

# 5 THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE ANZAC LEGEND

## Overview

Before 1914, Australia proudly saw itself as part of the British Empire. Most Australians had never seen England but many of them still referred to it as 'home'. When Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, there was no doubt that Australia would immediately support 'the mother country'. Thousands of young Australian men immediately tried to enlist and see the action 'before it was all over'. Australia's first major military action was at Gallipoli. This eight-month campaign was an utter disaster but it gave birth to the 'Anzac Legend'. Simpson and his donkey came to symbolise much of what is considered the essence of the Anzac Legend. In 1916, Australian troops were moved to the Western Front. One of the most horrific encounters Australian troops experienced here was the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917. On the Home Front, the government organised the nation for war. Women remained frustrated at not being allowed to fully contribute to the war effort like their British sisters. Prime Minister Hughes tried to introduce conscription in 1916 and 1917. The issue split the nation. The war finally came to an end in November 1918.

## Flow of chapter

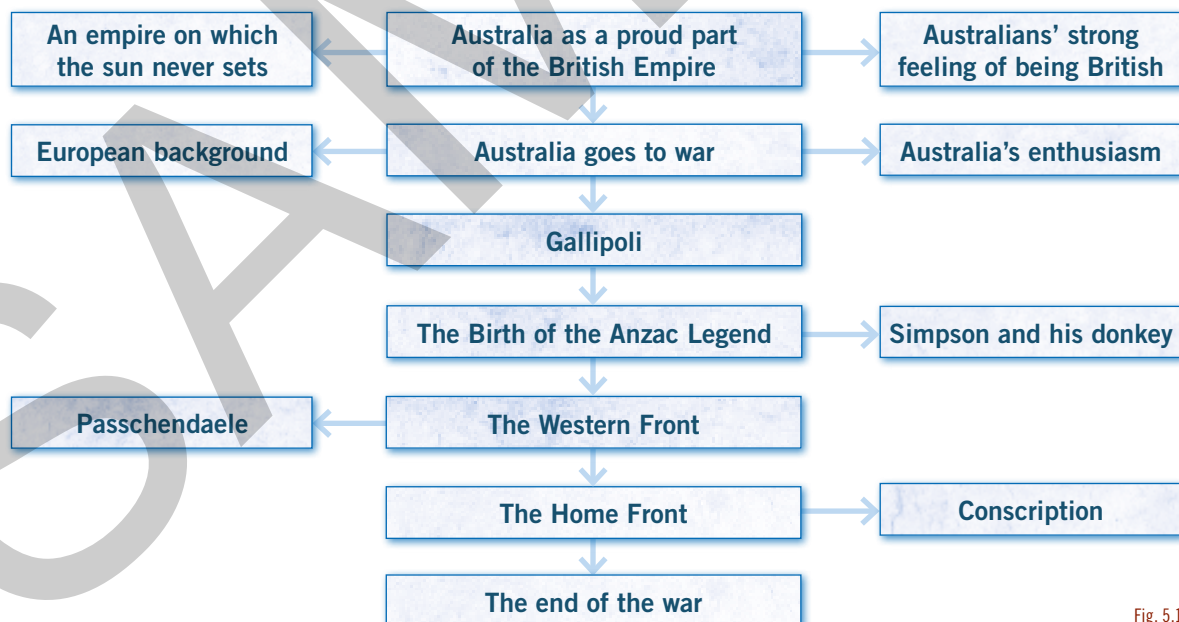


Fig. 5.1



## Key issues

- What was Australia's attitude to the British Empire before 1914?
- How and why did Australia become involved in the First World War?
- What was the Gallipoli campaign?
- What is the Anzac Legend?
- Why is the story of 'Simpson and his donkey' so important to Australia?
- What happened on the Western Front?
- Why was the Battle of Passchendaele so horrific?
- How did Australia organise for war on the Home Front?
- Why did the Conscription issue split the nation?
- How did the war come to an end?

## PART OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND PROUD OF IT

Australia became a nation in 1901 with Federation and as was explained in Chapter 4, there was a growing sense of being Australian. Most of the population was native born. In sport, art and literature there was a growing Australian national consciousness.

However, Australia was also part of the British Empire and the Australian people had a deep sense of being British. It is almost impossible today to understand the depth of affection and loyalty that Australians felt for Great Britain before 1914. A major part of this feeling was the pride felt in being part of the British Empire. All school rooms had maps pinned up showing that a quarter of the Earth's surface was coloured red indicating the extent of the British Empire. A proud boast of the time was that Britain had an empire 'on which the sun never set' meaning there was always part of it that was in daylight.

The connections between Australia and Britain and the Empire went very deep.

- Australia had been settled by the British. Australia's language, culture and institutions came from the 'mother country'. Many Australians who had been born in this country referred to England as 'home'.
- Australia's political and justice systems, its modes of fashion, literature, music and sport were all British.
- Australia's economy was tied closely to that of Britain. It was our largest export market and our most important source of imports.
- The ultimate defence of Australia was the British Navy. Australia was isolated from the rest of the world and there was a perceived threat from the Asian populations to the north. It was British power that ultimately preserved the British way of life in Australia.



Fig. 5.2 The British Empire in 1914

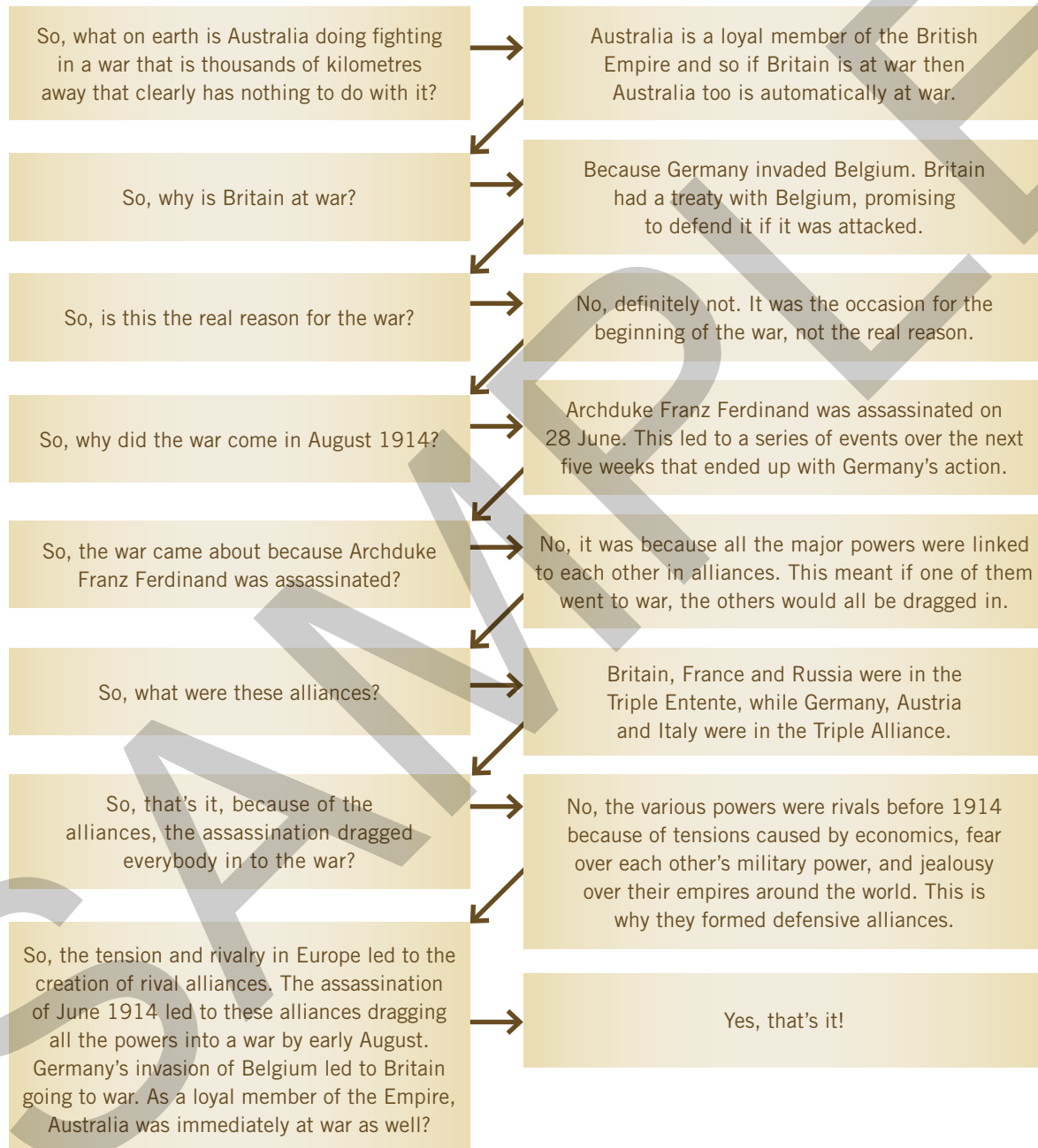
- As a member of the British Empire, Australia knew that it belonged to the greatest empire the world had ever seen.
- Australian children were educated in the British way and learned about the kings and queens of England. The stories they read were invariably about the daring-do of Englishmen fighting bravely against natives.
- In 1905, 'Empire Day' was introduced to Australia to celebrate the birthday of the late Queen Victoria. Empire Day was aimed very much at school children. On this day they would attend school in the morning to sing patriotic songs like 'Rule Britannia' and hear stirring addresses about the Empire and then receive a half-day holiday.

