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Job Skill, Manliness and Working Relationships in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I



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Abstract

Historical analyses of soldiers in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during World War I have focused overwhelmingly on combat experiences, the environment of the trenches, and the sense of “mateship” that developed between soldiers. In recent years, labour and cultural historians have begun to approach this environment in new ways, and their work is uncovering a hitherto unseen side of the Australian experience of war. This article continues this recent trend by considering the army as a workplace, and exploring the link between job skill, perceptions of manliness, and workplace relationships in the AIF during World War I. In particular, it will explore two common beliefs that linked work and manliness together in different ways, and consider how those beliefs contributed towards tension and conflict between soldiers of the AIF during World War I.

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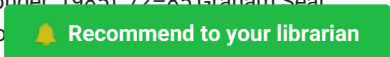
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Footnotes

2. See for example Jane Ross, *The Myth of the Digger: The Australian Soldier in Two World Wars* (Hale and Iremonger, 1985), 72–85; Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology* (University of Queensland Press, 2004), 77–82; Alistair Thomson, *The Legend of the Digger* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 49–50; and Linda Wade, “By Diggers Defended, By Victorians Mended: Mateship at Villiers-Bretonneux,”



3. Nathan Wise, "In Military Parlance I Suppose We were Mutineers": Industrial Relations in the Australian Imperial Force during the Great War," *Labour History*, no. 101 (November2011):161–71; Dale Blair, *Dinkum Diggers: An Australian Battalion at War* (Melbourne University Press, 2001), 37–68; Peter Stanley, *Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force* (Pier 9, 2010), 40–41, 98–99; Ross, *The Myth of the Digger*, 86–112. [Google Scholar](#)
4. See for example, Marilyn Lake, "The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context," *Historical Studies* 22, no. 86(1986):116–31; Chris McConville, "Rough Women, Respectable Men and Social Reform: A Response to Lake's Masculinism," *Australian Historical Studies* 22, no. 88(1987):432–40; Judith Allen, "'Mundane' Men: Historians, Masculinity and Masculinism," *Australian Historical Studies* 22, no. 89(1987):617–28; Marilyn Lake, "Socialism and Manhood: The Case of William Lane," *Labour History*, no. 50 (May1986):54–62; Bruce Scates, "Socialism, Feminism and the Case of William Lane: A Reply to Marilyn Lake," *Labour History*, no. 59 (November1990):44–58; Marilyn Lake, "Socialism and Manhood: A Reply to Bruce Scates," *Labour History*, no. 60 (May1991):114–20; Bruce Scates, "Socialism and Manhood: A Rejoinder," *Labour History*, no. 60 (May1991):121–24; Barbara Pocock, "Gender and Australian Industrial Relations Theory and Research Practice," *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work* 8, no. 1(1997):1–19; Bruce Scates, "Mobilizing Manhood: Gender and the Great Strike in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand," *Gender & History* 9, no. 2(August1997):285–309; Melissa Bellanta, "A Man of Civic Sentiment: The Case of William Guthrie Spence," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1(March2008):63–76. [Google Scholar](#)
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6. See in particular Ben Maddison, "'The Skillful Unskilled Labourer': The Decline of Artisanal Discourses of Skill in the NSW Arbitration Court, 1905–15," *Labour History*, no. 93 (November2007):73–86; Lucy Taksa, "'About as Popular as a Dose of Clap': Steam, Diesel and Masculinity at the New South Wales Eveleigh Railway Workshops," *Journal of Transport History* 26, no. 2(September, 2005):79–97; John Shields, "Deskilling Revisited: Continuity and Change in Craft Work and Apprenticeship in Late Nineteenth Century New South Wales," *Labour History*, no. 68 (May1995):1–29. [Google Scholar](#)
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8. For recent examples see Erik-Jan Zürcher, ed., *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative Study of Military Labour 1500–2000* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Peter Way, "Memoirs of an Invalid: James Miller and the Making of the British-American Empire in the Seven Years' War," in *Rethinking U.S. Labour History: Essays on the Working-Class Experience, 1756–2009*, ed. D. T. Haverty-Stacke and D. J. Walkowitz (Continuum, 2010), 25–53; Peter Way, "Class and the Common Soldier in the Seven Years' War," *Labor History* 44, no. 4(2003):455–81; Peter Way, "Rebellion of the Regulars: Working Soldiers and the Mutiny of 1763–4," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 4(October2000):761–92; J. S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and World War I in Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Helen B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in World War I* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). [Google Scholar](#)
9. Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 291. [Google Scholar](#)
10. Some soldiers even directly addressed their family members in their diary entries, or dedicated their diaries to a particular family member. For a more detailed analysis of this, see Nathan Wise, "A Working Man's Hell: Working Class Men's Experiences with Work in the Australian Imperial Force during the Great War" (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2008), 74–76. [Google Scholar](#)
11. This is explored in more detail in Wise, "A Working Man's Hell," 48–50. [Google Scholar](#)
12. Richard White, "The Soldier as Tourist: The Australian Experience of the Great War," *War and Society* 5, no. 1(May1987), esp. 68–69. [Google Scholar](#)
13. Nathan Wise, "The Lost Labour Force: Working-Class Approaches to Military Service during the Great War," *Labour History*, no. 93 (November2007):161–76. [Google Scholar](#)
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15. *Ibid.* [Google Scholar](#)
16. *Ibid.* Tosh notes that the three social environments where manliness was demonstrated were "home, work and all-male associations." [Google Scholar](#)
17. Charles Fox and Marilyn Lake, ed., *Australians at Work: Commentaries and Sources* (McPhee Gribble, 1990), 22; R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Allen & Unwin, 1995), 32–33. [Google Scholar](#)
18. Kay Saunders, "A New Race, Bred of the Soil and Sun: Conceptualising Race and Labour, 1890–1914," in *Working the Nation: Working Life and Federation*, ed. Mark Hearn and Greg Patmore (Pluto Press, 2001), 83. [Google Scholar](#)
19. C. E. W. Bean, *On the Wool Track* (Angus and Robertson, 1968), vii. [Google Scholar](#)
20. *Ibid.*, 79. [Google Scholar](#)

