

TOPIC 1: Who Am I?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When war came to the Commonwealth of Australia on 4 August 1914, the nation had a population of a little more than four and a half million people. Between 1914 and 1918, enlistments for service overseas with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) came, as one would expect, almost entirely from Australia's adult male population. More than 416,000 men who stated they were aged between eighteen and forty-four joined the force (some who were too young or too old lied about their age to enlist), representing about 38.7 per cent of the total adult male population. They came from every state and territory, from cities, towns and rural areas, from all walks of life and all religious denominations.

Australia in those years was a nation largely derived from the children and descendants of immigrants from what was then the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Many who enlisted had been born in the United Kingdom and migrated as children or adults. Smaller numbers were born elsewhere, with countries all over the world represented – like New Zealand, Russia, India, South Africa and Canada – many foreign-born men also could claim British or Irish heritage. The ten most common surnames in the AIF were Smith, Brown, Williams, Jones, Wilson, Taylor, Anderson, Thompson, Johnson and White. Again, not surprisingly, 80 per cent were single men, but they were not all young – 27 per cent of enlistees were over the age of thirty.

One way of gaining an idea of the basic characteristics of Australians who joined the AIF is to examine their stories. A soldier whose details are online is Private Alick Anderson, service number 3451. The Australian War Memorial (www.awm.gov.au) features Biographical Databases. By entering Alick Anderson in the World War I 'Embarkation Roll' the details of Alick, and other men of the 8th Reinforcements of the 27th Infantry Battalion, can be seen. They sailed on HMAT (His Majesty's Australian Transport) A30 *Borda* from Adelaide on 12 January 1916. Alick was nineteen, unmarried, and employed as a railway porter at Tailem Bend, South Australia. The other men ranged in age from nineteen to forty-three, coming from different towns and occupations, and some were married. By looking up Alick on the AWM's 'Nominal Roll' it can be seen that he returned to Australia in February 1918.

The National Archives of Australia (www.naa.gov.au) has Alick's service dossier. Search in 'Record Search' under '3451 Alick Anderson' and you will be able to see his original 'Attestation Form', which he signed himself; also, because he was under twenty-one Alick needed a parent's permission, and the letter signed by his mother can be seen. You can follow his service, noting that he was transferred to the 10th Infantry Battalion on 28 February 1916 at Serapeum, Egypt, from where he sailed to the Western Front. He was admitted to hospital sick in October 1916, rejoined his unit, was wounded in action the next month and was sent to England for treatment; he did not return to France until January 1918, during which time he trained as a signaller. He was not back on the Western Front long when he was admitted to hospital with another ailment, returned to England and was sent home. The Australian War Memorial also has a history of the 10th Battalion under 'Australians at War – Australian Military Units'.

The worksheets in this topic set up the main inquiry that students will follow throughout the remainder of the activities in this book: to try to discover the experiences and thoughts of an Australian soldier on the Western Front. Students may also wish to try to discover the experiences and thoughts of an Australian nurse who treated soldiers that served on the Western Front.

The activities ask students to devise questions that they want answered, and to think about how we find information to answer such questions.

Students at all three levels (Level 1 Years 4-7, Level 2 Years 8-10 and Level 3 Years 11-12) can ask the same questions, but their answers will differ according to the sophistication of their knowledge.

They came from every state and territory, from cities, towns and rural areas, from all walks of life and all religious denominations.

This topic also sets up the assignment that students are asked to work towards producing, and gives them a variety of options for presenting the information they gather and understandings they develop.

There are many elements in the photographs that will suggest some questions — such as the nature of the uniforms, the poses, the symbols included, the presence of families in some cases, the varying ages of the men — but many other questions will be general ones about a man’s likely war experiences.

AIMS

Students at Level 1/2/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate that war is about real people • Create a series of questions that they want answered by the end of their investigation
Students at Level 2/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on the nature of the evidence they can use to gain information and develop conclusions in history

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Level 1/2/3	<p>Have students look at the photographs. Some of the images might suggest particular questions — about uniforms, the symbols included, the soldiers’ feelings. Other questions will be more general — such as, what was it like to fight? Was he wounded? Do students have any photographs or memorabilia from World War I or other wars at home? This can be the start of their own investigations into family history.</p> <p>When students have completed their questions, announce that their assignment will be to find the answers to these questions from the evidence that follows, and that they will be able to use the CD-ROM to create their diary, letters, newspaper or film account (as decided by the teacher). They can focus on one of the soldiers in the photographs — their first research should be to go to the CD-ROM and find out from the caption if the soldier served on the Western Front. Or they can have an imaginary soldier as their focus — perhaps the Unknown Soldier (see Topic 11, Commemoration). Students may also wish to focus on an Australian nurse who treated soldiers that served on the Western Front.</p>
Level 2/3	<p>Have students list the questions they would like answered, and then have them complete the exercise on the Level 2/3 page. A focus for this level throughout is on how we know what we know — the nature and reliability of evidence.</p> <p>They will then be able to start gathering more evidence from the following pages to start creating their chosen product.</p>

Here are some photographs of Australian soldiers who served in World War I.

Some of them served on the Western Front (northern France and western Belgium) where Australians were involved in the fighting between 1916 and the end of the war in 1918.

- Imagine that a soldier — perhaps one of these men — was coming to your classroom to talk about his experiences. Work with a classmate to list the questions that you would ask him. Look carefully at the photographs because there are things in them that you might want to know about — for example, you might want to know how did the soldier feel about leaving his wife and child behind while he went away to war?



AWM DA09944

Private R Morrall



AWM DA09834

Three unnamed soldiers



AWM DA08945

Private Roland (or Rowland) Driscoll and family



AWM DAI4978

Private LE Glare



AWM DA09050

Private George Beamish Swanton and family



AWM P02179.001

Private Harold Arthur Cowan

- ▶ Share your questions as a class, and see if there are any that you did not think of but would like answered.
- ▶ Create a final list of questions that you would like answered. Keep this list as you will be able to see how many of these questions you have answers to at the end of this unit.

- ▶ **Your Task** as you work through the print and CD-ROM materials in this resource about Australians on the Western Front during World War I is to discover what experiences and thoughts a soldier possibly had, and use them to create your own record of that person's war.
 - Create an imaginary diary
 - Write a series of letters that he might have sent
 - Create a film about him
 - Write his biography



GO TO THE CD-ROM Visit the Image and Film Libraries and look at Topic 1 - WHO AM I?



Add information about a SOLDIER OR NURSE to your assignment

There are no known Australian soldiers who fought on the Western Front who are still alive to talk to you: the last one died in June 2005.

Although you are unable to talk to someone who lived through that time, you can still try to get answers to your questions.

- ▶ List possible ways, other than talking to a person, that you can find out about them.
- ▶ What will influence the value of the evidence (information that proves something) that you are likely to gather? You should consider such aspects as what the person would know, how typical it might be, when it was written or produced, and so on.

Very few soldiers left behind personal papers that can help us to know what they thought and experienced, other than their official file. So, we cannot know what they thought or what emotions they may have felt.

- ▶ How can we try to find out about what he possibly thought and experienced? List some ways.

That's your task. As you work through the print and CD-ROM materials in this resource about Australians on the Western Front during World War I you are to discover what experiences and thoughts a soldier possibly had, and use them to create your own record of that person's war.

You can do this by:

- Creating an imaginary diary
- Writing a series of letters that he might have sent
- Creating a film about him
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