## HOW AND WHY DID AUSTRALIA BECOME INVOLVED IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR?

In June 1914, nobody was contemplating that Europe would be at war within two months. Ordinary people were preparing for their summer holidays while many of Europe's political leaders were at their country retreats or cruising around the Mediterranean. In Australia, the idea that thousands of young men would soon be preparing to fight in the trenches of the **Western Front** in Europe would have seemed absurd. Yet by August, this was exactly what was happening. How did Australia get dragged into a conflict thousands of kilometres away that had nothing to do with it? Figure 5.3 attempts to provide an explanation.



Fig. 5.3 How it all came about



How did the Australians react to news of the outbreak of war in August 1914?

As explained earlier, it was taken for granted that Australia would give immediate support to Britain in the war with Germany. The Australian Prime Minister, Joseph Cook, stated at the time:

*Whatever happens, Australia is part of the Empire right to the full. When the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war.*



The Opposition Labor Party leader, Andrew Fisher, who was to become Prime Minister in September, said at the time:

*Should the worst happen after everything has been done that honour will permit, Australia will stand by our own to help and defend her [Britain] to our last man and our last shilling.*

The popular reaction to the outbreak of war was equally enthusiastic. When news of the war broke, thousands of young Australian men could not get into uniform quickly enough. The reasons for their eagerness to go and fight in a war thousands of kilometres away, a war about which they knew nothing and against people, who had done nothing to them, were varied.

- For many young men it was a matter of excitement, adventure and romance.
- Many saw it as a chance in a lifetime to travel.
- For others it was all about patriotic duty and love of empire, king and country.
- Peer pressure played a large role. If your mates were signing up, so did you.
- Men in uniform were attractive to the opposite sex. Failure to join up often brought great disapproval from women. It became common to give men in civilian dress a white feather which implied cowardice.
- Many were taken in by the strong anti-German propaganda which was being promoted. German soldiers were being accused of all manner of **atrocities** as happens during wartime.
- Because so many men rushed to volunteer, the authorities were able to set very high standards of fitness, health and physique. They did not just accept anybody. As a result, there was an eagerness among many men to be accepted and so be able to prove that they were indeed part of an elite.
- For some men it was a chance to earn some money for the first time in years.
- For all of them ignorance played a major part. Nobody had any idea what the coming war was going to be like. Indeed, the keenness of many men to sign up was the belief that it would all be over by Christmas 1914 and so they were afraid of missing out.

Fig. 5.4 An Australian recruitment poster



Fig. 5.5 A British recruitment poster





## Focus!

*Read each of the following statements. Write down each statement and indicate either TRUE or FALSE as it applies to the statement.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1</b> <i>Links between Australia and Britain were not very strong in the years before 1914.</i></p> <p><b>2</b> <i>Australians were extremely proud of being a part of the British Empire before 1914.</i></p> <p><b>3</b> <i>Australia's economy was heavily dependent upon that of Britain in the period before 1914.</i></p> | <p><b>4</b> <i>Australia's participation in the First World War was by no means an automatic decision.</i></p> <p><b>5</b> <i>War came about on 4 August 1914 because of Britain's invasion of Belgium.</i></p> <p><b>6</b> <i>Both sides of Australian politics were in full agreement about how to respond to the war.</i></p> |
|---|--|

## ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 1

Examine the recruiting posters in Figures 5.5 and 5.6.

- 1** Identify the different ways in which each tries to encourage men to join the army.
- 2** Identify the different emotions each tries to manipulate.
- 3** Do you think this is successful propaganda? Place yourself in the role of a young man in Australia in 1914/15, would these posters have affected your decision to join up? Give reasons.

# GALLIPOLI

The first Australian Imperial Force (AIF) troops left Australia in November 1914. They were combined with recruits from New Zealand into a joint Australia–New Zealand Army Corps – the **ANZACS**. Instead of being sent to the Western Front in France and Belgium, the Anzac forces were landed in Egypt. Once in Egypt they spent several months in training. The tedium of training proved too much for many of the Aussie soldiers and some of them got into trouble for various acts of misbehaviour. Eventually it was decided to use the troops in Turkey. This campaign was known as the Dardanelles Campaign; in Australia it is more usually known as Gallipoli.

The British authorities had several reasons for launching an attack on Turkey.

- Turkey was an ally of Germany and had joined the war in November. Therefore the defeat of Turkey would weaken the combined strength of the 'Central Powers', as Germany and its allies were known.

- Britain's ally, Russia, was in difficulty. Thus, the defeat of Turkey and capture of Constantinople would make it possible for supplies to be sent north to help Russia who was fighting the Germans on the Eastern Front.
- The fighting on the Western Front had already become bogged down in a **war of attrition**. It was believed a successful diversion against Turkey might help to weaken Germany.

## 25 April 1915: The landing of Anzac forces at Gallipoli

The landing of Anzac forces at Gallipoli, at what became known as Anzac Cove, was a disaster. The original landing spot was meant to be nearer Gaba Tepe but a combination of strong ocean currents and a touch of chaos meant that the Anzacs landed about two kilometres to the north. Anzac Cove had a very narrow beach into which thousands of Anzac troops had to squeeze.

**3.30 am** The first troops, Queenslanders from the 9th Battalion, transferred from the main ships to smaller boats which were then rowed to the shore. Conditions were cramped as up to forty men with all their gear and supplies crowded on to each boat.

**4.30 am** The first Anzac troops got out of their boats and ran ashore. They were met at first by Turkish small arms fire.

**4.45 am** Soon Turkish shrapnel was raining down on Anzac Cove and the Turks began to move reinforcements into the area.

**7.00 am** By now more troops were crowding onto the beach and Anzac forces were endeavouring to dig in on the cliffs that looked over the beach.

By the evening of the first day up to 16 000 troops were on the beach. The Turks had the upper hand as the Anzacs found themselves being fired upon from three sides with the sea behind them.

Over the next week more men arrived and had to face not only the narrowness of the beach and the steepness of the cliffs, but continuing Turkish assaults and artillery bombardments. Sometimes the fighting became very intimate with bayonet charges and one-on-one duels. By 30 April, almost 24 000 Anzac troops were ashore. Five thousand Australians were already dead and wounded.



Fig. 5.6 Anzac Cove





## What happened at Gallipoli throughout 1915?

- 8 January** Churchill is advised that a naval attack on the Dardanelles would be successful.
- 28 January** The British War Council finally approves the campaign plans.
- 19 February** British and French naval forces attack the outer Turkish forts at the Dardanelles.
- 26 February** British ships reach the narrows and some men are landed to attack Turkish positions.
- 11 March** General Ian Hamilton placed in charge of the campaign.
- 19 March** Allied commander General Hamilton informs the British Minister of War that a combined military/naval attack is needed to have any chance of success.
- 22 March** The decision is made for a combined naval/military attack.
- 25 April** Australian and New Zealand forces land at Anzac Cove, the French at Kumkale and the British at Helles.
- 26 April** The Anzacs fend off heavy Turkish attacks.
- 29 April** Heavy Turkish attacks occur all along the Anzac line.
- 30 April** An Australian submarine is sunk in the Sea of Marmara.
- 20 May** A Turkish attack is beaten away at Anzac. There are 10 000 casualties.
- 24 May** Both sides agree to a short **armistice** in order to bury the dead. An eight-hour break in the fighting was agreed to as each side collected their dead.

Throughout June and July both sides engage in a series of attacks on each other. Little ground is gained but casualties are high all round.

- 6–7 August** Anzac forces attack the Turks at Lone Pine and the Nek.
- 7 August** British forces land at Suvla Bay. They have little success largely due to the incompetence of their commander Stopford.
- 21 August** The Battle of Scimitar Hill at Suvla takes place and Hill 60 is attacked for the first time. This is the biggest action of the Gallipoli campaign.
- 28 August** New Zealand troops hold Hill 60.
- 8 October** Autumn storms damage the harbours at Anzac Cove and Suvla.
- 17 October** Hamilton is relieved of command.
- 27 October** General Munro takes over command.
- 28 November** A terrible winter blizzard causes a major loss of men.
- 7 December** The British government orders the evacuation of Gallipoli.
- 20 December** The evacuation of Gallipoli is achieved with no loss of life.

