

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A collection of perspectives

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1917 and the Long Reach of War: Three Stories from the Salient

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Abstract

Battles, by their very nature, are fixed in time and space. Paradoxically (as several historians have observed) they defy the constraints of linear time and their effects can be felt well into the future. This article explores the way the third battle of Ypres changed the lives of three men caught up in the carnage. It charts the way their stories have changed over time and considers the fraught politics of remembrance. All three stories are part of the 100 Stories project, a counter narrative that challenged the dominant mode of commemoration in Australia throughout the centenary of the war. Its aim was to broaden the ambit of remembrance, emphasise the human cost of conflict and examine the way war reaches into and damages the social fabric. Thus far, the 100 Stories have produced a book, inspired musical compositions and performance, formed the basis of several public exhibitions, and led to a host of public and academic presentations in Australia and overseas. They were the centrepiece of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) fielded by Future Learn and provide the framework of a new website hosted by the Australian National University, <https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au>. The stories in this article suggest the scope of the 100 Stories project, spanning the lives of an Indigenous soldier as well as those of British descent. Two of the men examined here were killed in the precinct of Glencorse Wood on the Ypres salient. The third took his own life well after the fighting had ended.

Keywords

1917; commemoration; domestic violence; memory; mourning; remembrance; shellshock; trauma; war; Ypres

From the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War through to November 2018, Museum Victoria hosted the *WWI: Love and Sorrow* exhibition in Melbourne. In some respects, *WWI: Love and Sorrow* was not so dissimilar to the *Scars on the Heart* exhibition bridging the World War One Sanctuary and the World War Two Hall of Memories in the Auckland War Memorial Museum. In common with the Auckland exhibition, *WWI: Love and Sorrow* employed artefact and testimony to convey both the memory and the lived experience of war, was grounded in expert historical commentary, and elicited a deeply emotional response from the visitor. Both exhibitions are examples, as Vanessa Agnew aptly put it, of history's 'affective turn'.¹

The opening gallery of *WWI: Love and Sorrow* merits our particular attention here. It provides a kind

of platform to explore the key themes of this article. The 'journey' (as the museum catalogue was apt to style it) began at the entry to the exhibition itself, a concave gallery featuring a panoramic depiction of Glencorse Wood.² For much of the war, this stretch of Belgian woodland was in the frontline of fighting in Flanders. By September 1917 and the disastrous push on Passchendaele, the forest that had once stood there was all but obliterated by shellfire. Michael McKernan's review of *WWI: Love and Sorrow* describes the imagery of the shattered wood as 'supremely evocative'. At one level, it recalled the moonscape imagery of Great War battlefields, the ghostly remains of trees eerily emblematic of men butchered by the same artillery (Fig. 1).³ At another, it mobilised sound to 'connect' visitors with an otherwise unimaginable experience: 'for

1 Vanessa Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present', *Rethinking History* 11, no. 3 (2007): 299–312.

2 Museums Victoria, *WWI: Love and Sorrow* [Museum Catalogue] (Melbourne: Museums Victoria, 2014).

3 We owe this observation to Jennifer Wellington's recent study of museums and commemoration, *Exhibiting War: The Great War, Museums and Memory in Britain, Canada and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).



Figure 1. 'Ghostly remains': Glencorse Wood shattered by shell fire. E00916A, Australian War Memorial.

the first and only time in "Love & Sorrow", [McKernan notes] we hear the sound of battle gradually replaced by today's birdsong'.⁴ That temporal shift—from the roar of the guns in 1917 to the tranquil woods of today—was reinforced by the way visitors interacted with the photographic panels. As individuals moved across the space of the gallery delayed sequence filming 'ghosted' one image on another, the green of the forest, symbolising life and renewal, restored in each figure's wake (Fig. 2). Visitors to this space thus found their own form 'embedded in that landscape', a poignant reminder that the Great War still somehow touches us all.⁵

The fighting that consumed Glencorse Wood transformed a generation and in many ways affects us to this day. Battles, by their very nature, might be bound in time and space but paradoxically (as many historians have observed) they defy any register of linear time

and their effects spill well into the future. This article will consider three specific lives lost in that desperate fighting on the salient.⁶ It will ask what these three case studies—all centred on 1917—tell us about the Great War and (equally importantly) how the memory of that war shapes current understanding of human conflict.⁷

