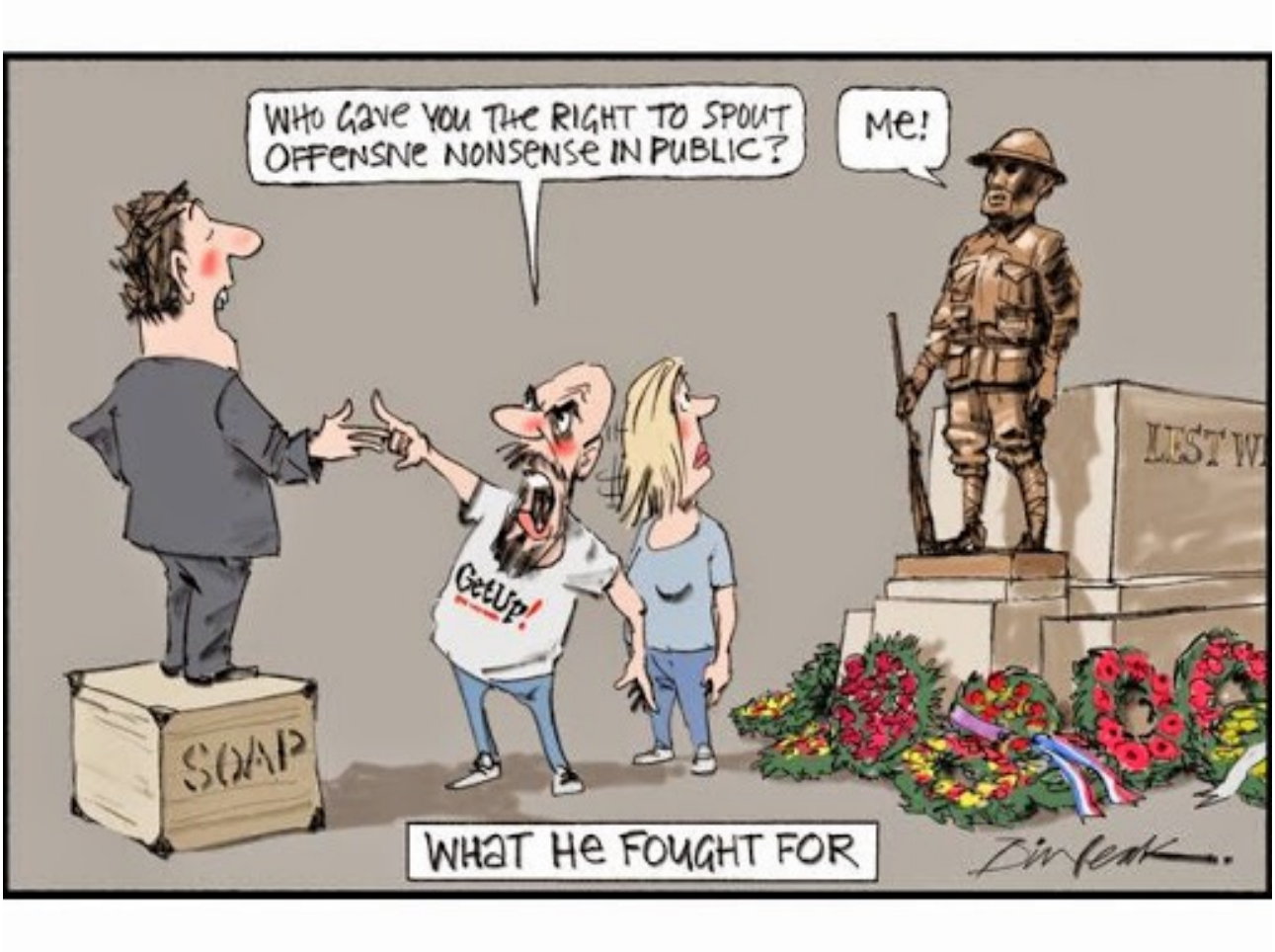
ANZAC - My Family Story
Bruce Wilson

I wrote this article on the 100th anniversary of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli in WW1.

I have a great deal of pride in being one, of what I estimate to be perhaps as few as only 15,000 to 20,000 Australians, who are third-generation returned servicemen. I am writing this rather longish article in an attempt to describe the experience of my family's three generations who went to war.

I've been spending some considerable time thinking about the significance of ANZAC, and its relevance to our modern lives in Australia. We have a long history of stable democracy in this country. As I think through our nation's experience of war, I have come to the conclusion that the contribution and sacrifice of those who served really has had a great contribution to the quality of life that we are now able to lead.

To me, this cartoon by Bill Leak from the Australian Newspaper says it all.



THE MEANING OF ANZAC

For my overseas friends, Anzac Day – 25 April – is probably Australia's most important national occasion. It marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by both Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War. ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. Through operating together at Gallipoli, the soldiers from both countries quickly

became known as Anzacs, and the pride they took in that name endures to this day. We celebrate it with more commitment than we do Remembrance Day on the 11th of November.

Prior to WW1, Australians had fought in previous wars (Maori Uprising on the Waikato River, Boxer Rebellion in China, the Sudan Conflict and Boer War) but these had all been as individual colonial forces. The Australian colonies only achieved federation in 1901 and when war broke out in 1914 we had been a Federal Commonwealth, or a single united nation, for the short time of 13 years.

The new national government was eager to establish its reputation among the nations of the world. As their first role in WW1 In 1915, Australian and New Zealand soldiers formed part of the allied expedition that set out to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula in order to weaken Turkey, Germany's major ally, and open the Dardanelles to the allied navies. The ultimate objective was to capture Constantinople (now Istanbul in Turkey), the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

The Australian and New Zealand forces landed at Gallipoli on 25 April, meeting fierce resistance from the Ottoman Turkish defenders. What had been planned as a bold stroke to knock Turkey out of the war quickly became a stalemate. The campaign dragged on for eight months before the Anzac forces were withdrawn at the end of 1915. Both sides had suffered heavy casualties and endured great hardships.

Of the 142,000 Anzac troops at Gallipoli, 26,111 became casualties of which 8,100 were deaths. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire experienced an horrific total of 251,000 total deaths and casualties. News of the landing on Gallipoli had made a profound impact on Australians at home, and 25 April soon became the day on which Australians remembered the sacrifice of those who had died in this war (and since then, all wars).

Although the Gallipoli campaign failed in its military objectives, the Australian and New Zealand actions during the campaign left us a powerful legacy. The creation of what became known as the "Anzac Legend" became an important part of the identity of both nations, shaping the ways they viewed both their past and their future.

For the remainder of WW1, Australians continued on to serve in many places including the Sinai, France and Belgium (The Western Front). They suffered terrible hardship in the trenches although in the end they provided leadership that changed the course of the war and world history.

Australia's experience in the First World War is one of horrific statistics.