The Gallipoli campaign had been a disaster. Turkey remained in control of the peninsula and remained in the war until late 1918. Australia suffered 34 000 casualties during the eight-month campaign, including 8000 dead.



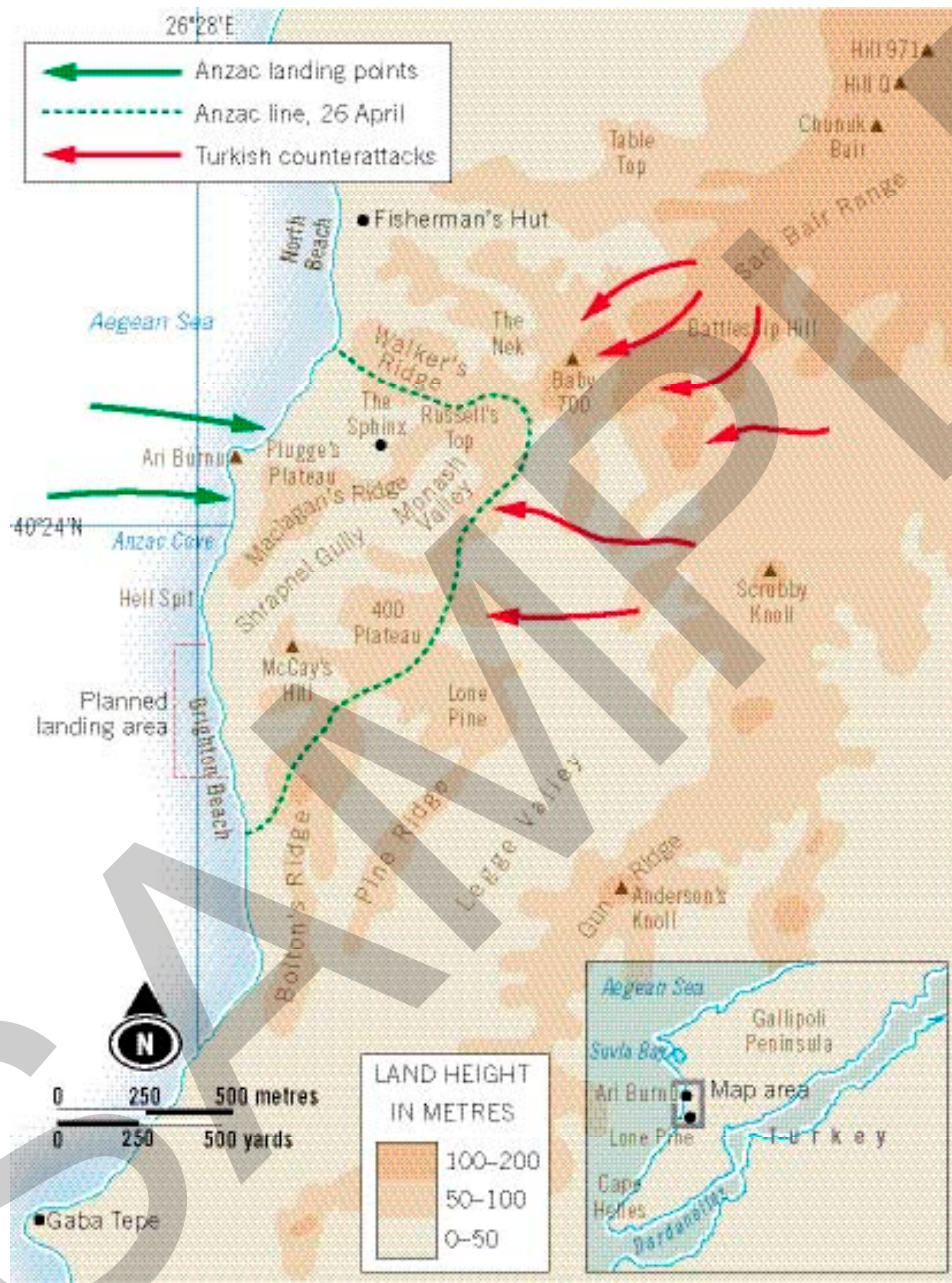


Fig. 5.7 The battles at Gallipoli

## Focus!

- 1 Why did the Australians end up in Turkey in 1915?
- 2 Why was the landing a disaster?
- 3 Why did both sides agree to an armistice on 24 May?
- 4 What happened in December 1915?





## ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 2

The following is an account of the Anzac landing written by the British journalist Ellis Ashmead-Barlett, published in *The Hobart Mercury*, 12 May 1915. He describes what happened when the landing boats were attacked by Turkish guns.

(It is a good idea to read the source out aloud in the style of 1915. Remember that at that time, the war was still seen as a glorious adventure.)

### Newspaper

The Australians rose to the occasion. They did not wait for orders, or for the boats to reach the beach, but sprang into the sea, formed a sort of rough line, and rushed at the enemy's trenches. Their magazines were not charged, so they just went in with the cold steel, and it was over in a minute for the Turks in the first trench had been either bayoneted or had run away, and the Maxim guns were captured.

Then the Australians found themselves facing an almost perpendicular cliff of loose sandstone covered with thick shrubbery. Somewhere half-way up the enemy had a second trench strongly held, from which there poured a terrible fire on the troops below and on those pulling back to the torpedo-boat destroyers for a second landing party.

Here was a tough proposition to tackle in the darkness, but these Colonials are practical above all else, and went about it in a practical way. They stopped for a few minutes to pull themselves together, got rid of their packs and charged the magazines of their rifles. Then this race of athletes proceeded to scale the cliffs, without responding to the enemy's fire. They lost some men, but did not worry. In less than a quarter of an hour the Turks had been hurled out of their second position, all either bayoneted or fled.

The courage displayed by the wounded Australians will never be forgotten ... Though many were shot to bits, without hope of recovery, their cheers resounded throughout the night ... They were happy because they knew they had been tried for the first time and not found wanting ...

For 15 mortal hours the Australians and New Zealanders occupied the heights under an incessant shell fire, and without the moral and material support of a single gun from the shore. They were subjected the whole time to violent counter-attacks from a brave enemy, skillfully led, and with snipers deliberately picking off every officer who endeavoured to give the command or to lead his men. No finer feat has happened in this war than this sudden landing in the dark, and the storming of the heights, and, above all, the holding on whilst the reinforcements were landing. These raw colonial troops, in these desperate hours, proved worthy to fight side by side with the heroes of the battles of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres, and Neuve-Chapelle.

- 1 What impression does Ashmead-Barlett give of the Anzac troops? How does he try to excite his readers?
- 2 Ashmead-Barlett and others like him were found later to have often exaggerated their accounts of battles. Why do you think this was done?

## What was it like for the Anzac troops at Gallipoli?

The Gallipoli campaign was a fiasco from the start. After an incorrect landing and heavy loss of life during the next few days, the Anzac troops were then forced to cling on to their precarious positions for almost eight months. A series of futile attacks were ordered throughout 1915 which again resulted in huge numbers of fatalities. Both sides suffered. By May, the losses had been so great that **no-man's land** had become clogged with the bodies of the dead. A temporary armistice was agreed to so that each side could bury their dead.

Losses were enormous on both sides:

- Allied casualties were 265 000; 46 000 dead
- Turkish casualties were 218 000; 66 000 dead
- Australian casualties were 26 000; 8000 dead
- New Zealand casualties were 7500; 2500 dead.

If having to fight to the death was not enough, the conditions faced by both sides in the trenches of Gallipoli were horrendous. In the summer it was extremely hot, dry and dusty. Water was always short and the men had to put up with the torment of plagues of flies. Decomposing bodies in no-man's land and the trenches only helped to attract the flies and the rats. In winter it was freezing and wet. Food was limited in both its quantity and its quality. Thousands suffered various ailments which often led to death. Most men had diarrhoea; many had **dysentery**. Lung and stomach ailments, lice, frostbite and dehydration were common experiences for most of the men at Gallipoli.

**Gallipoli veterans later reported that the organisation was so bad that some of the boats went to shore 'stern first', that is, backwards. When the men jumped out 'of the front' they found themselves in deep water. Weighed down with their gear, some of them drowned at this point.**



## WHAT IS THE 'ANZAC LEGEND'?

The Anzac Legend has become a major part of Australian life. Any politician who seeks office must pay homage to the legend, football players sometimes claim the Anzac spirit gets them through a game and thousands of Australians journey to Gallipoli each 25 April to take part in the dawn service at Anzac Cove.