SITUATING THE STORIES

These three portraits (and many others) were devised as part of the 100 Stories project. This was a First World War centenary initiative that began as part of Australia's official commemorative programme but (steeped in controversy) ended as an independent venture. The stories were chosen from both sides of the Tasman; they highlight the experience of women as well as men, and focus as much on civilians as combatants. Amongst

4 Michael McKernan, 'WW1: Love and Sorrow', *Recollections* 10, no. 1 (April 2015), https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/volume_10_number_1/exhibition_reviews/wwi_love_and_sorrow.

5 'Course Introduction', *World War 1: A History in 100 Stories*, accessed 29 July 2019, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/ww1-stories/1/steps/28133>.

6 Research informing this piece was funded by two Australian Research Council Linkage grants, LP110100264 (*A History of Anzac Day at Home and Abroad*) and LP0883705 (*A History of Soldier Settlement in NSW*). We thank the Partner and Chief Investigators on both these projects.

7 For a rewarding discussion of the changing and dynamic character of remembrance see Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 1-13. See also, Bart Ziino, ed., *Remembering the First World War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015) and "'A Lasting Gift to His Descendants': Family Memory and the Great War in Australia', *History and Memory* 22, no. 2 (Fall/Winter): 125-146.



Figure 2. 'Tranquil Woods': Life returns to the salient. Courtesy of authors.

the cast of the 100 Stories are not just sailors, soldiers, airmen, and nurses, but parents who lost their sons, wives who struggled with shell-shocked husbands, and children who never knew their fathers. Grappling with contentious and disruptive narratives—shell shock, domestic violence, suicide, and venereal disease—the stories run counter to the shallow sentimentality of state-sanctioned commemoration. They were a bid to broaden the ambit of remembrance and suggest ways memories of the past still resonate in the present.⁸

The stories were presented in myriad different ways. At their centre was what might be called a digital narrative, a brief video presentation simulating handwriting across a page, the blunt typeface of newsprint or telegram, and words that were spoken from the pulpit, in courts, on the hustings. This use of Keynote software was an experiment in digital humanities.⁹ Each story aimed to distil the essence of an archive, outlining a life, or rather a phase of

a life, in a matter of minutes, evoking 'voices' from the past in a sharp and arresting fashion. Individual stories acted as a synecdoche and represented an experience intended to challenge or enlarge traditional narratives.

These freestanding digital presentations can be accessed online but they are also exhibited and screened continuously at both Victoria's Shrine of Remembrance and the National Anzac Centre in Albany. The website that hosts the stories is scaffolded by historical commentary—reading lists, supplementary sites, and a forum where experts discuss topics as varied as women's mobilisation, traumatic memory, and the lasting impact the Great War had on Australia's Indigenous communities.¹⁰ An educational resource (informing the most highly subscribed First World War MOOC fielded by Future Learn),¹¹ the stories also found artistic expression. The Australian Art Orchestra devised a musical interpretation of the 100 Stories. Performed at the London Jazz Festival

8 '100 Stories Project', *Report of the Second Meeting of the Military and Cultural History Group*, 30 April 2012, tabled at the Anzac Centenary Advisory Board Meeting 15 May 2012, Canberra.

9 The keynote presentations were written by Bruce Scates and rendered in digital form with the assistance of Rebecca Wheatley, Tom Chandler, Rick Laird, and Margaret Harris.

10 This site is now hosted by the Australian National University, accessed 29 July 2019, <https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au/>. An earlier version of the website was the most frequently visited website fielded by the Faculty of Arts at Monash University, accessed 7 June 2017 <https://future.arts.monash.edu/onehundredstories/>. For an extended inquiry into this innovation in the digital humanities see Bruce Scates and Margaret Harris, 'Reaching out Beyond the Museum: "Love and Sorrow" and the Engagement of On-Line Learning', forthcoming.