These are the stories of our three generations of my family at war.

WORLD WAR 1 - 3646 SERGEANT WALTER EDGAR WILSON - 57 BATTALION, 1st AIF



Walter Edgar Wilson, my Grandfather, signed up to join the 1st AIF (Australian Imperial Force) on 24 July, 1915. He was 24 years old, 5 feet nine inches (175 cm) tall and weighed eleven stone (67 kgs). His occupation was a Grocer. He referred to himself as Edgar, or Ed but to distinguish him from my father who had the same name, I am referring to him here as Walter.

It appears that he had tried to volunteer earlier than his enlistment date of 24 July, 1915. His Attestation Form describes that he was rejected earlier with a back problem. He embarked for overseas service on 2 January 1916 and was transported to Egypt in the troopship HMAT Afric. At that time, Egypt was a British Protectorate and was used extensively by the British as a military base and a training area. Walter was originally posted to the 24th Battalion in the 8th group of reinforcements for that battalion, but after the withdrawal of the troops from Gallipoli, the Army went through a restructuring process to double its size. Half of the seasoned men from the first 30 Anzac Battalions were split into new ones in order to provide experience and Walter was re-assigned to the 57th Battalion and promoted to Sergeant.

I think that Australia has typically 'punched above its weight' whenever it has sent military forces to war. We have frequently made a contribution disproportionate to the size of our population. In 1914, the population of Australia was only around 5 million people, yet 416,800 men volunteered to serve. That's nearly 10 percent of the population, or assuming a relatively even split between males and females, around 20% of all the male population of the country. Throughout the entire First World War, some 60,000 Australians were killed and 156,000 wounded. Added to this number of Australians, 100,000 New Zealanders, out of a population of only 1.1 million people, also served. They experienced 8,159 men killed and over 14,800 casualties. Of all the British Commonwealth forces in WW1, Australia and New Zealand had the highest casualty rates of all.

After his assignment and training, Walter eventually arrived in Marseilles in June 1916 and his Battalion, as part of the 15th Brigade moved forward to Fromelles, reaching the front line of the Western Front on 16 July 1916. This place was to be the first taste of action for many Australians and it was a terrible disaster.

Fromelles

The Battle of Fromelles was the Australian part of a larger operation - The Battle of the Somme. This was poorly planned and executed with disastrous results by the British General, Richard Haking. He had a reputation for acting as a commander who was willing to wage a pointless war of attrition. He earned himself the contempt of the Australian Generals for his decision to launch this attack at Fromelles for no particular purpose. It was just a feint, designed to draw attention away from other actions in the area. The Australian Generals tried to convince him that the attack would fail but he would not be persuaded to desist.

On the night of 19 July 1916 after some days of delay caused by bad weather, Australian soldiers climbed out of the trenches in their thousands to advance on the German positions. Members of

the 59th and 60th Battalions reached the German trenches but couldn't hold them. Most were cut down by withering machine gun fire. In a single night, the Australians suffered 5533 casualties - the greatest Australian loss of life ever in a single day of combat. This number of casualties from this battle in one night is more than than the Australians experienced in the Boer War, Korean War, Malayan Emergency, Vietnam War, Iraq and Afghanistan combined. In other words, we experienced around one quarter of the total number of casualties of the entire nine-month Gallipoli campaign in one night. The impact was so great that it took nearly six months before these units were again battle ready.

During this attack, Walter was in the reserve trenches with 57th Battalion. They were moved into the front line during the following morning as the survivors of the battle were too few in number to effectively defend the line. The British refused to negotiate a truce to attend to the wounded in no man's land between the trenches so members of the 57th Battalion took it on themselves to individually venture out and collect the wounded. They marked their positions by day and collected the wounded by night. Over three days, they managed to retrieve over 300 wounded men. As men were being rescued, other wounded men nearby would call out "Don't forget me cobber". Volunteers would then mark his location and return to save them as well. ('Cobber' was the term then used in Australia for a 'mate' or 'friend'. It persisted until I was a boy).

There is a wonderful statue at Fromelles that commemorates the bravery of this action with a second copy of the same statue standing near the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. It is called 'Cobbers' and shows a Sergeant of the 57th Battalion carrying a man in a fireman's lift back to safety.

Life in The Trenches

Throughout WW1, the war was conducted along a line of trenches that extended from the French / Swiss border to the North Sea on the Belgian coast. For Australian, and British soldiers, life was one of being rotated between billets behind the lines, into reserve trenches and then into the front line. The march from billets, usually farm houses and barns, to the front line could be as long as five miles.

When the Australians reached the trenches at Fromelles, they had moved from the heat of Egypt to the coldest winter in France for 40 years. They risked freezing to death.

Typically, a battalion's spell in the front line would be followed by a stint spent in support, and then another in reserve lines. A period of rest would follow - generally short in duration - before the whole cycle of trench duty would start afresh. For example, a man might expect, over a year, to spend something like 70 days in the front line, with another 30 in nearby support trenches. A further 120 might be spent in reserve. Only 70 days might be spent at rest. The amount of leave varied, with perhaps two weeks being granted during the year.

Death was a constant threat to those serving in the line; even when no raid or attack was launched or defended against. In busy sectors of the front, the constant shellfire directed by the enemy brought random death, whether their victims were lounging in a trench or lying in a dugout (many men were buried as a consequence of such large shell-bursts).

New soldiers were cautioned against their natural inclination to peer over the parapet of the trench into No Man's Land. Many men died on their first day in the trenches as a consequence of a precisely aimed sniper's bullet. Perhaps one third of all Allied casualties on the Western Front were actually sustained in the trenches.

Aside from enemy injuries, disease was prevalent. Rats in their millions infested the trenches. Gorging themselves on human remains (grotesquely disfiguring them by eating their eyes and liver) they could grow to the size of a cat. Men, exasperated and afraid of these rats (which would

even scamper across their faces in the dark), would attempt to rid the trenches of them by various methods: gunfire, with the bayonet, and even by clubbing them to death.

Rats were by no means the only source of infection and nuisance. Lice were a never-ending problem, breeding in the seams of filthy clothing and causing men to itch unceasingly. Even when clothing was periodically washed and deloused, lice eggs invariably remained hidden in the seams; within a few hours of the clothes being re-worn, body heat would cause the eggs to hatch. Lice caused Trench Fever, a particularly painful disease that began suddenly with severe pain followed by high fever. Recovery, away from the trenches, took up to twelve weeks.

Frogs by the score were found in shell holes covered in water and also in the base of trenches. Slugs and horned beetles crowded the sides of the trench.

Many men chose to shave their heads entirely to avoid another prevalent scourge: nits.

Trench Foot was another medical condition peculiar to trench life. It was a fungal infection of the feet caused by cold, wet and unsanitary trench conditions. It could turn gangrenous and result in amputation. Trench Foot was more of a problem at the start of trench warfare. As conditions improved in1915 it rapidly faded, although a trickle of cases continued throughout the war.