Consider these statements:

### STATEMENT 1

**Following the death of Alec Campbell, the last Anzac soldier to die, Prime Minister John Howard said on 17 May 2002:**

*It is a story of great valour under fire, unity of purpose and a willingness to fight against the odds that has helped to define what it means to be an Australian.*

### STATEMENT 2

**On Anzac Day 2002, the NSW Veterans Affairs Minister, Danna Vale, said:**

*Today is about compassion, about endurance against overwhelming odds, about mateship, it is about a 'fair go' – these are the values that were lived by our Anzacs and our Aussie boys on the Western Front and at Gallipoli.*

### STATEMENT 3

**On 11 November 1993, at the 'Funeral Service of the Unknown Australian Soldier', Prime Minister Paul Keating spoke as follows:**

*The Unknown Australian Soldier we inter today was one of those who by his deeds proved that real nobility and grandeur belongs not to empires and nations but to the people on whom they, in the last resort, always depend. That is surely at the heart of the Anzac story, the Australian legend which emerged from the war. It is a legend not of sweeping military victories so much as triumphs against the odds, of courage and ingenuity in adversity. It is a legend of free and independent spirits whose discipline derived less from military formalities and customs than from the bonds of mateship and the demands of necessity.*

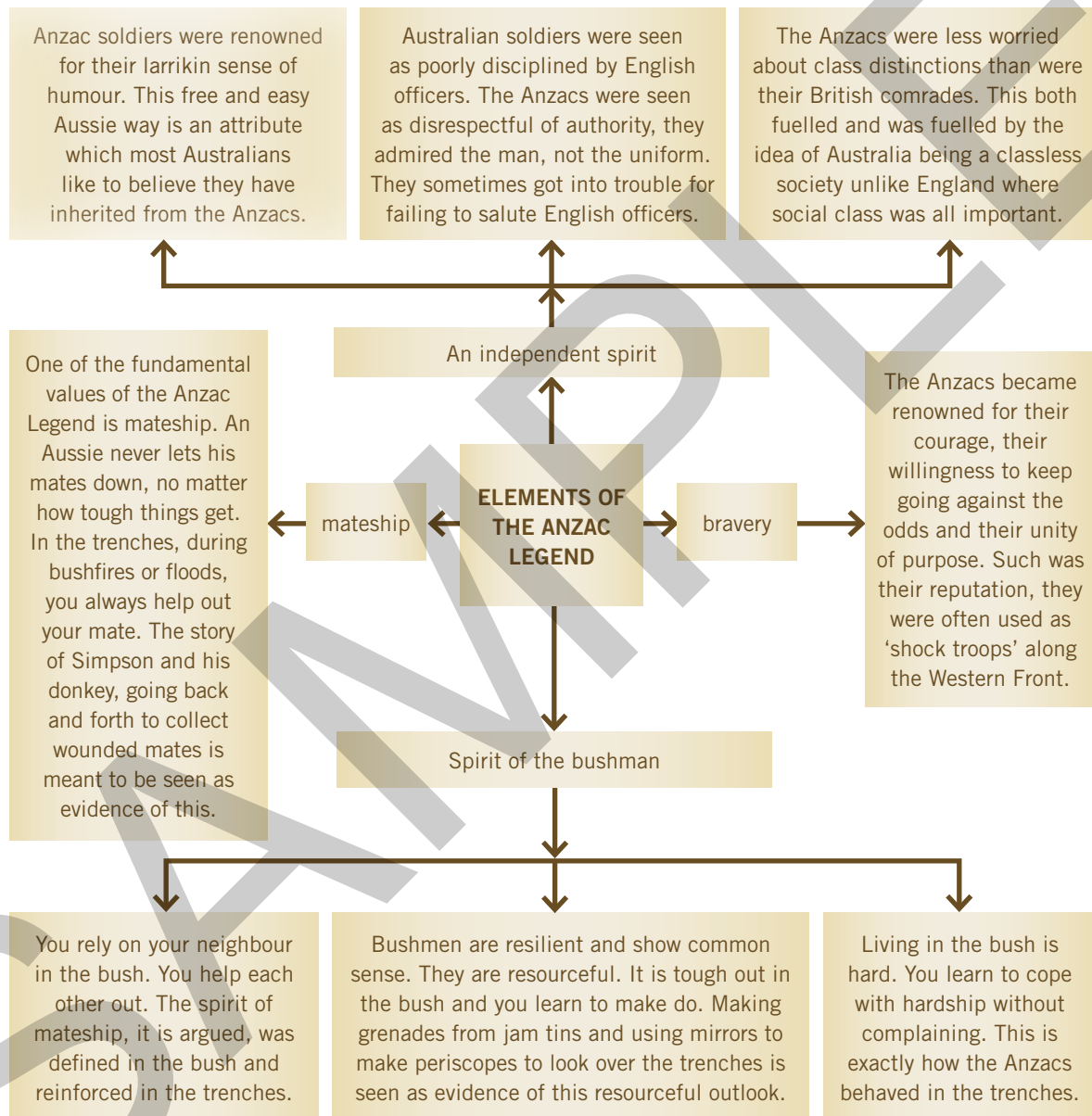
The stories which have been passed down about Gallipoli and the Western Front have **coalesced** to produce the Anzac Legend. It is argued that the elements of the legends have combined to produce the 'true Australian spirit'. What are the elements of the legend? Figure 5.9 summarises some of the key ideas.

## Focus!

- 1 Identify the three key elements John Howard sees as part of the Anzac Legend in Statement 1.
- 2 What does Danna Vale add to the list in Statement 2?
- 3 In Statement 3, Paul Keating refers to similar things, but he also emphasises other elements of the Anzac Legend. Identify them.



Fig. 5.8 Elements of the Anzac Legend





## ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 3

In groups of three or four, produce a PowerPoint presentation and show it to the rest of the class. The subject of your presentation should be: 'Elements of the Anzac Legend'.

In your presentation:

- Select elements of the Anzac Legend.
- Provide evidence to support the elements you have chosen.
- Use both visual and written sources for this. (Information listed at the Cambridge Analysing History website will provide good sources of information for this.)
- Consider the importance of the legend today.

## A SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

### Simpson and his donkey

One of the iconic stories from the Gallipoli story concerns 'Simpson and his donkey'. John Simpson Kirkpatrick spent 24 days at Anzac Cove before he was mortally wounded on 19 May 1915, aged 22. He acted as a single unit venturing into Shrapnel Gully to collect wounded soldiers and bring them back down for medical attention. Several donkeys had been landed with the Anzacs and many wandered free. Simpson used these to ferry the wounded back. When he started doing his work, he was technically a deserter but his commanding officer valued his work and 'turned a blind eye'. Simpson is said to have saved the lives of many men. He remains a key element of the Anzac Legend representing mateship, courage, determination and resourcefulness.



Fig. 5.9 Simpson and his Donkey, Australian War Memorial, Canberra

## Simpson before Gallipoli

- Simpson was born John Simpson Kirkpatrick on 6 July 1892 in South Shields, England. His parents, Robert and Sarah, were Scottish. Robert Kirkpatrick had been a merchant seaman in his youth.
- In 1909, Simpson took a job on the SS *Heighington* and spent the next three months sailing around the Mediterranean Sea.
- In February 1910, he joined the crew of the *Yedda* and sailed to Newcastle, New South Wales. On arrival in Australia he jumped ship and for the next four years did a series of labouring jobs around the country.
- On 25 August 1914, Simpson jumped ship from the SS *Yankalilla* in Fremantle, and enlisted in the army.
- He took the name 'Simpson', fearful that as a deserter from the Merchant Marine, he might not be accepted into the army.

## Simpson at Gallipoli

- Simpson had enlisted in the hope of getting a free trip home. However, the Anzacs were diverted to Egypt. On 25 April 1915, he landed at Gallipoli as a stretcher bearer, with C section, 3rd Field Ambulance, 1st Australian Division.
- Immediately he decided to act as an independent unit and was technically a deserter.
- Each day he and one of his donkeys – variously named Murphy, Abdul, Duffy – made their way up Shrapnel Gully into Monash Valley and to the deadly area around Quinn's Post where the enemy trenches were only fifteen metres away.
- He made his trip through sniper fire and shrapnel, bringing out wounded soldiers, up to fifteen times a day.
- Simpson made his final trip on 19 May. He was hit by Turkish machine gun fire and died instantly.

Simpson has been recommended for several **posthumous** medals, including the Victoria Cross. The Australian Dictionary of Biography describes Simpson as: 'a typical digger; independent, witty, warm-hearted, happy to be indolent at times and careless of dress'.