11 Future Learn, 'World War 1: A History in 100 Stories', accessed 29 July 2019, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/ww1-stories>.

in late 2018, it marked the centenary of Armistice,¹² as did the ‘durational sonic meditation sound installation’, *Aftermaths*, staged on Remembrance Day at Melbourne’s Domain.¹³ At the same time the stories fed into more conventional academic outputs: a co-authored monograph and a host of articles and publications.¹⁴ Indeed the three cases profiled in this article were first presented to *The Myriad Faces of War* conference held in Wellington.

RETURNING TO GLENCORSE WOOD

Bill Knox’s story is the first of three stories from the salient we will consider.¹⁵ An officer in the Field Artillery, Knox served in Gallipoli and France before he was killed in August 1917 in Belgium. The archive on which his story is based is vast and complex. Thousands of pages of correspondence have been preserved and so too has their provenance. The collection includes maps, operational orders, newspaper clippings, pressed flowers, and artefacts. It remains in the hands of the family and stands, one might argue, as Knox’s most impressive but also most intimate memorial.

So rich a collection offers a historian considerable latitude. William Knox’s story might have been about duty. Trained in the militia prior to the outbreak of war, Knox felt a deep obligation to serve and boarded his troopship within weeks of his first—and only—child being born. Bill Knox left a young wife and his baby daughter behind him, a promising career in business, and political interests as well. Like hundreds of young men who put themselves forward, duty to Country and King outweighed any personal consideration. The Knox story might have been about the ‘big words’ we have heard so often during the First World War centenary—sacrifice, courage, service.

It might also have been about privilege. Knox was schooled at Scotch College, made his money on the Stock Exchange, and gave his address as the Melbourne Club. And beyond all that lies the complex afterlife of William Knox—an elaborate and ever-shifting architecture of remembrance. Captain Knox was commemorated in

church, school, and community; his name was carved in the polished blackwood of Melbourne Stock Exchange’s Honour Roll. A hundred years after his death, Knox’s grave became a place of pilgrimage for the Chair of Victoria’s Anzac Centenary Committee.

William Knox’s story is all these things and more. But this is a very private as well as a public narrative. All said and done, Knox’s story is about love. Bill Knox loved the men who served beside him. It was not just the enduring friendship forged with fellow officers, decent chaps he shared a tent with. Far from home, the young Knox acted as a surrogate father for the men who served beneath him, he cared for their welfare, wrote to their families, and brought them extra rations. Their deaths touched him deeply:

I lost two of my best ... yesterday [Knox wrote to his wife at the beginning of 1917].... They got blown up by a shell.... Feltham was one of the best fellows in the world – cheery and popular with everyone. Young Robinson I told you about before ... I am very sad about it and a bit upset & nervy tonight.... I couldn’t get a Padre so I had to read the burial service myself. The most trying thing I have ever done and more so as we were under heavy shellfire at the time – I was very fond of those two lads and wanted to do what I could for them properly – Fritz just commenced to hot us up with heavy stuff though I had tried to pick a quiet time ... I had just commenced to read the service when we got it right and left.... This is the way two fine brave lads went out and I am very sad and had to write their people tonight.... It is desperately cold snowing for four days & ... an icy wind blowing that almost cuts one in half....¹⁶

Knox also loved his baby daughter, Diana, a child he would never really come to know. In the close world of the trenches, he would stare at her photograph for hours, willing it somehow to life: ‘I love that lovely little snap of her ... with her mouth all pursed up in readiness for a smile...’.¹⁷

12 The performance featured the work of George Darvidis (voice), Lizzy Welsh (violin), Aviva Endean (clarinets), James Macaulay (trombone), Jacques Emery (double bass), Simon Barker (drum kit) with system design/production by Jem Savage. Production was supported by the Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture Fund, the Australia Council for the Arts, the Australian High Commission in the United Kingdom, and Creative Victoria. Art Orchestra, *Sometimes Home Can Grow Stranger than Space: A Suite of Works by Peter Knight, Tilman Robinson and Andrea Keller* (Melbourne: AAO, 2018). The influence of the 100 Stories project is generously acknowledged in such publications as if the original conception of AAO founder Paul Grabowsky.