The daily routine of life in the trenches began with the morning 'stand to'. An hour before dawn everyone was roused from their slumber by the company orderly officer or sergeant and ordered to climb up on the fire step with bayonets fixed to guard against a dawn raid by the enemy. Accompanying stand to, as the light grew, was the daily ritual often termed the 'morning hate'. Both sides would often relieve the tension of the early hours with machine gun fire, shelling and small arms fire, directed into the mist to their front: this made doubly sure of safety at dawn.

With stand to over, rum might then be issued to the men. They would then attend to the cleaning of their rifle and equipment, which was followed by inspection by the officers.

Breakfast would be served. In essentially every area of the line at some time or other each side would adopt an unofficial truce while breakfast was served and eaten. This truce often extended to the wagons which delivered such sustenance. Truces such as these seldom lasted long; invariably a senior officer would hear of its existence and quickly stamp it out. Nevertheless it persisted throughout the war, and was more prevalent in the quieter sectors of the line.

With breakfast over, the men would be inspected by either the company or platoon commander. Once this had been completed NCOs would assign daily chores to each man (except those who had been excused duty for a variety of reasons). These included the refilling of sandbags, the repair of the duckboards on the floor of the trench and the draining of trenches. Particularly following heavy rainfall, trenches could quickly accumulate muddy water, making life ever more miserable for its occupants as the walls of the trench rapidly became misshapen and were prone to collapse.

Given that each side's front line was constantly under watch by snipers and look-outs during daylight, movement was logically restricted until night fell. Thus, once men had concluded their assigned tasks they were free to attend to more personal matters, such as reading and writing letters back to home.

Meals were also prepared. Sleep was snatched wherever possible - although it was seldom that men were allowed sufficient time to grab more than a few minutes rest before they were detailed to another task.

With the onset of dusk the morning ritual of stand to was repeated, again to guard against a surprise attack launched as light fell.

This over, the trenches became a hive of activity. Men would be sent to the rear lines to fetch rations and water. Other men would be assigned sentry duty on the fire step. Generally men would be expected to provide sentry duty for up to two hours. Any longer and there was a real risk of men falling asleep on duty - for which the penalty was death by firing squad.

Patrols would often be sent out into No Mans Land. Some men would be tasked with repairing or adding barbed wire to the front line. Others however would go out to assigned listening posts, hoping to pick up valuable information from the enemy lines. Sometimes enemy patrols would meet in No Man's Land. They were then faced with the option of hurrying on their separate ways or else engaging in hand to hand fighting. They could not afford to use their handguns while patrolling in No Man's Land, for fear of the machine gun fire it would inevitably attract - deadly to all members of the patrol.

Men were relieved from front-line duty at night-time too. Relieving units would wind their weary way through numerous lines of communications trenches, weighed down with equipment and trench stores (such as shovels, picks, corrugated iron, duckboards, etc.). The process of relieving a line could take several frustrating hours.

Finally, no description of trench life can avoid the aspect that instantly struck visitors to the lines: the appalling stench given off by numerous conflicting sources. Rotting corpses lay around in their thousands. For example, approximately 200,000 men were killed on the Somme battlefields, many of which lay in shallow graves. Overflowing latrines would similarly give off a most offensive stench. Men who had not been afforded the luxury of a bath in weeks or months would offer the pervading odour of dried sweat. Their feet were generally accepted to give off the worst odour.

Trenches would also smell of creosol or chloride of lime, used to stave off the constant threat of disease and infection.

Add to this the smell of cordite, the lingering odour of poison gas, rotting sandbags, stagnant mud, cigarette smoke and cooking food... yet men grew used to it, while it thoroughly overcame first-time visitors to the front.

From time to time, both sides would conduct raids on the other sides trenches. This involved crossing no mans land with the possibility of heavy machine gun fire and then engaging in hand to hand fighting to take prisoners or disrupt the enemy. This involved fighting with clubs, bayonets and bare hands - awful stuff.

Battle of Polygon Wood

The next major action that Walter saw was the Battle of Polygon Wood which took place during the Second Battle of Ypres in September 1917, near the southern Belgian town of Zonnebeke. The British planned to advance 900 to 1300 metres over a front of nearly 8 kilometres. The name Polygon Wood was derived from a plantation of forest that lay along the axis of the Australian advance. Shelling had reduced the wood to little more than stumps and broken timber.

This battle would rely on huge amounts of shellfire and thousands of men. The British General, Douglas Haigh, ordered up 56,000 tonnes of additional artillery ammunition over the normal amount used. The Australians had 205 heavy artillery pieces - one gun for every 9 metres of its front. The plan was for about 90,000 British and Australian men to advance behind a moving screen of shells – the ‘creeping barrage’ as it was known – and seize most of their objectives. The Germans launched several counter-attacks but these were thwarted by the heavy defensive artillery barrages used to protect the infantry consolidating their objectives.

However, before the 57th Battalion could begin its attack, a significant German artillery barrage fell across their lines and those of the Australian 15th Brigade and 5th Division. Very accurate artillery fire caught the 57th Battalion as they moved towards the line through the nearby Glencourse

Wood. Fifteen were killed and 42 wounded. One of these was Walter Wilson with shrapnel wounds to his head and back. He was transferred to a local casualty clearing station and then to a base hospital at Le Havre. He rejoined his battalion on 6th February 1918.

British losses were 15,375 casualties; 1,215 being killed. The 4th Australian Division suffered 1,717 casualties and the 5th Australian Division had 5,471 dead and wounded in the period 26–28 September.

This was one of the actions planned by General Douglas Haig, He was one of the most controversial generals of the war. Under his direction the British Army launched a series of mighty offensives against the German lines, the most famous of which were the battles of the Somme (1916) and this one of Passchendale (1917). Haig's character remains mired in mystery. He has been depicted as a callous and incompetent man who obstinately persisted with costly and futile offensives driven by a boundless, yet ill-founded optimism. These two offensives resulted in huge numbers of casualties but failed to break the deadlock or to win significant territory. Haig has been accused of being an out-dated cavalryman wedded to a belief in the possibility of breakthrough and the idea that will and persistence will triumph. He failed to appreciate the realties of the new attritional warfare used in WW1 where success was measured, not in territory captured, but by the attainment of a favourable casualty ratio.

Battle of Amiens

In March of 1918, the Germans had mounted an offensive push westwards towards the city of Amiens, They had taken back more territory than the British had gained over the previous four years of the war. The Australian Fifth Division, which included the 57th Battalion, were moved north to deal with the German advance. By now, the British were tired of the war. They had become unwilling to fight and their military police were forcing men into the trenches with drawn pistols.