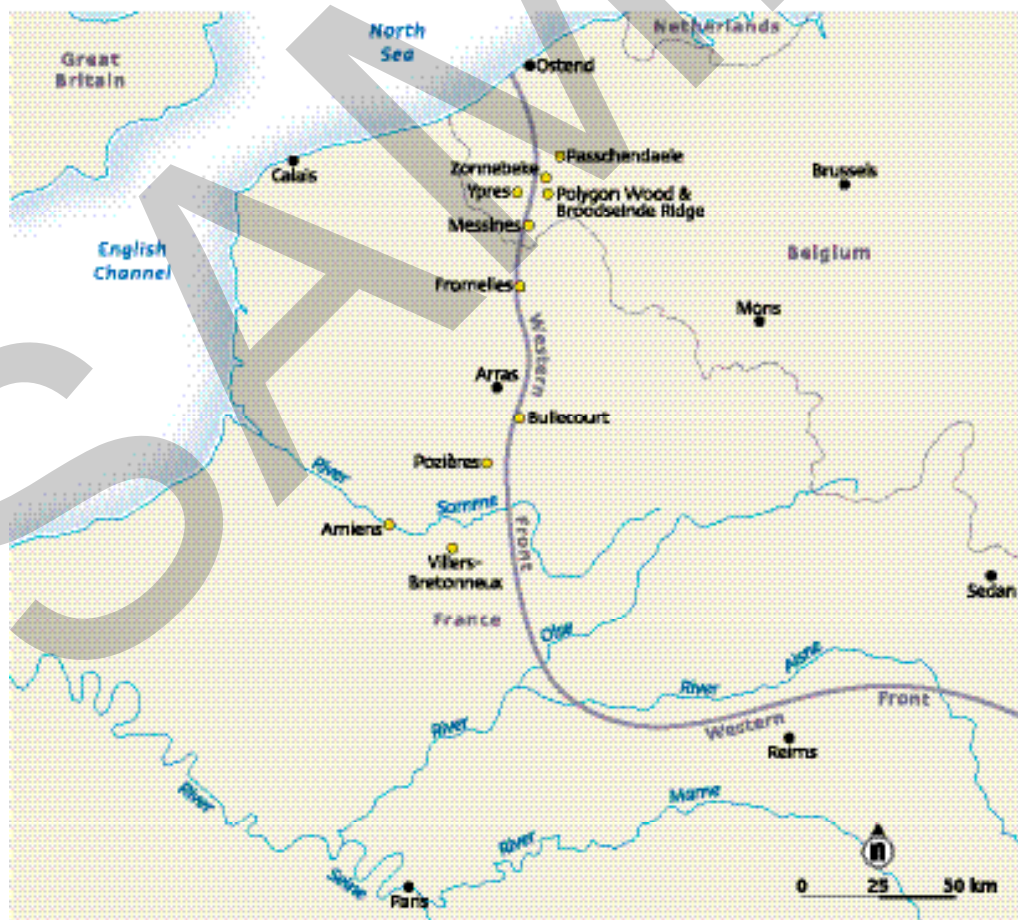




## WHAT HAPPENED ON THE WESTERN FRONT?

When the war broke out in August 1914, most people expected it would all be over by Christmas. There was a belief that the war would be ended in one major battle. The British and their French allies expected that after victory in such a battle, they would march into Germany and capture Berlin. The Germans, of course, expected to do the same and march through France and take Paris. However, by the end of 1914, both sides had become bogged down in a static war of attrition. For the next four years they continued to build complex trench systems. The lines of trenches stretched over 300 kilometres from the English Channel to the Swiss border. This was the Western Front. The trenches also stretched back several kilometres and throughout the war they were constantly being strengthened and deepened. Between the end of 1914 and early 1918, German and allied front lines hardly moved. Commanders on both sides hurled millions of artillery shells at each other and ordered hundreds of thousands of soldiers to leave their trenches, and run across no-man's land to attack the enemy.

Fig.5.10 Map of the Western Front





Soldiers will tell you that in any war, every battle is unique. However, by 1915, a certain pattern had developed along the Western Front.

- To try and break the deadlock, a commander would choose a certain location along the enemy front line to attack.
- Supplies and men would be gathered in readiness for the attack. It proved impossible to keep such preparations secret; the enemy prepared to defend.
- Millions of artillery shells would be hurled against the enemy to 'soften them up' and drive them out of their front-line trenches.
- Then soldiers would be ordered 'over the top'. They would climb out of their trenches and race across no-man's land. These battles were regular and spectacular failures. The enemy would sit behind their machine guns and mow down the oncoming soldiers.
- Men were blown apart by artillery, choked on gas or ended up dying a slow and agonising death from their wounds, caught on the acres of barbed wire that was strewn along the battle front.

Hundreds of thousands of men on both sides died in these futile battles. The Battle of Verdun between French and German forces lasted from February to November 1916; the Battle of the Somme between allied and German forces lasted from July to November 1916. In each case the result was indecisive, no ground had been gained and the loss of life was devastating. The worst of all the Western Front Battles was the Battle of Passchendaele in late 1917 (see below). As well as the horrific nature of battle, the men had to cope with the putrid conditions in the trenches, extremes of weather and disease. Many men were destroyed psychologically by **shell shock**.

## Australian troops on the Western Front in 1916

Following the failure of the Gallipoli Campaign, the Anzac troops were moved to the Western Front. In April 1916, they fought in the defence of Armentieres. In July, they were ordered to join British forces in General Haig's disastrous Battle of the Somme. Anzac forces played a major role in the Somme campaign.

- On 19 July, the 2nd Anzac Corps attacked Fromelles; over 5000 Australians died.
- The 1st Anzacs Corps attacked Pozieres; after weeks of fighting it was finally captured and held.
- Australia suffered 22 000 casualties during the Somme campaign.

Between April and November 1917, Anzac forces fought in many of the battles which sought to break the German lines near Ypres in the Flanders region of Belgium.

- Australian forces fought at Bullecourt; 3000 died and 1700 were captured.
- The 2nd Anzac Corps fought at Messines near Ypres in June. The Germans were dislodged but Anzac casualties were over 15 000.



- In September and October 1917, Anzac forces fought at Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke and Broodseinde Ridge.
- At Broodseinde, over 6000 Australians were killed during early October.
- The Flanders campaign ended in November with the tragic battle of Passchendaele (see page 110).
- During the five months of the Flanders campaign, the British suffered over 250 000 casualties for a gain of eleven kilometres.

By mid 1918, Australian forces had been grouped into single corps numbering 117 000 men. These men played a major role in holding back the German Spring Offensive of that year at Villers-Bretonneux. In April Australian forces prevented the Germans from capturing the town of Amiens. The Australians were lucky enough to be now commanded by one of their own, General John Monash. Monash was arguably the finest allied commander during the First World War.

Fig. 5.11 Part of the aftermath of the battle at the Western Front



Towards the end of 1918, Australian forces were engaged in battles that finally brought the defeat of Germany.

- They captured Mont St Quentin and five German divisions.
- They broke the German lines at Bellicourt in September.
- In 1918 alone, over 15 000 Australian troops were killed.

The Australian contribution to the war had been enormous. Over 416 000 men had volunteered, of these 330 000 had fought overseas. Sixty thousand Australians died and 150 000 were wounded. Per head of population, Australian casualties during the First World War were the highest of any nation that fought.



Fig. 5.12 Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash

**On Christmas Day 1914 German soldiers began singing Christmas carols and then called for the English to do the same. Eventually, soldiers from each side climbed out of their trenches and walked across no-man's land towards each other. They shook hands, shared drinks and cigarettes, looked at photos of wives and girlfriends, and even played soccer.**

## Focus!

- 1 *What was the Western Front?*
- 2 *Why were Western Front battles such a waste of time?*
- 3 *Identify several locations where Australian troops fought.*





## ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 4

The experience of the Anzacs on the Western Front in France and Belgium was horrific. Well over 200 000 Australians were killed or wounded. Australian heroics were no less in France than Gallipoli but the **carnage** was far greater. There was no rushing out of boats and climbing up cliffs, and there was no Ashmead-Bartlett to tell a glorious story. Instead the story was one of months and years of mud, stalemate and futility.

If the Anzacs had gone to France first, and not Gallipoli, how do you think this might have affected:

- recruitment in Australia?
- public reaction to the war?
- later attitudes to Australia's military past?
- the development of the Anzac Legend?

## A SIGNIFICANT EVENT

### The Battle of Passchendaele, 1917

The third Battle of Ypres took place between July and November 1917. It became known as the Battle of Passchendaele because it culminated in an attack on the small Belgian village of Passchendaele. This battle was arguably the most horrific of the First World War. Throughout July, allied forces bombarded German positions with masses of artillery with the result that the area beyond the British and Australian positions became full of massive craters. The heavy summer rains filled these with water and the whole area became a quagmire of sticky mud. Men and horses risked being dragged down into a quicksand of oozing slime. As soldiers moved forward carrying their weapons, supplies and their greatcoats, they risked death if they slipped into the mud or one of the craters.

