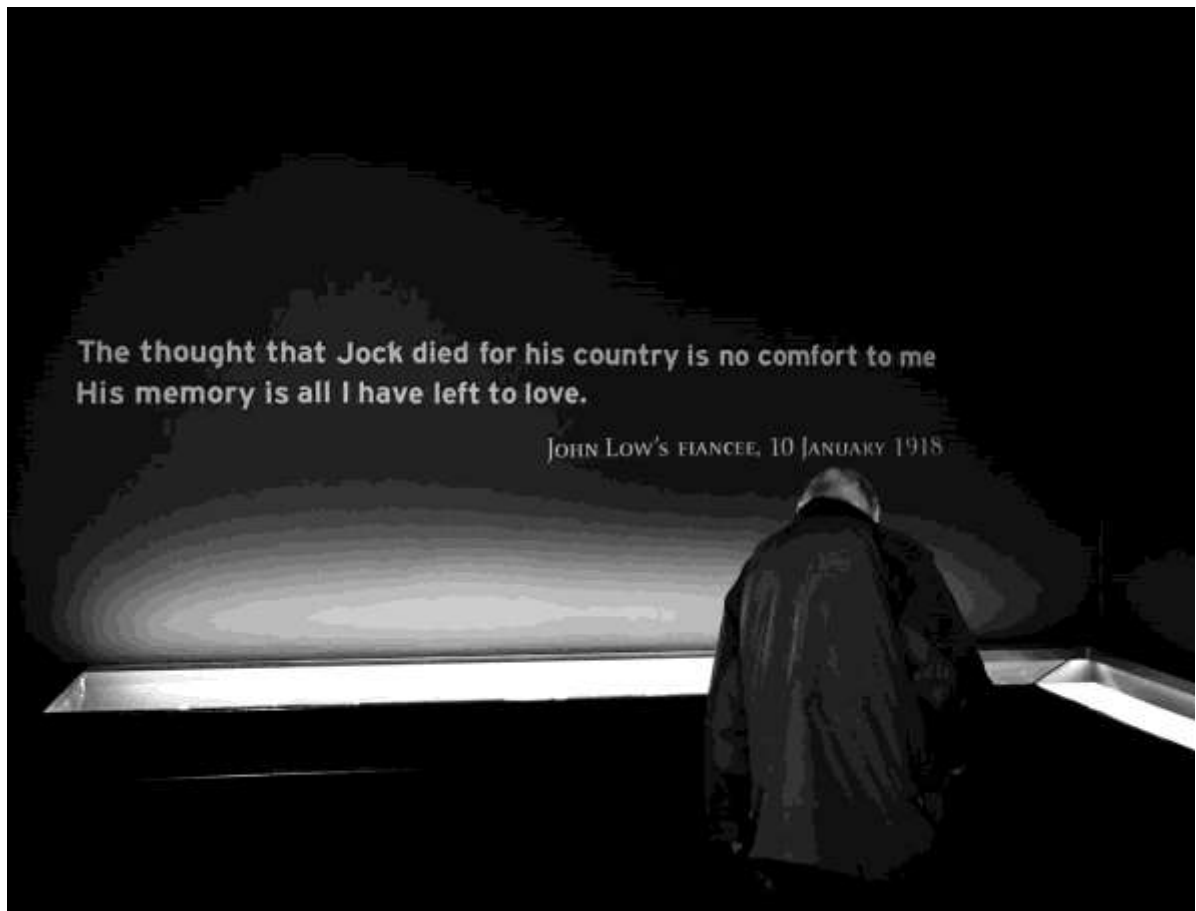
His mother, Helen, was ten years old when Ray said, 'Don't haul the flag down until I come home.'¹¹ Helen carried the burden of his unsolved disappearance until she died, aged 91, in 1995

'I once was lost, but now am found.'
Epitaph on Ray Pflaum's tombstone



On 19 July 2010 — nearly 100 years after the fields near Fromelles echoed to the sound of machine-gun fire and artillery — 250 Australian and British soldiers were officially laid to rest in the first commonwealth war cemetery to be built for nearly 50 years.

Within the throng of mourners, dressed in grey overcoats, scarves, and raincoats, were third-generation Pflaum family members, Elizabeth Scales and Margaret Cannon, and their respective partners, Phillip and Peter.



Battlefield Tourism

A poignant photograph of the interpretative centre at Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium.

Many battlefields now appear to be packaged up tourism parks

The visitors neatly divided into two groups:

- There were the sightseers/
- And there were the more purposeful pilgrims.

There are more exhibits each year: Fromelles Museum; Sir John Monash Interpretative Centre; Lobbying for more memorials at Pozieres

Are the centres expensive way to create 'a warm and fuzzy feeling' for Australians?

One journalist asked, 'How much memory — and at what cost — is enough?'

Bruce Scates on the connection of current generations to their dead and missing forebears:

‘The grief may not be as bitter as for those who lost loved ones, it may not lead to anguish or madness, but it is real and unrelenting all the same.’



Current Connections

Is there an enduring connection between current generations and their missing forebears?

Professor Bill Scates conducted hundreds of interviews in an effort to understand the connection of current generations to their dead and missing forebears.

In his book *Returning to Gallipoli*, he concluded, ‘The grief may not be as bitter as for those who lost loved ones, it may not lead to anguish or madness, but it is real and unrelenting all the same.’

I see it when I talk with 93 year old Cherie Elliot, the niece of Mordaunt Reid; Cherie felt that a heavy shadow hung over her family in the 1920s and 1930s. As a little girl, she prayed for the souls of Mordaunt and Lindsay at bedtime, closing with, ‘Please let there not be any other wars.’

I see it in my daughter, seeking to connect with her great, great uncle who died in France 1 week before the end of the war.