The local French population were evacuating. Ross McMullen, a noted Australian historian, tells the story of women moving along the road from their villages dragging their belongings and with with children clinging to their skirts. As the Australian marched passed on their way to the front one soldier called out "'Fini retreat madame – beaucoup Australiens ici' (Stop retreating madam, there are many Australians here). With renewed confidence, many of the women turned around and returned to their homes. The Australian Diggers were greeted enthusiastically by the local people who admired their strength and fortitude.

By this time, the brilliant Australian General John Monash had worked out how to combine infantry, armour, artillery and aircraft into a unified moving advance. This would enable the army to move with surprise and without the forward warning of the traditional artillery barrage. Whilst for the previous four years, the war had not moved more than a kilometre or so in either direction, the Australians were now pushing the Germans back for distances of up to 11 kilometres in a day. Ross McMullen says that at this time, Australia probably had more impact on world history than ever before, and ever since. This was also the first time that all five Australian Divisions had fought together.

Their first accomplishment was to liberate the village of Veillers-Bretonneux and this enabled them to have the tactical advantage of occupying high ground. This was achieved on April 25, the third anniversary of the original landing at Gallipoli. The local people remember Australians fondly and there has been a strong bond ever since. The school in Villers Brettoneux was rebuilt with pennies collected by Victorian school children after the war and to this day displays a sign, "Do Not Forget Australia".

The 57 Battalion's war diary records that the town was surrounded by 3.00 am on April 25 and the Battalion pushed into the town in the morning from the west. Over 600 prisoners were taken. Fighting around the town continued for the next two days and on April 29, the 57th battalion was

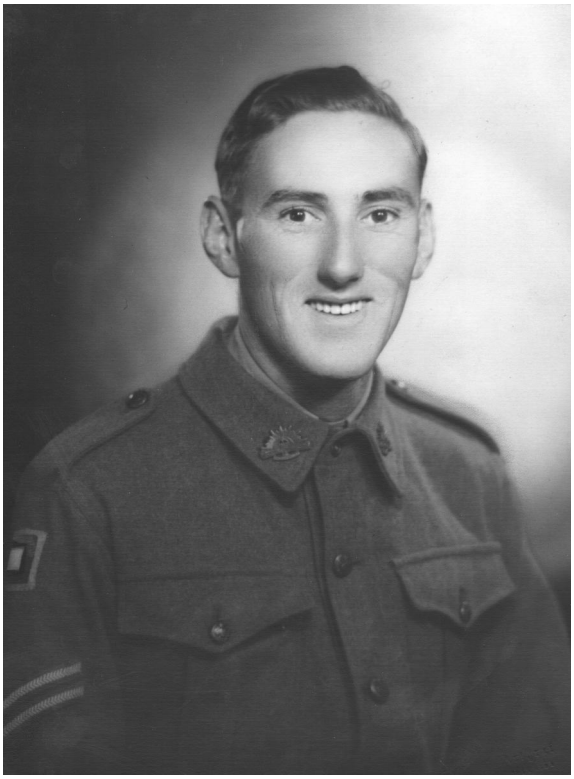
provided with a rest day so the men could have a bath in the village of Daours. Clean underclothing was also issued to all men.

During the first week of August, training was held with the Canadians for a further advance on a wide front of 11 miles. Then on August 8, over 130,000 Australians attacked on the north of the railway line from Amiens towards Harbonnieres with the Canadians fighting to the south of the railway line. The Australians set out from positions near Villers Brettoneux and Hamel and accomplished all their objectives in just two hours. This momentum began to change the war and eventually pushed the Germans right back to St Quentin and eventual surrender.

August 8 was the last day of the war for Walter Wilson. Somewhere in the advance, he was shot in the right buttock. He was one of 6,491 casualties over the seven days of the battle. Apparently, his injury was not uncommon as when you went to ground and covered your head with your hands as protection, your bum stuck up in the air. He was transferred to an ambulance station at Boulogne and eventually sent to hospital in England. He was discharged from hospital on 21 October, 1918 but then re-admitted with influenza one week later.

Walter returned to Australia on 3 March 1919 and married in 1920. He died on September 19, 1956 while driving home from his last delivery to a customer of his grocery business. He was planning to close his business that night and retire.

WORLD WAR 2 - VX134593, CORPORAL EDGAR OSWALD WILSON - 108 SUPPLY PLATOON



Edgar (Ted) Wilson, my father, took after his dad and worked in his family business as a grocer. Later, he studied accountancy at night school at RMIT. He was born on 1 February 1921.

Service in the Militia

At the outbreak of the Second World War, a new volunteer army was raised in Australia and sent for service overseas. Members of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF or Army Reserve)) were restricted to service on Australian territory to ensure home defence. The defence of Australia at that time included the defence of Australian territories in Papua and New Guinea. When the Japanese entered the war, members of the CMF actually fought together with the AIF in New Guinea.

In WW1, a referendum for conscription was defeated and so the 1st AIF was a totally volunteer army. In 1939, at the start of World War II, all unmarried men aged 21 were to be called up for three months' militia training. Conscription was effectively introduced in mid-1942, when all men aged 18–35, and single men aged 35–45, were required to join the Citizens Military Forces (CMF). Volunteers with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) scorned CMF conscripts as "chocolate soldiers", or "chockos", because they were believed to melt under the conditions of battle. This was a term that was still used when I served in Vietnam. It was actually very inappropriate as proved by members of the 39th Battalion who encountered the Japanese at Kokoda and fought very bravely and gallantly.

By WW2, Australia's population had grown to 7 million people. From this number, just under one million people served in the three forces - army, navy and air force. Australians suffered 66,563 wounded and 39,429 deaths over the duration of the war. Proportionally, this is a much lower figure than WW1. Firstly the type of warfare was different - more mobile and not bogged down in static trench warfare. Secondly, it is also because in the first world war, Britain provided all the support services such as ordnance, transport, supply etc. This meant that almost all Australians who served were in combative units. In World War 2, it took something like seven support troops to keep one Australian combat soldier in the field.

In effect, Australia fought two wars between 1939 and 1945 – one against Germany and Italy as part of the British Commonwealth's war effort and the other against Japan in alliance with the United States and Britain. While most Australian forces were withdrawn from the Mediterranean following the outbreak of war in the Pacific, Australians continued to take part in large numbers in the air offensive against Germany.

From 1942 until early 1944, Australian forces played a key role in the Pacific War, making up the majority of Allied strength throughout much of the fighting in the South West Pacific.

My father, Ted Wilson joined the CMF, or Militia, in 1941. After his initial training at a camp located near Royal Park, in Melbourne, he was posted to a supply company which was part of the Australian Army Service Corps. The AASC was responsible for transport and the supply of fuel and fresh food. Supplies of equipment, ammunition and related stores were then the responsibility of the Australian Army Ordnance Corps.

