

VCE Student Lectures 2011, VCE Unit 4

Lecture: Marina Larsson, Australian Families' Responses to War Death and Disability after the First World War

Primary Source 1

This is a letter written to the Inspector-General of the Insane (Victoria) in 1927 by the parents of a shell shocked soldier. This letter is in the archives of the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) Letter to the Inspector-General of the Insane, 3 October 1927, PROV, VPRS 7527/P0001, Unit 1.

Dear Sir,

I feel it is my duty to write a few lines to you to let you know how my son [Herbert] is progressing ... He is not going back any: all the same he is not normal and I doubt he will ever be ... he gets up and goes to bed as he likes, and he is now trying his best to work up a little Bee farm ... before the war Bee stings had no effect on him but he don't take so kindly to them now. Too nervy I think ... I hope whenever it comes you will speak on behalf of him for a pension for him: his father is 73 years and I am 65 years: and the home is always here for him. He is now over 40 years and his life is blighted. It has been a long war for us ...

I remain yours truly,

Clara Stephens

[This is a pseudonym, no real names are mentioned]

Primary Source 2

These are newspaper reports of returned soldiers who died from war disabilities in 1932 and 1936.

'After 18 Years: German Bullet Kills Digger', *Reveille*, 1 August 1936, p. 31;

'The Death of "Wally" Guy': Brave Soldier Passes', *Herald*, 6 October 1932, p. 12.

AFTER 18 YEARS
German Bullet Kills Digger



Due to the complications set up from a German bullet having been embedded between his heart and lung for 15 years, Jas. R. Maitland, who was a company sgt.-Mjr. in the 19th Bn., A.I.F., and a member of the Australian military forces for 20 years, died in Sydney on July 26. He was 47 years of age. Maitland was wounded at Villers-Bret. on Aug. 8, 1918, and the bullet was removed in 1933. This picture (showing bullet in inset) was taken at the Prisco of Wales Hospital, Randwick, after the operation.

**THE DEATH OF
"WALLY" GUY**

**Brave Soldier
Passes**

PATIENT SINCE 1922

Another story of the Great War—and a very gallant one—closed at Caulfield Military Hospital yesterday with the passing of Walter Henry Guy, one of the pluckiest of the 14th Battalion "Wally," as he was known to the hospital, was aged 38. He had been there since 1922.

Today his comrades at the hospital told of the wonderful cheerfulness of "Wally" during the time he was a patient. It is a story which reached its climax yesterday morning, when he was being wheeled into the operating theatre for the last time.

Turning in his cot, he wished his fellow patients "Cheerio" with a smile and a wave of his hand. The nurse who brought him out of the theatre again says that he was quite courageous. Scarcely able to command his smile, he gave her his last greeting—with a wish.



Students may also be interested in exploring how families expressed their grief in the 'In Memoriam' pages of newspapers. Around Anzac Day in the 1920s and 1930s there are many notices put in this section by families of the war dead and those who subsequently died of their wounds.

Secondary Sources

Marina Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2009.

Martin Crotty & Marina Larsson, *Anzac Legacies: Australians and the Aftermath of War*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010.

** See the relevant chapters on the aftermath of the First World War.

Tanja Luckins, *The Gates of Memory: Australian People's Experiences and Memories of Loss and the Great War*, Curtin University Books, Fremantle, 2004.

Tanja Luckins, 'Crazed With Grief?: The asylum and the Great War in Australia', in Catharine Coleborne and Dolly MacKinnon (eds), *'Madness' in Australia: Histories, Heritage and the Asylum*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2003.

**This article looks at the experiences of mothers and widows of soldiers whose grief at losing a son was so profound that they were admitted to mental hospitals.

Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War*, University of Western Australia Press, 2007.