13 The creative team behind the installation included Aviva Endean (clarinets/turntables), Peter Knight (trumpet/tape loops/turntables) together with Tilman Robinson (electronics/turntables), George Darvidis (voice/turntables), and Jem Savage (system design/production). Australian Art Orchestra, *Aftermath Program* (Australian Art Orchestra: Newport, 2018). For reflections on these creative outputs see Bruce Scates, ‘Aftermaths: Commemorating the Centenary of Armistice and Reflections on the Performance of Remembrance,’ in *Beyond the Stage: Re-imagining Conflict through Performance*, ed., Mark Carroll (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2019).

14 Bruce Scates, Rebecca Wheatley and Laura James, *World War One: A History in One Hundred Stories* (Melbourne: Penguin/Viking, 2015).

15 The first iteration of this story appears in Scates, Wheatley, and James, *World War One: A History*, 346–349. We thank Kate Baillieu for permission to consult and cite these privately held papers.

16 Bill Knox to Mildred Knox, 20 January 1917, Baillieu family papers.

17 Bill Knox to Mildred Knox, 28 July 1917, Baillieu family papers.

And Knox loved his wife. Throughout the war, he wrote to Mildred on an almost daily basis, snatching a moment of tenderness from the chaos and brutality erupting around him. He described the horrors of the battlefield, the terror of the fighting, but also the love that sustained him in his ordeal. Every letter to 'Mim' brims with intimacy and affection. She was his 'dearest girl', his 'dear old sweetheart', 'the most splendid perfect wife'.¹⁸ Mim would read every letter time and again, treasure their presence—that reminder of him—in her household. And in 1916, at great risk and no little expense, Mim and Diana travelled all the way to England. They spent a few precious weeks with Bill on 'Blighty leave' from France. The three of them walked the pebbled beach at Bognor Regis, a memory rendered in sepia by a photograph (Fig. 3). The only recollection Diana had of her father was being lifted high up on his shoulders in the crisp sea air.

Within a matter of months of that photograph being taken, Bill Knox was dead. A lifetime of grieving lay before Mim; like thousands bereaved by war she would not marry again. Diana would grow up without a father—as would thousands of other children, in countries all over the world.

When Diana died at the age of 97, her ashes were placed—as she had asked—in her father's grave. Kate, Diana's daughter, remembered Ypres as a strangely peaceful place, a once battered landscape glowing golden with wheat. 'On a perfect summer's day,' she described how she walked across Flanders fields and found the place where her grandfather was almost certainly killed. The ground around her was peppered with shrapnel. 'It seemed as though the war was still growling beneath my feet,' she said, 'rumbling on just below the surface'.¹⁹

Space does not allow us to reach much *beyond the surface* of that account. It brims with references familiar to cultural historians—Mike Roper's and Joanna Bourke's work on soldier masculinity,²⁰ Jay Winter on the emotional labour of real and fictive kin.²¹ In the Knox correspondence we certainly see a shift from 'warrior' to 'nurturer'. And—through time-honoured rituals of burial and pilgrimages—we see the way remembrance is reinvested with meaning for new generations.²²



Figure 3. Captain W. J. (Bill) Knox M.C. (13th Field Artillery, A.I.F.) on his last leave with his daughter, Diana, on Bognor Regis beach, England, June 1917. Courtesy Kate Baillieu.

* * *

Our second narrative centres on the story of two brothers, also killed near Glencorse Wood in 1917 but different, besides that, in almost every other way. Bill Knox was born into power and privilege. Rufus and Cyril Rigney were raised on the fringes of white colonialism, on the Aboriginal mission station at Port Macleay.²³

Port Macleay is the name Europeans used. Raukkan has been the Aboriginal name for this place since time immemorial; it means a place of meeting. Once the

18 Bill Knox to Mildred Knox, 2 January 1917, Baillieu family papers.

19 Kate Baillieu email correspondence and interview with authors, 10 March 2015.

20 Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Press, 1996).

21 Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jay Winter, 'Communities in mourning', in *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, eds. Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995).