In the Militia, Ted was posted to a number of supply depots in the Northern Territory. His first was at Alice Springs. Prior to the war, Alice Springs was an extremely isolated settlement of fewer than 500 people. During the war, however, the town was an extremely active staging base, known as No. 9 Australian Staging Camp, and a depot base for the long four-day trip north to Darwin. The railway hub in Alice Springs was taken over by military operations and the number of soldiers posted in Alice Springs grew rapidly, as did the number of personnel passing through on their way to and from Darwin. This activity was in support of the defence of Australia's northern coast.

He was also based at the towns of Tennant Creek and Barrow Creek. During World War II, Barrow Creek was used by the Australian Army as a staging camp for convoys of troops and supplies, and was known as No. 5 Australian Personnel Staging Camp. It was the first overnight stop on the northern trip from Alice Springs to Birdum (Daly Waters) and then Darwin.

His job at this time was to negotiate with local cattle producers for the supply of meat for the forces and supervise the transition of stores and supplies through the staging camps on the roads to the north. He travelled as far north as Daly Waters although was never posted to Darwin.

Joining the AIF

In 1942 a number of events occurred that shattered Australian's confidence and raised high levels of alarm. During that year, the seemingly impregnable British base at Singapore was overrun by the Japanese, Darwin was bombed repeatedly, Japanese mini submarines were active in Sydney Harbour, large naval fleets fought the battle of the Coral Sea and the Japanese were coming south through New Guinea (an Australian protectorate) across the Kokoda Track. People were terrified of a Japanese invasion.

This fear caused Ted and many other Australians to transfer from the Militia and sign up for active service in the full time army (2nd AIF). On the 22 January, 193 he transferred to the 2nd AIF and his service number changed from a militia number of V70187 to an AIF number of VX134593. He continued to serve in the Northern Territory until October 1944.

Just before Christmas of 1944, he found himself reposted to Queensland and attending a jungle warfare course at Canungra. This was a tough training centre where every movement was done 'at the double'. It is the only military training centre in Australia that has its own cemetery.

At the end of January, Ted was posted to 183 Supply Depot Platoon in Queensland. There is very little information available on the supply operations during WW2. This unit is listed by name as part of the taxonomy of Australian units at the Australian War Memorial but there is no information about it. It is simply listed as one of about 45 other supply depots linked to the war with Japan. It probably operated to supply expanding operations in the Pacific with food and stores.

Morotai

On 28 April, 1945, Ted embarked on the troopship, the Fred C Ainsworth, to Morotai and began his active service. This ship was originally laid down as SS Pass Christian by Ingalls Shipbuilding at Pascagoula, Mississippi, and was completed in June 1943. She was transferred to the US Army, and renamed USAT Fred C. Ainsworth. The ship operated in the Pacific during World War II, except for a brief voyage to Europe in mid-1945 to redeploy troops to the Pacific Theatre.

Morotai is a small island located in the Halmahera group of eastern Indonesia's Maluku Islands. Most of the island's interior is rugged and covered in thick jungle. Prior to the outbreak of war, Morotai had a population of 9,000 and had never been commercially developed. It formed part of the Netherlands East Indies and was ruled by the Dutch through a Sultanate. The Japanese first occupied the island in early 1942 during the Netherlands East Indies Campaign but did not garrison or develop it.

In July 1944, General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of the South West Pacific Area, selected Morotai as the location for air bases and naval facilities needed to support the liberation of of the Philippines. It was occupied in the Battle of Morotai, part of the Pacific War, which began on 15 September 1944, with skirmishes continuing until the end of the war in August 1945. The fighting started when United States and Australian forces landed on the southwest corner of the island. The invading forces greatly outnumbered the island's Japanese defenders and secured their objectives in two weeks. Japanese had reinforcements land on the island between September and November of 1944, but they lacked the supplies needed to effectively attack the Allied defensive perimeter. Intermittent fighting continued until the end of the war, with the Japanese troops suffering heavy loss of life from disease and starvation.

The allies quickly built a huge logistics base - three airstrips, docks, an enormous fuel depot, warehouses and supply dumps. The island played a significant part in providing support for the recapture of the Philippines. As in Australian units to which he was posted, Ted's role in this location would have been receiving food and fuel and then despatching it to fighting units in the field.

An interesting fact is that the last Japanese soldier on Morotai finally surrendered to Indonesian authorities in 1974. He was Private Teruo Nakamura who was a Taiwan-born soldier of the Imperial Japanese Army. He is the last known Japanese 'hold-out' to surrender after the end of hostilities in 1945. After the allies captured the island, it appears that Nakamura lived with a few other stragglers until well into the 1950s, while going off for extended periods of time on his own. In 1956, he apparently decided to relinquish his allegiance with the other remaining Japanese and set off to construct a small camp of his own, consisting of a small hut in a 20 x 30-metre fenced field. Nakamura's hut was accidentally discovered by a pilot in mid-1974. In November 1974, the Japanese Embassy in Jakarta requested the assistance of the Indonesian government in organising a search mission, which was conducted by the Indonesian Air Force on Morotai and led to his arrest by Indonesian soldiers on December 18, 1974. He was flown to Jakarta and hospitalised there. News of his discovery reached Japan on December 27, 1974. Nakamura decided to be repatriated straight to Taiwan, bypassing Japan, and died there of lung cancer five years later in 1979.

Borneo

Ted's last posting in WW2 was to British North Borneo (now the Malaysian state of Sabah). He was transferred to there on a tank landing ship, the LST 941 on 12 July, 1945. British Borneo then comprised North Borneo, Sarawak, Brunei and Labuan Island.

The Borneo Campaign of 1945 was the last major Allied campaign in the South West Pacific Area during World War II. It was directed to mopping up the remnants of Japanese occupation in the islands of the South West Pacific. In a series of amphibious assaults between 1 May and 21 July, 1945 the Australians, under Lieutenant General Leslie Morshead, attacked Japanese forces occupying the island.

A forward supply base was required to support the troops. Ted arrived there within a few weeks of the Australians landing and gaining a beach head. The war in North Borneo ended with the official surrender of the Japanese 37th Army by Lieutenant General Baba Masao on Labuan on 10 September 1945.

Return Home

Australians stayed in the Pacific for some months after the war and Ted arrived home back in Brisbane on 12 February 1946. Japan had formally surrendered on 2 September 1945.

Ted was formally discharged from the army in June 1946. He had married in June 1946. After a period of part time study he became a qualified accountant and started work at the first job in his new career a Guests Biscuit Factory. For many years, he refused to eat rice, claiming he had more than enough whilst overseas. In the first few years he was home from active service, he suffered from recurring bouts of malaria which often required hospital treatment.