The British commander, General Douglas Haig, claimed that the aim of the campaign was to ease pressure on the French and to further wear down the German army. Minister of Munitions, Winston Churchill, suggested that Haig's real motive was to achieve victory before the American forces arrived. Haig's desire for glory and his total ignorance of the conditions at Passchendaele – Haig never went near the actual battle front – resulted in a pointless battle in dreadful conditions which had no impact on the long-term outcome of the war. At best, the allies gained a few kilometres of useless muddy land. Historians find it difficult to agree on casualty figures because so many were lost in the carnage and the mud. British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, claimed allied casualties reached almost 400 000.





Fig. 5.13 The atrocious conditions at Passchendaele

The Australian involvement in this campaign was significant:

- Australian infantry divisions fought in the battle of Menin Road on 20 September.
- The 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions moved up to Polygon Wood, close to Zonnebeke. The 4th and 5th Divisions took over and attacked German positions on 26 September.
- Despite heavy German resistance, the Australians were able to move forward a few kilometres but Australian casualties in just over a week were 11 000.
- In early October 1917, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divisions captured Broodseinde Ridge at the cost of thousands dead.
- However, torrential rain came and the quagmire was complete. On 12 October the 3rd and 4th Divisions attacked Passchendaele atop the main ridge. Totally exhausted, they handed over to the Canadians in mid-November.

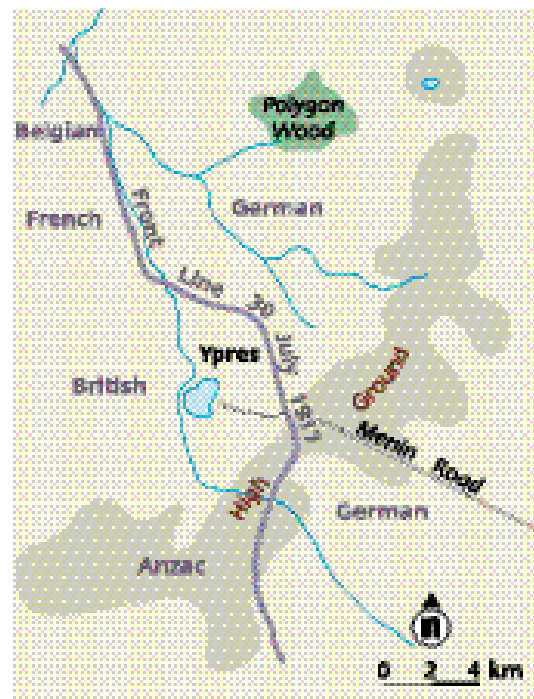


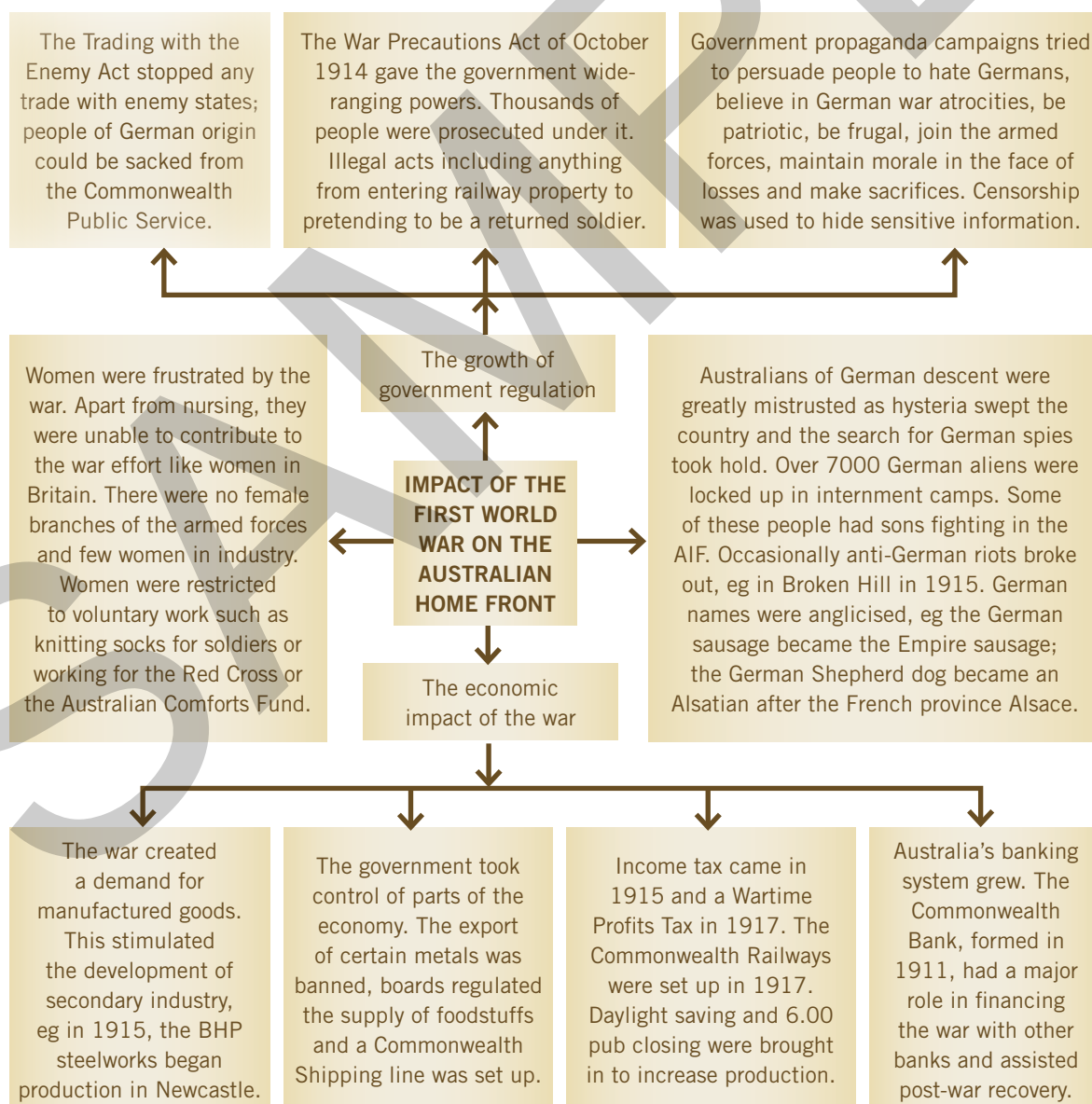
Fig. 5.14 Ypres region, 1917



# THE AUSTRALIAN HOME FRONT

Though the war was a long way from Australia, Australian politics, economy and society were all greatly affected. By far the greatest impact of the war was the conscription debate. This will be dealt with in detail in the following pages. However, the Home Front experienced many other changes. The government assumed greater powers over security and economic matters; women did their best to become involved in the war effort despite the government's reluctance to use them; German 'aliens' were mistrusted and many were locked up; and Australian industry expanded. The overall impact of the war on the Home Front is summarised in Figure 5.16 below.

Fig. 5.15 The impact of the First World War on the Australian Home Front



# WHY DID THE CONSCRIPTION ISSUE SPLIT THE NATION?

**Conscription:** the forcible enlistment of men into the armed forces and the right to send them overseas to fight.

Australia had never had conscription. In 1911 the Federal Government had introduced compulsory military training for men up to the age of 25 but it had always been clear that Australia's military provisions were for defence. There was no expectation that these men would be sent overseas.

When war broke out in August 1914, there was no need for conscription. Australia's young men were eager to get into uniform and show what they were made of. By the end of 1914, over 52 000 men had enlisted into the Australian Imperial Force. Once the news of Gallipoli had reached Australia and the heroics of the Anzacs absorbed, many more men felt inspired to enlist. In July 1915 alone, 36 575 men joined up.

However, once the true horror of conditions in the trenches along the Western Front became known, and as the casualty lists mounted, the enlisted figures began to fall; in July 1916, Australian casualties at Pozieres alone were 23 000. In October 1915, Australia had a new prime minister, William Morris 'Billy' Hughes. Hughes was in England in 1916 and visited Anzac troops in France. He became known as the 'little digger', a term he enjoyed. On his return to Australia, he declared 32 000 men were needed to reinforce Australian numbers and that 16 500 a month would be needed after that. Hughes argued that the only way he could achieve this was to introduce conscription.

Hughes realised that he would never get conscription through the parliament because his own Labor Party was strongly opposed to it.

- Hughes' solution was to hold a referendum on the issue. If he could persuade Australians to vote in favour of the referendum, he would not need to use parliament.
- The question the people would be asked to vote on was:  
'Are you in favour of the government having in this grave emergency, the same compulsory powers over citizens in regard to requiring their military service, for the term of this war, outside the Commonwealth, as it now has in regard to military service within the Commonwealth.'

Or to put it in other words, can the government send conscripts to the Western Front?