22 For inquiry into the changing character of pilgrimage over time see Bruce Scates, *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the Battlefields of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and "'Letters from a pilgrimage': reflection on the 1965 return to Gallipoli', *History Australia* 4, no. 2 (2017): 540–544.

23 The authors respectfully acknowledge the elders past and present of the Ngarrindjeri nation. This account is based on sources in the public domain, most importantly the Rigney brothers' service dossiers, the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry initiated for Rufus Rigney, and websites for the State Library of South Australia, the Raukkan community, and the Connecting Spirits Commemorative Tour; see also Mike Sexton, 'One service charged with extra emotion', *The 7:30 Report*, ABC, 25 April 2005, transcript available: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2005/s1353096.htm>. The first iteration of this story appears in Scates, Wheatley, and James, *World War One: A History*, 305–308.

traditional lands of the Ngarrindjeri extended many miles up the Murray, and encompassed coastlands as far as Encounter Bay. By the turn of the century the best of that vast estate had been taken by white farmers. Clearing destroyed a landscape Aboriginal people had tended for generations.

At the time Rufus and Cyril enlisted, Ngarrindjeri people were not permitted to speak their language, the community was isolated and institutionalised, and traditional practices vigorously discouraged. Both boys recorded their occupation as ‘Labourer’ on their attestation papers. Few other vocations were open to them. Perhaps it was the hope of something better than toiling on a farm that persuaded Rufus and Cyril to enlist; perhaps—as for many white recruits—the lure of travel and adventure. In Rufus’s case at least, it may have been the strong sense of family obligation at the core of Aboriginal culture. Cyril signed up in April 1916; Rufus would follow his elder brother to war four months later.

Both these lads were under 21 years. Had they been white, they would have required their father’s consent, but the Protector of Aborigines—not the boy’s parents—was deemed to be the legal guardian of all Indigenous people. William Garnet South, a man Rufus had probably never met, duly signed his papers.

Cyril was killed at Messines in 1917. Rufus died near Passchendaele three months later. Unlike Bill Knox, we know little of the circumstances of Cyril’s death—the body of this Ngarrindjeri man was swallowed up by

the Ypres salient. Rufus was initially reported ‘missing’ rather than killed and the uncertainty regarding his fate prompted a series of Red Cross inquiries. A few sparse lines, saying so much because they said so little, are the only remaining record of his war.²⁴

Ninety years after their deaths, the Rigney brothers’ family travelled to Belgium. They carried part of their country with them—sand from the dunes of Ninety Miles Beach. Dry earth from Australia was scattered on the moist turf of Harlebeke New British Cemetery where one of the two brothers was buried. The distinctive notes of a didgeridoo cried out across Flanders Fields to the other.

And where might that story take us? One might reflect again on the ever-inventive rituals of remembrance or the way (as Bart Ziino has put it) home and the front were imagined and connected.²⁵ Or one might consider the politics of pilgrimage. In 1917, the Rigney family had neither the means nor the opportunity to make that journey to the battlefields. In Australia, Aboriginal people were not even permitted passports. Arguably however, the most challenging aspect of the Rigney brothers’ story is the role that remembering war plays in Indigenous communities today.

Not long after the war ended, a memorial window was placed in the church of the Mission (Fig. 4). It reads ‘For Justice and Freedom’ and that powerful phrase can be read in a number of different ways. It may originally have been invoked in spirit of patriotism,



Figure 4. ‘For justice and freedom’: memorial windows raised to the memory of Indigenous soldiers from Raukkan. Courtesy of authors.

24 Private Rufus Rigney 2872, Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914–1918 War, 1DRL/0428, Australian War Memorial.

25 Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War* (Crawley: UWA Press, 2007).

even imperialism. These were the lofty sentiments that rationalised the butchering of a generation. And yet, for many Aboriginal people today, including the community at Raukkan, fighting in the Great War was literally a struggle for justice and freedom, and the loss of the Rigney brothers part of the price for full and equal citizenship.²⁶ It is interesting the phrase Aboriginal people often use when they are conceded a symbolic space in war memorials across the country. 'To those who fought for their country', some plaques read, a reference perhaps to a frontier war many white Australians are still intent on forgetting.²⁷

The reference to the politics of remembering and forgetting acts as a segue into our final story. It too hails from Belgium and from 1917.