After the famous Battle of the Coral Sea frustrated the Japanese plan to capture Port Morseby via an amphibious landing, the Japanese attempted to capture the town by landing the South Seas Force at Buna on the north coast of Papua and advancing overland using the Kokoda Track to cross the rugged Owen Stanley Range. The Kokoda Track campaign began on 22 July, 1942 when the Japanese started their advance, opposed by an ill-prepared CMF brigade designated 'Maroubra Force'. This force was successful in delaying the South Seas Force but was unable to halt it. Two AIF battalions from the 7th Division were hastily returned from Europe and reinforced the remnants of Maroubra Force on 26 August 1942. By then, the Japanese continued to make ground and had reached the village of Ioribaiwa near Port Moresby on 16 September. The South Seas Force was forced to withdraw back along the track on this day, however, as supply problems made any further advance impossible and an Allied counter-landing at Buna was feared. Australian forces pursued the Japanese along the Kokoda Track and forced them into a small bridgehead on the north coast of Papua in early November. The Allied operations on the Kokoda Track were made possible by native Papuans who were recruited by the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit, often forcibly, to carry supplies and evacuate wounded personnel.

We may think about the various actions such as this and perhaps consider them to be just normal military activities in a time of war. To do this would be a great injustice to the men involved. It would overlook the courage, fear, fatigue and terror that they experienced in action. It wouldn’t take into account the misery of being a prisoner of war and it denies the barbarous murders of ordinary Australian fighting men by the Japanese.

War is a horrible time. There are no words that can ever describe the horrors of the holocaust in which over 6 million Jews died. We need to remember that 23 million service men and women from all countries gave their lives in the spirit of loyalty to their nation during WW2. Over 34 million civilians lost their lives - the Soviet Union alone had 21 million of its population perish. The social effects of these numbers are enormous and long term. These are terrible statistics.

VIETNAM - 3793987 PRIVATE BRUCE WILSON - 85 Transport Platoon, 26 Company, RAASC



This part is my own story. I am the third generation of the Wilson Family to see active service. As a result of this I now have an experience and a network of friends and close mates that no one else in my family, or extended family, has.

Vietnam War

During 1964 the Australian government re-introduced conscription to support their decision to send troops to South Vietnam. Twenty-year-old men were called up for two years of service in a lottery drawn by pulling marbles from a barrel based on their birthdates. Marbles were pulled out in sequence until sufficient numbers were reached to maintain the desired strength of the army. This was the first time ever in Australian history that conscripted soldiers were sent on active service.

Australian support for South Vietnam in the early 1960s was in keeping with the policies of other nations who were concerned to stem the spread of communism in Europe and Asia. Governments around the world were fearful of the increasing inroads of communist aggression.

At first, during 1961 and 1962, Australia sent thirty military advisers to Vietnam to operate with local forces. In August 1964 the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) sent a flight of Caribou transports to the port town of Vung Tau. By early 1965, when it had become clear that South Vietnam could not stave off the communist insurgents and the North Vietnamese regular forces for more than a few more months, the US commenced a major escalation of the war. By the end of the year it had committed 200,000 troops to the conflict. As part of the build up, the US government requested support from other countries including Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Thailand and the Phillipines.

The Australian government dispatched the first troops - the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) in June 1965. In March 1966 the government announced the establishment of a task force to replace 1RAR, consisting of two battalions, later three, at Nui Dat with support and logistics services to be based at Vung Tau. The task force (including national servicemen) was assigned its own area of operations throughout Phuoc Tuy province. This province had not been secured by government forces since before WW2. All of the Royal Australian Regiment's nine battalions eventually served in the task force at one time or another. At the height of Australian involvement our forces numbered some 8,500 troops along with RAAF and Navy units which also served in various locations of the country.

By late 1970, the military effort in Vietnam had begun to wind down. The number of battalions in the task force was reduced to two although the strength of the training team was increased. The withdrawal of troops and all air units continued throughout 1971 – the last battalion left Nui Dat on 7 November 1971, while a handful of advisers belonging to 'The Training Team' remained in Vietnam until the following year. In December 1972 they became the last Australian troops to come home, with their unit having seen continuous service in South Vietnam for ten and a half years. This is the longest war in which Australia has even been involved.

A total of 50,001 people served in Vietnam with 2,400 casualties and 520 deaths.

The South Vietnamese army continued to fight with sporadic levels of effectiveness until, in early 1975, the communists launched a major offensive in the north of South Vietnam resulting in the fall of Saigon on 30 April. In the previous month a RAAF detachment of 7 - 8 Hercules transports flew humanitarian missions to aid civilian refugees displaced by the fighting and carried out the evacuation of hundreds of Vietnamese orphans. The Australian embassy was finally closed and evacuated on 25 April, 1975. We saw the after effects of the war between 1975 and 1995 when Vietnamese refugees arrived on our northern shores as 'boat people'.

National Service Training

I was required to register for National Service in February 1968 (the year in which I turned 20 years of age) as the law demanded. My birthday was drawn in the ballot and so, to my trepidation, I began my two year period of national service along with 1000 other men at Puckapunyal on 17 July 1968. I was in the 13th intake of National Servicemen, or the 3rd intake of 1968.

Between 1964 and 1972, a total of 804,286 twenty-year-olds registered for national service and 63,735 of them saw service in the Army. Contrary to public opinion, not all National Servicemen ('Nashos') served in Vietnam - only about one third (19,450 of us) eventually saw active service.

My experience was typical of all national servicemen who went to Vietnam. I first reported to the Army Engineers Depot which was then in Swan Street, Richmond. The building has since been demolished and the location is now marked by a plaque on the eastern side of AAMI Park. From there we were bussed to the large army base at Puckapunyal (about 100km north of Melbourne) and issued with jungle green uniforms to begin our 10 weeks of recruit training. This taught us basic infantry skills and initiated us into army life. I was in 1 Platoon, A Company at 2RTB (2 Recruit Training Battalion). At the conclusion of recruit training, we were sorted into various occupational groups based on our education, preferences and physical ability. At six feet three inches of height (195 cm), I only weighed 10.5 stone (75 kgs). I jokingly tell people that I survived the war by walking around sideways and no one could see me to shoot at me. I was hopeless at PT although I could shoot well and easily manage long route marches. I suspect that my physical build and work experience influenced the army's decision to initially allocate me the job of a Pay Clerk in the Royal Australian Army Service Corps (RAASC).

My maternal grandfather died on the day of my march-out parade from recruit training and I was given a couple of days compassionate leave to attend his funeral. When I reported back to the RAASC Training Centre, also at Puckapunyal, the officer in charge asked me what training I was reporting for, so I said "Sir, I would like to be a truck driver". He pointed along the hallway and said that I should go to the third room on the left where the driver training course was about to commence. I have always been grateful for that period of compassionate leave as I didn't quite expect to spend my time in the army in the over-exciting role of a payroll clerk. The eight-week driver training course not only taught us how to drive , but also covered tactical aspects of driving in threatened environments, paperwork, vehicle servicing and some transport administration. I graduated as top of the class but I was bemused to later see that in my personal service record that my grading during training was marked only as 'average'.

