

An Australian Family Poignancy in WWI

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*Two Brothers Killed on the
Western Front, France,
1916-1917*

By

Bob East

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Pte. James Gordon Stevens. Pte. George Charles Stevens.

The following is a recollection of events leading up to, and immediately after, the deaths of two of the author's paternal great-uncles who were both killed during World War I (WWI) on the Western Front—France. Their names, and ages at their deaths are officially recorded by the Australia War Memorial (AWM)—Canberra, Australia, as James Gordon Stevens, 25, and George Charles Stevens, 23. James died on 29 July 1916—missing presumed dead—and George died of wounds—or so it was presumed—the year after, on 05 May 1917. However, George's death is also the subject of speculation as will be discussed later in this publication. Neither soldier has an official burial place, but their names are recorded on memorials both in Europe—France and Britain—and Australia. Both the Stevens were Australian citizens—brothers—and both were born in the State of Queensland small town of Warwick in the last decade of the 19th century.

James Gordon Stevens and George Charles Stevens enlisted in the First Australian Imperial Force (1st AIF) in 1915 in different months. An older brother, Thomas Alexander Stevens—25 in 1915—did not enlist. Whether he attempted to do so is unknown. There were misconceptions that it was illegal—or simply not advisable—for all brothers in a family of enlistment age to join the 1st AIF. This was simply not true. Many families had all their sons enlist in the 1st AIF—sometimes with devastating consequences such as those which befell the Stevens family. The older Stevens son, Thomas Alexander Stevens (Tom) was found to have a very minor health issue—or physical disability—that restricted him from enlisting with his brothers. It is interesting to note that Tom lived into his 90th year, indicating his minor health issue was certainly no impediment to his longevity.

(The 1st AIF was formed on the 15th August 1914 following the declaration of war on Germany by Britain. Although Australia was by this time an

independent country, it was still part of the British Commonwealth, and as such was expected to support the “Mother Country” in times of war or need.)

The Stevens family at the outbreak of WWI—28 July 1914—was comprised of a father and mother—Thomas and Janet—and three adult boys and three sisters. Another brother, John, died in 1908 at the age of 13 years of a cancer related illness, whilst another sister, Mary Emily, died in her infancy. In the 19th century and early 20th century most Australian families had anywhere up to 10 children—sometimes more—and it would have been rare indeed if all the offspring reached maturity. Sickness and accidents accounted for many premature deaths.

Although the Stevens family war loss was not unique numerically in Australia in WWI, it nevertheless is a poignant reminder of the suffering which many Australian families endured in an age when “God”, “King”, and “Country” were paramount. This allegiance to the “Mother Country”—which Britain was affectionately known as—saw Australia involved in this European War—and of course other areas of conflict in which Germany and its allies were also involved in WWI—including the failed Dardanelles Campaign of 1915.

To afford recognition to where James Gordon Stevens, and George Charles Stevens served and trained it was considered necessary to include in this publication, not only the primary evidence of personal correspondence, but also a large number of prints—including maps produced during the early part of the 20th century. (Most of the early photographs are taken from the AWM collection—with thanks.) It is hoped by including this additional data that the story of James and George Stevens, in WWI, and their deaths, can become a little easier to comprehend in the context of their milieu.

Also included in this publication is a brief analysis of where Australian troops saw action in WWI. It would not do justice to the Stevens family, and others, if an overview, albeit selective was not made of why WWI occurred, and the major battles that made this war truly, “a World War”.

Because the various cemeteries in France, and the memorials in France, Britain, and of course Australia, are such an integral part of the sadness and sacrifice that over 60,000 Australian men made from 1914 to 1918—and a little later if the wounded men who died after the Armistice are included—a chapter on itself is devoted to these cemeteries and memorials with appropriate photos.

Finally, a chapter—albeit brief and concise—is devoted to Australia’s official war correspondent, Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean (18 November 1879 – 30 August 1968). Bean’s poignant description of what he saw, especially in France on the Western Front, is essential reading. His description of the horrors he witnessed and wrote about makes him arguably the doyen of the savageries of the conflict.