- In October 1916, a referendum was held on the issue of conscription. The Australian people voted NO. The result was:

YES	NO
1 087 557	1 160 033
Victoria	NSW
Western Australia	Queensland
Tasmania	South Australia
Federal Territory	

- A second referendum was held in December 1917. This time the majority against conscription had grown.

YES	NO
1 015 159	1 181 747
Tasmania	NSW
Western Australia	Queensland
Federal Territory	South Australia
	Victoria

As the figures suggest, the conscription campaign split the nation down the middle, husbands and wives, brothers, and friends were all divided. Figure 5.17 summarises the main divisions that occurred in the conscription debate.

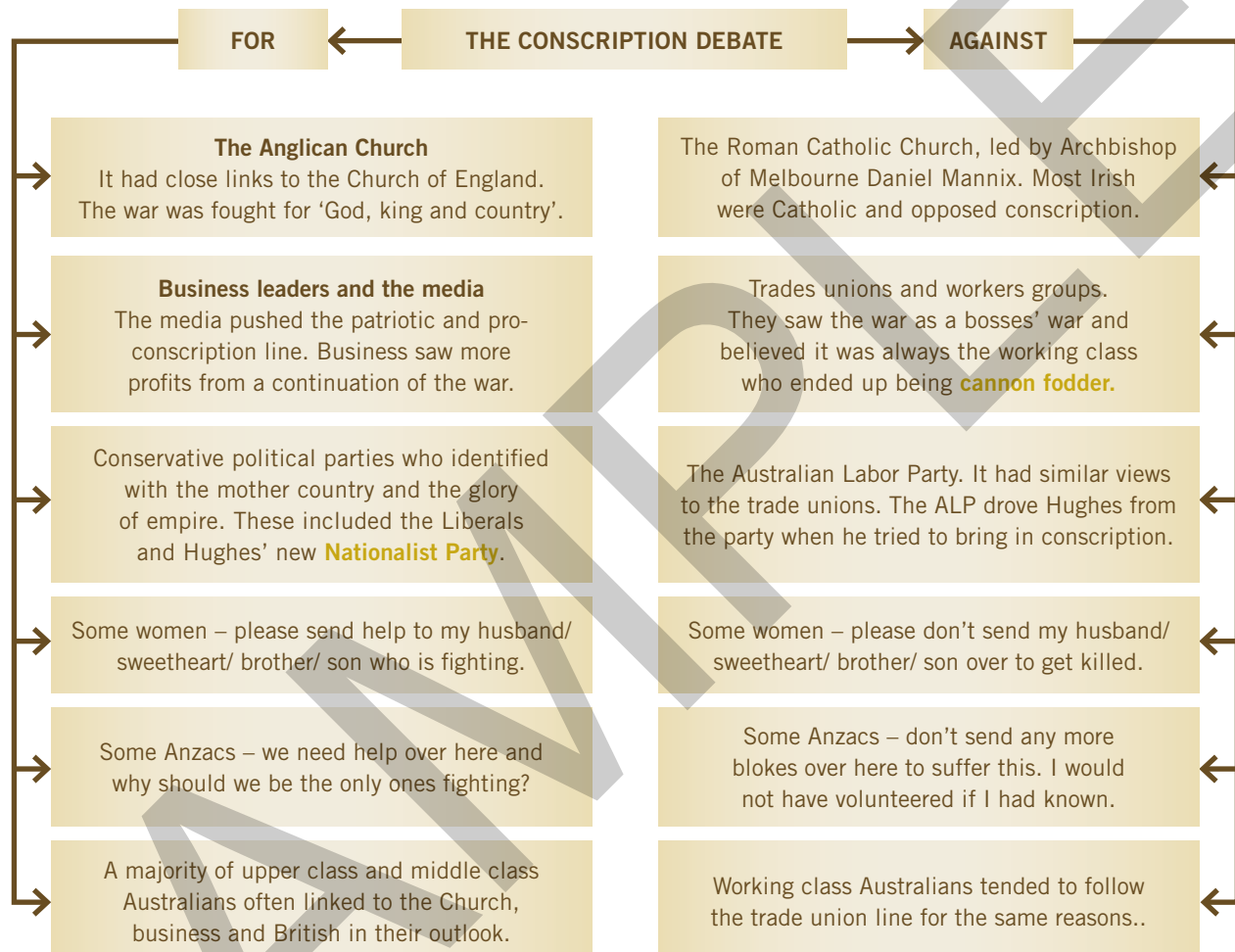
Fig. 5.16 A call to arms poster

In September 1914, Arthur Machen, a writer of supernatural stories, wrote a fictional story for a newspaper which described how bowmen from the fifteenth century led by Saint George helped the British troops at the Battle of Mons. Such was the hysteria of the time, the story became 'angels from heaven' helping the British, proving god was on 'our side'. Denial of the story became considered virtual treason.





Fig. 5.17 Conscription divides Australia



In 1916 and 1917, there was no television or radio. The campaign was conducted in the newspapers, through billboards and speeches at political meetings. However, there were similarities to politics today. Each side of the debate employed speech writers, played on the emotions and tried to grab the daily headlines.

## Focus!

- 1 Why was conscription not considered necessary early in the war?
- 2 Why did Hughes like being called 'the little digger'?
- 3 Why did Hughes choose to hold a referendum rather than simply pass a law through parliament?
- 4 What was the difference between the two sets of referendum results on the conscription issue?



## Conscription: The case 'for'

Hughes travelled around the country trying to stir up support for the 'yes' vote. He argued that a 'no' vote meant one was being unpatriotic, deserting the boys in the trenches, and that it implied cowardice and that you were helping the enemy.

### Extract from a speech delivered by Prime Minister Billy Hughes in 1916.

*The great enemy of Australia, of Labor, of liberty, is the military **despotism**, of which Germany is the living embodiment. If we defeat her the future of Australia – free and white – is assured. If we turn tail and desert the Empire, to whom we owe everything, abandon the allies who have suffered such awful losses and horrors, and made such great sacrifices – but who still fight gallantly on – if we refuse to reinforce the heroic Anzacs, then, indeed, will fall upon us the doom we deserve, and before the tribunal of the nations we shall stand condemned.*

*Fellow citizens, be true to yourselves, to Australia, to the Empire, and vote YES.*



Fig. 5.18 A pro-conscription poster, 1918



Fig. 5.19 Prime Minister Billy Hughes speaking at a pro-conscription rally in Toowoomba

## ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 5

- 1 Explain how the pro-conscription posters try to play on people's emotions.
- 2 Identify five arguments Hughes uses to convince people to vote yes.