Service in Vietnam

After I completed my driver training, I was posted to 87 Transport Platoon, also at Puckapunyal. This unit had just returned from service in Vietnam and acted as a reinforcement unit for other transport units serving in Vietnam. I was posted there for about three months and then spent a few weeks at the Jungle Warfare Training Centre at Canungra in Queensland before being sent to join a unit in Vietnam.

By the time we arrived in Vietnam, we 'Nashos' were trained equally as well as the regular soldiers in the army. Apart from our service numbers, which had a difference numeric sequence, one could

not tell any difference between us. We preferred to be called National Servicemen rather than the more derogatory term of ‘Conscripts’.

I arrived at 85 Transport Platoon in Nui Dat, South Vietnam on the morning of April 16, 1969 - some nine months after I entered the army. My time in Vietnam is recorded in my diary which I have published on my website at http://www.wilsons.id.au/vietnam-diary-march-1969-70/. It is also available in Ebook form as the ‘Road Runner Diary’ on Apple’s iBooks store.

My unit, 85 Transport Platoon, 26 Company, RAASC, had been based in Vietnam since April 1967. Located at our task force, or fighting base at Nui Dat, it was the only first-line transport unit in Vietnam. The unit was eventually returned home in June 1972 as part of the planned withdrawal of Australian Forces. Over its total time of the war, members of the Platoon rotated in and out on an individual basis, typically spending a year’s posting in the platoon on active service. Around 480 men served with the unit over its life in Vietnam. Since then it has seen service in East Timor and is now based at Amberley, Queensland. Subsequently, individual members have seen active service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I flew to Vietnam on the weekly chartered Qantas Boeing 707 flight. This plane left Sydney late at night, refuelled in Darwin and arrived in Saigon early on the next morning. Singapore allowed us to transit through their airport on an informal basis. We could have hardly hidden our true identity as we were required to changed into civilian clothes during the time we spent time on the ground as the plane refuelled. Imagine how obvious it was as to who we were when 200 young men in different civilian shirts,, but all wearing khaki polyester pants with spit polished boots disembarked and wandered around the terminal! Once we arrived in Saigon, we were transported to whichever base our assigned unit was located on different aircraft. I flew to Nui Dat in an American Hercules aircraft along with a couple of dozen other men and two army Land Rovers.

I now reflect on that time and think how young we were. I was still twenty years of age when I arrived at Nui Dat. I had my twenty-first birthday six weeks after I arrived. My Platoon Sergeant was twenty-three and my Commanding Officer was twenty-five. Soldiering is certainly a job for young people - only the young can cope with the physical demands required of them at war. The average age of Australian soldiers in Vietnam was 21 - the youngest of any war in which Australians have ever been engaged.

At Nui Dat, I was met by Lt Reason, the 2IC of 85 Platoon, introduced to the OC, Captain Snare, and issued with a rifle and ammunition and assigned a bed in a tent. I was quite nervous and anxious about my first night in a war zone which wasn’t helped by being awoken in the middle of the night by the blood-curdling screams of the unit’s Hygiene Duty Man (Dunny Man) who had gone ‘troppo’ and was having another nightmare. He was sent home a few weeks after I arrived.

We were accommodated in lines of tents - four men to a tent which were sandbagged, for protection, to a height of about 1.5 metres. Outside every tent was an underground weapon pit for protection in the times that we were rocketed or mortared by enemy fire.

We had a daily routine where at 6.00 am we reported, in our lines, for roll-call and a compulsory pill parade at which we were issued with anti-malarial pills and medication. Breakfast was typically at 7.00 am and we reported for duty at the Transport Yard at 8.00 am to be assigned our tasks for the day. Lunch was at 12.00 noon if we were still within the base, or from ration packs if our task for the day meant that we were still out on the road. The evening meal was at 6.00 pm after which we could relax at the canteen, watch a movie or have other personal time until lights out at 10.00 pm. Every now and then, we were rostered for piquet (guard) duty where had a four hour shift during the night patrolling our lines and work areas in pairs.

Over the 12 months of deployment, we only had Sunday afternoons as rest time, unless some urgent event or operation required us to work. We had one week’s R&R leave which could be taken in any of the destinations open to US Servicemen. These included Hong Kong, Taipei,

Singapore, Sydney, Honolulu, Manila, Penang or Tokyo. We also had five days of Rest and Care Leave at the Australian Army's recreation centre in Vung Tau.

On my second day in Vietnam, I was advised that I would be seconded to Vung Tau to join a detachment of our unit which provided tip-trucks for use at our logistics base. Vung Tau was considered to be an easy posting and with much fewer restrictions on life than at Nui Dat. Unlike Nui Dat, local people were employed inside the base as cleaners, kitchen hands and labourers. Soldiers were free to spend the evenings in the town as long as they were back at the base in time for the local curfew at 10.00 pm.

From Vung Tau, we were mainly tasked to carry sand, rock and ice to the task force base at Nui Dat. We travelled in 'packet's of five to six trucks and were escorted by a gun jeep - a Landrover with an M60 machine gun mounted on a post in the back. Each truck had a driver and a 'shotgun' who were armed with automatic rifles. Sometimes, especially when a new infantry battalion arrived, a convoy to Nui Dat could consist of around 200 vehicles. A daily convoy to Nui Dat was generally scheduled in the morning and late afternoon. We mostly drove independently of these convoys. On occasions when the road was rated as being of a 'Red' condition (there was an enemy engagement somewhere), the convoys would be delayed until armoured protection was in place and the road was again clear.

When the detachment ended two months later, and we returned to Nui Dat, my work in the tipper section of the platoon meant that we were mostly working with the Army Engineers to carry rock and materials for road building, civil aid and construction projects. We repaired many roads, culverts and bridge approaches that had been damaged by the Viet Cong when they planted mines or other explosives. We were frequently out late at night, well after curfew, with armoured protection repairing damaged roads.

At one time, we were working with the American Seabees to build roads in one of the villages that we knew had a strong level of Viet Cong (VC) sympathy. Over the weeks that we worked on this job, we befriended many of the little village kids, taking them for rides in our trucks and giving them lollies. On one day, we were very grateful for this friendship as the kids caught us before we entered the village gates and told us not to proceed as the road had been mined overnight by the local VC. Their action most likely saved a life or two!

About halfway through my time in Vietnam, I came home on R&R for a week's leave. On my return, I was reassigned to another section in the platoon to drive general cargo trucks. These were very flexible vehicles and could be set up in many ways. One was with central seating for carrying troops. Alternatively, the wooden seats could be folded up and placed on the sides of the vehicles to make a high sided cargo carrying area. They could also be removed completely to convert the truck into a standard tray truck. These trucks were six-wheel drive vehicles with a six speed crash gear box that could operate in either a high or low gearbox ratio. They were rated as 5 tonne vehicles, but were frequently overloaded and often carried up to 7 tonnes (as also were the tippers).