21. C. E. W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918: Volume 1: The Story of Anzac: From the Outbreak of War to the End of the First Phase of the Gallipoli Campaign, May 4, 1915* (Angus and Robertson, 1941), 46. [Google Scholar](#)
22. See Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity 1870–1920* (Melbourne University Press, 2001), 25. For a recent similar analysis of the situation in New Zealand, where soldiers were held up as the archetypal man during World War I, see Steven Loveridge, “Soldiers and Shirkers: Modernity and New Zealand Masculinity During the Great War,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 46, no. 1 (April 2013): 59–79; for a British comparison, see Meg Albrinck, “Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal,” in *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, ed. Pearl James (University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 312–39. [Google Scholar](#)
23. Wise, “A Working Man’s Hell,” 166–67. [Google Scholar](#)
24. See for example Nathan Wise, “‘Dig, Dig, Dig, until You are Safe’: Constructing the Australian Trenches on Gallipoli,” *First World War Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 51–64. [Google Scholar](#)
25. Wise “The Lost Labour Force,” 165–67. [Google Scholar](#)
26. See for example John McQuilton, “A Shire at War: Yackandandah, 1914–1918,” *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 11 (October 1987): 28. [Google Scholar](#)
29. *Ibid.*, see diary entries dated 5 March 1917 and 24 November 1917. [Google Scholar](#)
30. *Ibid.*, see diary entry dated 18 September 1917. [Google Scholar](#)
32. *Ibid.*, diary entries as dated. The RHA was the Royal Horse Artillery, and the RFA was the Royal Field Artillery. [Google Scholar](#)
33. *Ibid.*, diary entries as dated. [Google Scholar](#)
37. Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 93. [Google Scholar](#)
39. C. E. W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918: Volume 2: The Story of Anzac: From 4 May, 1915 to the Evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula* (Angus and Robertson, 1941), 254. [Google Scholar](#)
40. *Ibid.*, 270n. [Google Scholar](#)
41. *Ibid.* [Google Scholar](#)
42. *Ibid.* [Google Scholar](#)
43. See C. E. W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Volume 6: The Australian Imperial Force in France, during the Allied Offensive, 1918* (Angus and Robertson, 1942). See in particular chapter 2, “‘Peaceful Penetration’ Begins,” 32–61; chapter 10, “‘Peaceful Penetration’: Its Climax on the Somme,” 336–82; and chapter 11, “‘Peaceful Penetration’: Its Climax at Hazebrouck,” 382–41. See also Bean’s definition of the term “Peaceful Penetration,” 42. Whilst having its origins in Germany’s “peaceful penetration” of their trade empire into British territory prior to the war, in 1918 it applied to attempts to advance the Allied front lines through the use of minimal violence. [Google Scholar](#)
44. *Ibid.*, 43. [Google Scholar](#)
45. *Ibid.*, 47. [Google Scholar](#)
46. Tosh, “What Should Historians do with Masculinity?” 186. [Google Scholar](#)
47. Frances, *The Politics of Work*, 67. [Google Scholar](#)
48. *Ibid.*, 2. [Google Scholar](#)
49. Rosemary Deem, *Work, Unemployment, and Leisure* (Routledge, 1988), 15. [Google Scholar](#)
50. Stanley Parker, *Leisure and Work* (George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 23. [Google Scholar](#)
51. Goodwin, diary entry dated 13 December 1917. [Google Scholar](#)
52. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (Monthly Review Press, 1974), esp. 443–47. [Google Scholar](#)
53. Maddison, “The Skillful Unskilled Labourer,” 73. [Google Scholar](#)
54. Goodwin, diary entry dated 4 October 1915. [Google Scholar](#)
55. *Ibid.* [Google Scholar](#)
56. *Ibid.*, diary entry dated 1 November 1915. [Google Scholar](#)
57. Frances, *The Politics of Work*, 2. [Google Scholar](#)
58. Wise, “In Military Parlance”; Nathan Wise, “Fighting a Different Enemy: Social Protests against Authority in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I,” *International Review of Social History* 52, supp. 15 (December 2007): 225–41. [Google Scholar](#)
59. Parker, *Leisure and Work*, 30. [Google Scholar](#)
60. Stanley, *Bad Characters*, 66–69. [Google Scholar](#)

61. Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, 3. [Google Scholar](#)

62. Wise, "Fighting a Different Enemy," 234–36. [Google Scholar](#)

63. Bruce, diary entries as dated. [Google Scholar](#)

64. There were exceptions, particularly in the latter months of 1918 when the German Army was on the verge of collapse. See for example Wise, "In Military Parlance," 167–71. [Google Scholar](#)

65. Goodwin, diary entry as dated. [Google Scholar](#)

66. *Ibid.*, diary entry dated 4 October 1915. [Google Scholar](#)

68. Mike Noon and Paul Blyton, *The Realities of Work* (Palgrave, 2002), 88. [Google Scholar](#)

69. An example of this was at The Nek on 7 August 1915, where it has been argued that the artillery fire stopped too early, giving the Turkish defenders ample time to man the parapets and suitably prepare for the defence of the trenches, at a minimum only 20 metres away from the Australian lines, at a maximum only 65 metres away. See for example, John Hamilton, *Goodbye Cobber, God Bless You: The Fatal Charge of the Light Horse, Gallipoli, August 7th 1915* (Macmillan Press, 2004), 270–76. [Google Scholar](#)

70. Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Penguin Books, 1987), 214. In the more organised cases of "Peaceful Penetration" tanks and artillery support were used. The purpose of this, as Bean records, was sometimes to destroy specific enemy posts, and at other times to distract the enemy or to drown out the noise from a raid in some other section of the line. For an example of artillery support see Bean, *Official History: Volume 6*, 46, and for evidence of the use of tanks in the larger raids see *ibid.*, 338–64. [Google Scholar](#)

71. Gammage, *The Broken Years*, 214. [Google Scholar](#)

72. Barry Clissold, "Peaceful Penetration: 1918," *Sabretache* 43 (December 2002), 42. [Google Scholar](#)

73. Bean, *Official History: Volume 6*, 39. [Google Scholar](#)

74. Gordon Rose, *The Working Class* (Longmans, 1968), 25. [Google Scholar](#)

75. Parker, *Leisure and Work*, 23. [Google Scholar](#)

76. Fox and Lake, *Australians at Work*, 11. [Google Scholar](#)

77. Bean, *Official History: Volume 6*, 45. [Google Scholar](#)

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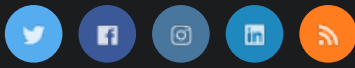
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In Australia, the outbreak of World War I was greeted with considerable enthusiasm. Even before Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, the nation pledged its support alongside other states of the British Empire and almost immediately began preparations to send forces overseas to engage in the conflict. The first campaign that Australians were involved in was in German New Guinea after a hastily raised force known as the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force was dispatched from During the Second World War Australian forces made a significant contribution to the Allied victory in Europe and in Asia and the Pacific. The generation that fought in the war and survived came out of the war with a sense of pride in Australia's capabilities. Post-war prosperity. After the war Australia entered a boom period. Millions of refugees and migrants arrived in Australia, many of them young people happy to embrace their new lives with energy and vigour. The number of Australians employed in the manufacturing industry had grown steadily since the beginning of the century. Many women w Discover why so many Australian men joined the armed forces in World War I, and why many men didn't want to enlist in the army after 1915. Enlistment standards for the Australian Imperial Force over the course of World War I. Minimum physical requirements. August 1914. needing to stay home and work family farms or stations. family decisions to keep one son at home when others went. But a large group of willing men was ready to enlist in the armed forces, even before the war was announced. Widespread empathy for Great Britain's cause. Large sections of the Australian community felt loyal to Britain when the war was declared. More than 90% of migrants to Australia in the 8 years before 1914 were from the United Kingdom.