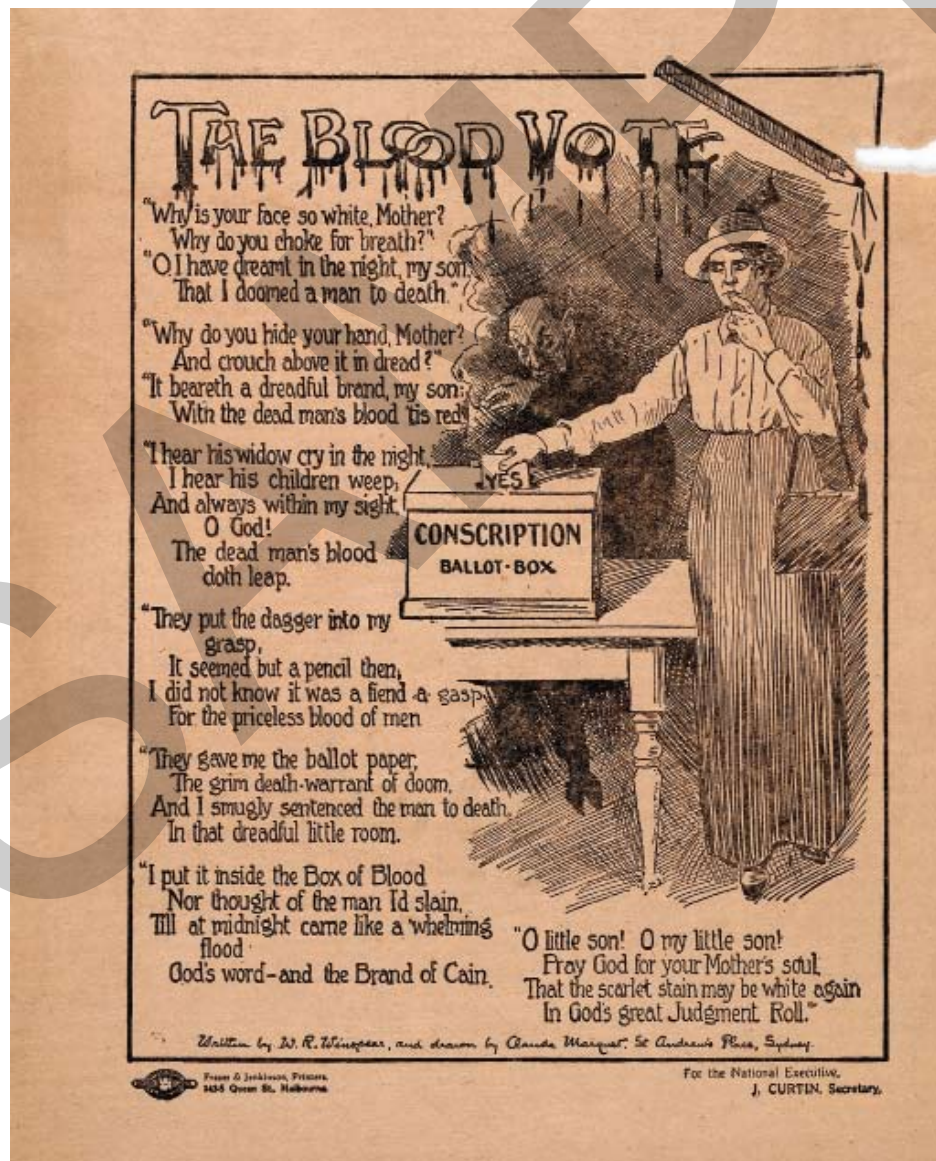


## Conscription: The case 'against'

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, led the case against conscription. Mannix and his supporters argued that the war was futile, that no difference would be made to the final outcome by sacrificing a few thousand more young Australians. Mannix was Irish and in 1916, the British army brutally suppressed the nationalist Irish Easter Revolt in Dublin. The Irish were seeking their independence from Britain. Others argued that Hughes could not be trusted with such extra powers.

Some of the anti-conscription propaganda that was used at the time is shown below. Study it and answer the questions that follow.

Fig. 5.20 An anti-conscription poster from the First World War







# Newspaper

EXTRACT FROM *THE AUSTRALIAN WORKER*, 26 OCTOBER 1916, A TRADE UNION PAPER

If you vote 'yes' on October 28 many men will die because of your vote. Don't send them to their death against their will. They are human beings just like you ...

**DO NOT VOTE TO RUIN THE COUNTRY** under the false

impression that you are helping the men at the front.

The men at the front cannot possibly be helped by any action that will paralyse and **pauperise** the land they are fighting for. With 300 000 men already withdrawn from its social and industrial activities, a further drain of 16 500 ... would simply be disastrous ...

Do not run the risk of turning (Australia) into a black man's hell. Hughes is feverishly protesting that he will not permit coloured labourers to enter the Commonwealth during the period of the war. Don't be fooled by such promises.

## ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 5

- 1 Explain how the anti-conscription posters try to play on people's emotions.
- 2 Identify three arguments in the *Australian Worker* article used to convince people to vote 'no'.

## The end of the First World War

By early 1918, the war had dragged on for three and half years and no end seemed in sight. The trenches of the Western Front were still in place. However, the entry of the United States of America on the allied side offered hope that a breakthrough might happen.

- The German commander, Ludendorff, realised that if Germany was to win the war, it had to be done before the American presence was felt.
- In March 1918, he launched a giant offensive against the allies which nearly reached Paris.
- However, by July, with his troops exhausted and running out of supplies, the allies counter-attacked. The German army could not match the combined strength of the allies and was steadily pushed back.

With the home front in Germany collapsing and the possibility of allied troops entering Germany itself, Germany surrendered and signed an armistice on 11 November 1918. The war was over!

**It has been estimated that 11 per cent of France's entire population was either killed or wounded as a direct result of the war.**

## ***THE STORY SO FAR***

- 1 Before 1914, Australia was a loyal member of the British Empire and prided itself on its British heritage.
- 2 When Britain went to war in 1914, Australia's involvement supporting the 'mother country' was unquestioned.
- 3 Anzac troops were sent to fight against Turkey at Gallipoli. The campaign was a failure but the Anzac forces fought bravely and tenaciously.
- 4 The behaviour of the Anzac forces at Gallipoli combined with contemporary press coverage led to the creation of the Anzac legend.
- 5 Simpson's unselfish behaviour seemed to epitomise the Anzac Legend.
- 6 After Gallipoli, the Anzacs fought on the Western Front, in conditions even worse than they experienced in Turkey.
- 7 The most horrific and most futile battle in which Australians were involved was the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917.
- 8 The Home Front was organised for war, including giving the government extra powers and the internment of aliens. Women could play only a minor role.
- 9 The conscription issue deeply divided the nation.
- 10 The war finally ended with Germany's surrender on 11 November 1918.



## CHAPTER REVIEW

Define the following terms:

- mother country
- war of attrition
- no-man's land
- conscription
- armistice.

### Short answer questions

- 1 Why did Australians feel so British before 1914?
- 2 Why was the Gallipoli campaign fought?
- 3 Why didn't women play a bigger role during the war?
- 4 Why did Archbishop Mannix oppose conscription so strongly?

### Analyse the writer's views

This is an extract from a speech given by Les Carlyon, the author of the book *Gallipoli*, on 11 November 2004 at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

- 1 What does Carlyon mean when he says: 'But I do think the factual story is the more affecting, the more worthy if you like. The story of what happened to the infantrymen, the volunteers from Ballarat and Bathurst, stands the scrutiny of ninety years ...'?
- 2 How does Carlyon justify his view that despite the chaos and failure of Gallipoli, '... Gallipoli says something good about the Australian people and the Australian spirit'?



What was to become one of the strongest strands of our folklore began with falsehoods. The papers [on 30 April 1915] ran a British War Office announcement saying the Allies were advancing steadily up the [Gallipoli] peninsula. According to the press, the Australian death toll had crept up to 41. Then Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's story appeared ...

... Ashmead-Bartlett had the Australians jumping out of their boats and rushing trenches with bayonets. He had men, 'shot to bits', lying on the beach and cheering throughout that first night. Clergymen quoted Ashmead-Bartlett in their Sunday sermons. People cut out his words for scrapbooks. Enlistments soared, reaching heights in July and August of 1915 never again reached. Ashmead-Bartlett, without meaning to, had started the Anzac legend...

... The trouble was, there was also an Anzac reality. It, too, was something to be proud of, but it was not the same story Ashmead-Bartlett had created. **Censorship** is inevitable in war and Ashmead-Bartlett had to leave things out. [His] omissions, plus [his] enthusiasm, meant Australians became captivated by a story that wasn't quite accurate and sounded like an adventure written by Kipling. Ashmead-Bartlett made Gallipoli sound romantic, and it wasn't. Rather than fleeing, the Turks were fighting bravely ...

... In military terms, the [Anzac Cove] landing was nearer a failure than a success. The Australians were clinging to about 400 acres [162 hectares] above the beach, in the rough shape of a triangle. After that first day they could not advance. The casualties were not the 'few hundred' the newspapers were suggesting. By the time Ashmead-Bartlett's report appeared, the Australian and New Zealand casualties were approaching 8000, of whom more than 2000 were dead ... As a result of all this, young men were lining up at the recruitment centres with a fraudulent picture of the war in their heads. And families with husbands and sons at Gallipoli were living with false hopes ...

... I don't think it matters if there are two Gallipolis, one that belongs mostly to folklore and mythology and another to facts and reality. But I do think the factual story is the more affecting, the more worthy if you like. The story of what happened to the infantrymen, the volunteers from Ballarat and Bathurst, stands the scrutiny of ninety years ...

... Getting ashore was not that hard. Hanging on, up on that ridge, for eight months – that was hard. The Australians defended absurd positions. They looked after each other. They kept their good humour. There is a cheerfulness in soldiers' letters from Gallipoli one seldom comes upon in letters from France. The food was unspeakable, the flies a plague. [So were] dysentery and lice ... The miracle is simply these men didn't lose heart. And they didn't, not even when they knew all was lost and they were creeping away by night, leaving so many dead.

That, to me, is why we are right to remember Gallipoli. We are surely right to honour them. We are surely right to walk past the political intrigues and the blunders and say Gallipoli says something good about the Australian people and the Australian spirit.



## Extended response questions

Imagine that you fought at Gallipoli throughout 1915 and kept a diary. You are fortunate enough to survive until the evacuation in December. Produce a six-page diary account of your experiences at Gallipoli.

- Each page will represent one day.
- Be sure to include *some* of the following:
  - » the landing
  - » the attack on Lone Pine or the Nek
  - » living conditions
  - » the evacuation
  - » a photo source or other illustration relevant to the specific diary entry
  - » specific detailed information which you have managed to find from examining the primary sources regarding Gallipoli
  - » morale
  - » humour
  - » attitudes towards the Turks.
- You can assume one of the following roles:
  - » you might be a nurse
  - » you might be an Anzac soldier
  - » you might be a Turkish soldier.

## Read more deeply

To help you with the assignment, refer to the Cambridge Analysing History website.