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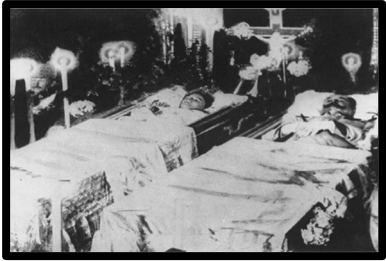
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FOREWORD



On mid-morning of 28 June 1914, in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo, two shots rang out from a Belgian made .32 calibre pistol that was to be the catalyst for over four years of global conflict culminating in the death of more than nine million soldiers and a further six million—or more—civilians dying, or being killed, as a result of what

was to become known as the First World War—or simply abbreviated as WWI. It is, for obvious reasons, sometimes just referred to as “The Great War.”

An interesting aside of WWI is that many of the leaders—or royalty as they were referred to—of the major combatants were related normally through marriage. Tsar Nicholas II of Russia—and his wife Alexandra—and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and King George V of Britain were all first cousins. This was not unusual for the time, because many European royal families tended to marry at their own social level. That is, royalty to royalty.

The two pistol shots that rang out on that tragic morning were fired by a 19-year-old Bosnian Serb Yugoslav nationalist by the name of Gavrilo Princip. His targeted victims were the Hungarian heir apparent—Archduke Franz Ferdinand—and his wife Sophie, both of whom were in a motorcade travelling down the main street of Sarajevo. Their motor vehicle was open and had a footboard which enabled Princip to stand on it and fire point blank at his victims. The result was that the Archduke was shot in the neck—the jugular vein—and his wife was shot in the abdomen. By 11.30am on the morning of 28 June 1914, both victims were dead. (The photo above shows them lying in state.) Immediately after the shootings, Princip attempted to shoot himself, and when that failed, he swallowed a cyanide tablet, which also failed to kill him. He was then arrested and consequently charged with murder. After being convicted of this crime he was jailed for life—being too young for capital punishment in that country which was reserved for

offenders over the age of 21 years. The conditions of his imprisonment were primitive and squalid, and he consequently died in captivity some four years later of tuberculosis—a highly contagious disease amongst those living in close quarters.

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, Europe entered into what was called “The July Crisis”. Originally it was a bilateral crisis involving Serbia and Austria-Hungary. In retaliation for the assassination, Austria-Hungary shelled the capital of Serbia—Belgrade. (It was assumed that Princip had official approval from Serbia for what he did—this was not true as it has now been established.) However, at that time, Europe was a network of alliances. Briefly, many of Europe’s great powers were divided into two camps—or coalitions as they came to be known. The Triple Alliance—as it was called—consisted of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. On the other side of the equation—opposing the Triple Alliance—were France, Russia and Britain who formed the Triple Entente. Originally France joined Britain—an old rival—in 1904. This was followed three years later, in 1907, when Russia—another old adversary both of France and Britain—joined these two countries in what was hoped to be for mutual protection. Because Australia in 1914 was a dominion of the British Empire, when Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, Australia was automatically at war. This had been the case in Australia since 1901—midway through the Second Anglo-Boer War—when Australia ceased to be a collection of British colonies and became a dominion of the British Empire. Effectively that meant Australia had its own distinctive military uniforms and its own military leaders. It did maintain the same ranks—both officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO)—as Britain, and to a lesser degree the composition of the various fighting units, that is, Battalion, Brigade, Division and so forth up to Army. Additionally, Australia had its own navy, and later on an air-force. When it came to a rimmed rifle cartridge the .303 of an inch cartridge, fired from a long-barrelled rifle—as well as certain machineguns—was the standard used by Britain and the Commonwealth countries until the 1950s. It had been in service since December 1888. After that, Britain and the Commonwealth adopted the NATO 7.62 x 51 mm cartridge for its rifles and many of its machine guns.

After Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, it did take some time for Australian troops to become involved in the European, western Asian and north African theatres of war, due to logistics and the tyranny of distance. Troops had to be enlisted and trained, and then transported halfway across the world by sea. Apart from the Dardanelles and north Africa

in late 1914 and most of 1915, the last major theatre of war in which Australian troops were involved in was the 1899-1902 Second Anglo Boer War in South Africa. (Australian troops in 1901 did assist British troops in crushing the Chinese Boxer Rebellion—however this was more symbolic than actual warfare.)