For the last part of my time in Vietnam I was transporting troops, stores, ammunition and fuel to remote fire support bases that were providing covering fire for different infantry operations. The most significant operation in which I was involved was a three-day trip to resupply an armoured operation where the tanks needed refuelling and re-arming. We took five trucks loaded alternatively with petrol and tank ammunition to a remote resupply point to the west of Saigon - well out of our normal territory. Our protection for this trip consisted of two armoured personnel carriers, our own gun jeep and occasionally a helicopter. It was very reassuring to know that we were well protected.

One of the most pleasing tasks was the few weeks that I spent working on a civil aid job at a village north of our task force base called Ngai Giou. It was a village where local people had been relocated from North Vietnam to escape religious persecution. As part of a small team, we built a

community and medical centre in the village. My job each day was to take a truck loaded with water for use in making concrete. It was a good opportunity to talk to a few of the local people.

Our trucks were shot at on a few times in Vietnam, but I'm very grateful that I never had to shoot back at anyone in anger. Mostly, the threat we faced as drivers was one of uncertainty and anxiety due to the nature of being in a guerrilla war. We weren't fighting for territory as in previous wars; we were fighting to win hearts and minds - to make the country side safe for the farmers to harvest their crops, for store keepers to sell their goods and for villagers to live without being stood over or assassinated for their political beliefs. This type of environment results in a high level of stress. We never knew whether the man riding a motor scooter alongside our truck and carrying a satchel was just a school teacher on his way to work, or whether his satchel was full of explosives and he was about to heave it into the cabin of our truck.

Another role of our unit was to maintain the task force base. We were occasionally rostered to drive either a water truck that delivered water from the water point to the various units in Nui Dat (except that we conveniently forgot the Military Police whenever they charged on of our drivers with speeding) or driving the only purpose-built garbage compactor truck that the army had ever owned. To spend a week on the garbage truck was a highly desired job. It was easy work and with a little effort, you make the garbage run last all day. The main attraction was that, under the army's uniform replacement policy, you could exchange a piece of worn out gear on a one-for-one basis with a new piece. As soldiers were returning home, they just threw their unwanted gear away and these could easily be collected on the garbage run and replaced for new ones, even if the size was different. At one stage, I had six pairs of pants and ten shirts - well in excess of the standard army issue of two sets of uniform.

Returning Home

As each person left the unit to return home, they were presented with a pewter mug that had been inscribed by the dentist using his drill. We had a barbecue most weeks with good Australian meat and sausages to celebrate someone's returning home.

When it was my turn to return home, I had been driving trucks on the Monday before I left Vietnam. I flew to Saigon and caught the chartered Qantas flight home from Saigon overnight on Tuesday. It landed early in Sydney early the morning so as to avoid the anti-war protesters and on Wednesday afternoon, I was back home with Mum. I had none of the many months that my father and grandfather had in which to get over the stress of being at war. I remember walking up to the shops with my mother on the first day that I was home. A car back-fired and I found myself lying on the footpath with my hands over my head. In a state of alarm, my mother asked "What on earth are you doing?" I simply replied "Just what I did yesterday". Few veterans, especially those suffering from PTSD, received any help in readjusting to normal life after coming home from the war.

Like most other Vietnam veterans, being home was a great relief from the threat and anxiety of being at war. The Vietnam War was very contentious and divisive and many people in the community thought that it was wrong. For the first time ever, Australians could watch the events of a war (often sensationalised by the media) on TV in their lounge rooms. People were protesting in the streets of capital cities and because they couldn't get to the politicians who actually sent us to war, they took out their anger on the troops when they returned home. These men had no influence over the fate of the war and were simply doing their duty.

Whilst I was stationed in Vung Tau, we all took part in an an Anzac Day Dawn Service on the helicopter pad that also served as a Parade Ground. I remember thinking to myself as I stood at attention "I am now an ANZAC too, I've qualified for this 'club' ". The problem was that when we arrived home, we didn't get any accolades or praise for our defence of our national values as our fathers and grandfathers had received. My grandfather's service was applauded at a civic ceremony and my father participated in marches along the city street, cheered on by grateful

crowds. They were heroes. We came home and hid from the risk of abuse, being spat at and being called ‘baby killers’.

It wasn’t until I participated in a formal Welcome Home Parade in Sydney in 1987 (17 years after my return from Vietnam) that I felt that I could openly talk to others about my experience and service. Some Vietnam Veterans still cannot do this. I hope that the protesters of the day now feel remorseful for the way that they treated the soldiers. I actually think they should be ashamed of the way that they treated our returned servicemen. Those protesters took out their anger on the wrong people in a very cruel, and vindictive way.

SO, WHY DO I MARCH ON ANZAC DAY

Since the Welcome Home Parade, I now march in the Anzac Day Parade along with about twenty other men with whom I served. Other members of 85 Transport Platoon also march in the different towns and cities around Australia in which they live. I also get see many old mates at the bi-annual reunions of 85 Transport Platoon.

In no particular order, I march on Anzac Day because:

- These men are my mates. They are not all people with whom I would normally want to spend a lot of time, but we have a common bond in that we worked hard together, we stood by each other and we looked after each other.

- Even though there is much written about war, only those who were there can truly understand what it was like. You can explain it to others, they can read books and watch movies or documentaries, but they will never have the same understanding of those who were actually there. These men know exactly what it was like - there is no need for explanations; they just understand.

- While it might sound corny to some people, I’m actually very proud of having served my country.

- It also gives me a chance to reflect on the sacrifice and bravery of ordinary people who were asked to make a contribution in times of war and conflict. When you are on active service, you are engaged in the only occupation in the community where you put your life on the line every time that you get dressed for the day. Anyone who has served in the military has made a sacrifice. For some men and women, their sacrifice is the ultimate one where they gave their lives for the cause for which they were fighting. For others, it is the continuing pain, disability and suffering they received from an experience in which men (and now, women) expect themselves to be able to do more than is humanly possible . For those that simply served, it is giving up part of their life when their were far more enjoyable things to do. Of course it wasn’t only the soldiers who suffered. The local people in a war zone always suffer - loss of family, loss of crops, displacement, higher prices, physical threats and damage and loss of their homes and belongings.

Contrary to some people’s perception, none of my experience at Anzac Day is in any way related to the glorification of war. If you go back over the stories of the three generations of these men in my family you can reflect on each of their personal experiences - the fear, exhaustion, and trauma of physical combat in my grandfather’s case, the distance from loved ones, disease and threat of physical harm in the case of my dad and the constant anxiety, strain and uncertainty of guerrilla warfare in my own experience.

There is nothing in any of these stories to glorify. There were no heroics. We were simply ordinary people doing what was required and what we considered to be our duty.


I HAD NO IDEA
THAT FREEDOM
WAS SO EXPENSIVE