* * *

By any criteria Frank Wilkinson was a war hero.²⁸ In the push towards Messines, he charged into an ammunition dump set ablaze by shelling. He extinguished the fire and was awarded the Military Medal.²⁹ Frank survived the war but not the peace. He returns to Australia in 1919, takes up marginal land as a soldier settler in Victoria, fails as a farmer, struggles against debt, illness, and depression and, ten years after Passchendaele, takes his own life.³⁰ But before slitting his throat, Frank Wilkinson MM turned on those who loved him. He killed both his wife, Elizabeth, and his four-year-old daughter, Isabella (Fig. 5). Elizabeth Wilkinson lingered on for days after the attack. Her skull had been crushed by a hammer. Elizabeth's last words were read out to the Inquest. 'He couldn't help it, he couldn't help it.'³¹

No one hurried to condemn Frank Wilkinson in the 1920s. Perhaps because Australia was full of similar stories equally tragic; once good men undone by the horrors of war, brutalised by what they had seen and what they had done. The question really is whether we are prepared to hear such stories today.

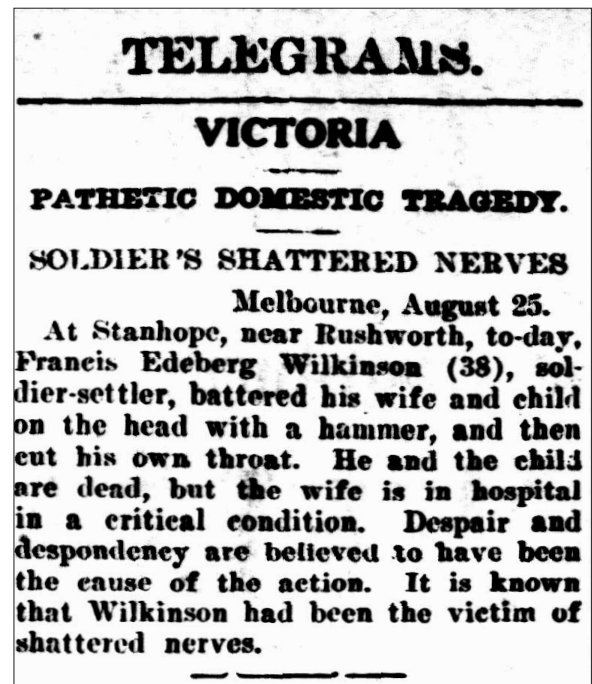


Figure 5. "The horrors of war": Press account of murder and suicide in Stanhope. *Geraldton Guardian*, 27 August 1927.

The Wilkinson story was one of several submitted to the Anzac Centenary Advisory Board in the lead up to formal commemorations. Prior to Wilkinson, the Board had approved several of the 100 Stories; it could tolerate tales of loss and hardship, like Knox's, extend the narrative of Anzac to those it once so readily excluded, like the Rigneys, even contemplate the enormous psychological trauma war inflicted. The difference with Wilkinson was that the violence was no longer directed inward; he ceased to be simply a

- 26 We gratefully acknowledge our debt to Clyde Rigney, who facilitated a visit to Raukkan, and Verna Koolmatric, who welcomed researchers to her community and generously shared her memories. Thanks are also due to the Indigenous playwright Wesley Enoch who first alerted us to the existence of the Rigneys' memorial window and who wove their story into his remarkable play, *Black Diggers*. For further insight into Wesley Enoch's work see the interview conducted by Rebecca Wheatley and Laura James, 'Wesley Enoch on Indigenous soldiers', *One Hundred Stories – Australian National University*, accessed 29 July 2019, <https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au/stories/wesley-enoche-indigenous-soldiers>.
- 27 Studies of Ngarrindjeri Anzacs were pioneered by Doreen Kartinyeri, see *Ngarrindjeri Anzacs* (Adelaide: Aboriginal Family History Project, South Australian Museum and Raukkan Council, 1996) and more generally, Doreen Kartinyeri and Sue Anderson, *My Ngarrindjeri Calling* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2008). For more recent scholarship see Joan Beaumont and Allison Cadzow, eds., *Serving our Country: Indigenous Australians, War, Defence and Citizenship* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2018).
- 28 The first published account of Wilkinson's story appears in Scates, Wheatley and James, *World War One: A History*, 68–69.
- 29 Frank Wilkinson, recommendation for Military Medal, 10 August 1917, AWM28 1/206 - Recommendation file for honours and awards, AIF, 1914–18 War, 4th Australian Division, 30 June 1917 to 30 July 1917.
- 30 Frank Wilkinson's soldier settlement record, VPRS5714 Land Selection Files, unit 1473, Public Records Office of Victoria. For recent work on the plight of soldiers sent to work the land see Bruce Scates and Melanie Oppeheimer, *The Last Battle: A History of Soldier Settlement in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For an inquiry into the insights historians might draw from repatriation records see Bruce Scates, 'How War Came Home: Reflections on the Digitisation of Australia's Repatriation Files', *History Australia* 16, no. 1 (2019): 190–209.
- 31 Coroner's Inquest of the deaths of Frank, Elizabeth and Isabella Wilkinson, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS5714, 1927/1017.

victim and he suggested a possibility totally at odds with the commemorative carnival that distorts the remembrance of war in Australia. The Anzacs were not all heroic caricatures, mythical embodiments of service and sacrifice. Many were deeply flawed, troubled, and violent human beings.

After some debate, the Board resolved to reject the story altogether. The Chair instructed historians to delete all reference to Frank Wilkinson MM and replace his confronting testimony with ‘a positive nation-building narrative’. Driving the Board’s concern was a fear of ‘embarrassing the Minister’—the public would surely take offence at so ‘brutally honest’ a history.³² Canberra was wrong. Wilkinson’s story was published (without the sanction of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs) and, within a week of its appearance in Melbourne’s *The Age* newspaper, researchers were approached by his niece. One family member likened telling the story to laying a ghost to rest, enriching what had once been a purely archival narrative with a vernacular memory of her own.³³ As Carolyn Holbrook has observed, Anzac descendants may well have a far more ‘complex and nuanced’ attitude towards the First World War than many commentators have assumed. Often they reject comforting mythologies, the ‘warm fuzzy feeling’ Board members were all too prepared to offer, and embrace a more mature and reflective history.³⁴

CONCLUSION

There is more at stake here than the sensibilities of a few disputatious historians. What is at issue is the whole character of historical remembrance. Throughout the centenary archives, galleries, libraries, memorials, and museums on both sides of the Tasman have negotiated a difficult path—the journey through Glencorse Wood was never an easy one. But the response to the 100 Stories project, and for that matter the equally confronting *WWI: Love and Sorrow* exhibition, suggests many believe it is time to broaden the ambit of remembrance, embrace new, disruptive, and even transnational narratives. Those of us who engage with the commemorative project face what Jay Winter calls ‘a stark choice’. Either we ‘aim at an interrogation as to how war can be represented or [we] continue to deepen lies and illusions about it’.³⁵ A hundred years since the catastrophe that tore Europe and the world apart, Anzac deserves a better history.

Acknowledgements

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32 See account of the Anzac Centenary Board’s deliberations, see Scates, Wheatley, and James, *World War One: A History*, vii–viii.

33 ‘What we owe them this Remembrance Day’, originally published in *The Age*, 11 November 2012, <https://onehundredstories.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Scates-Forgotten-Stories-Age-2012.pdf>. Authors’ correspondence with Jill Fradd. Rebecca Wheatley, co-author of this piece, interviewed Wilkinson’s niece as Wilkinson’s narrative was redrafted.

34 Caroline Holbrook, *ANZAC: The Unauthorised Biography* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2014), 155; see also Scates, Wheatley and James, *World War One: A History*, vii–viii.

35 Jay Winter, ‘Museums and the Representation of War’, in *Does War Belong in Museums: The Representations of War in Exhibitions*, ed. Wolfgang Muchitsch (Wetzlar: Verlag, 2013), 17–36, also *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).