In March 1916 Australian troops were sent to France, most of whom had participated in the Dardanelles Campaign. The Australian troops who were sent to France eventually were engaged in fighting on the Western Front—a frontier controlled on the east by Germany and on the west by the Allies. It was on the Western Front that both James Gordon Stevens, and George Charles Stevens, were killed. Inter alia, Australian troops did see action against Turkey—an ally of Germany—in 1915 at the Gallipoli Peninsular—the Dardanelles as mentioned—but were forced to withdraw in November 1915. Many of the Australian troops that engaged in the fighting there, eventually ended up fighting on the Western Front. There is a misconception in Australia, that Australian WWI war deaths were greater in the Dardanelles Campaign than France—this is simply not true. Australia suffered approximately 15,000 war dead in the Dardanelles Campaign as opposed to approximately 46,000 war dead in France—predominately the Western Front. For whatever reason, Australians, in the main, appear to know more about the Dardanelles Campaign (Gallipoli as most Australians know it as) than the Western Front battles. The landing of Australian and New Zealand, (ANZAC), troops on the morning of 25 April 1915 is celebrated every year both in Australia and New Zealand with a public holiday and significant ceremonies, beginning with the Dawn Service at about 4.15 am. This is the approximate time ANZAC Forces landed on what is now known as Anzac Cove.

A perspective of the time

The noted historian, peace activist, and Nobel Prize Laureate, Earl Bertrand Arthur William Russell—1871-1970—wrote in his autobiography in 1967 the following:

“Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither...over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair”.

It is said that WWI, and the human suffering it caused had a profound effect of his perspective of the human race. Such was his feeling of melancholy, that he later wrote this about his personal perception of the period:

“Every Christmas throughout the War I had a fit of black despair, such complete despair that I could do nothing except sit idle in my chair and wonder whether the human race served any purpose”.

When he was asked about the leaders of the two major countries now at war—leaving aside the monarchs—this is what he had to say:

“And all this madness, all this rage, all this flaming death of our civilization and our hopes, has been brought about because a set of official gentlemen, living luxurious lives, mostly stupid, and all without imagination or heart, have chosen that it should occur rather than that any one of them should suffer some infinitesimal rebuff to his country’s pride”.

In 1918, Russell was jailed for six months, in Brixton Prison for giving public lectures against the United States becoming involved in WWI—on the side of Britain of course. Rather than just serve out his time, he put his incarceration to good use. Upon his release, he had this to say about his time in jail:

“I found prison in many ways quite agreeable. I had no engagements, no difficult decisions to make, no fear of callers, no interruptions to my work. I read enormously”. I wrote a book, ‘Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy’... and began the work for ‘Analysis of Mind’.

Russell went on to write 72 books, and in 1966 and 1967 he set up the Russell Vietnam War Crimes Tribunal which investigated war crimes supposedly committed by the United States in the controversial Vietnam War. (Australia participated in this war, but Britain did not.)

The former British Prime Minister, Winston Stanley Churchill, had similar feelings about the “senseless slaughter” on the Western Front as Bertrand Russell and other world dignitaries—albeit 20 years later and just before his country would again declare war on Germany. He wrote in 1939 in *Step by Step-1936-1939* the following, when he sensed history may be on the verge of repeating itself:

“This nation...sacrificed hundreds of thousands of its men to gain obscure villages in the mud of Flanders”.

Of course, he realised the armaments would be different, but the carnage would be the same—or even greater given that long-distance bombers would now be able to bomb cities. This in itself—as Churchill well knew—was that civilian deaths would far exceed that which was experienced in WWI.

The media on losses in WWI

Such was the magnitude of the losses on the Western Front, that every weekly or daily newspaper—local or national—in Britain at the time, published photographs and obituaries of British troops killed in the previous days. Australia would have done the same, however the circulation and number of newspapers would have been considerably less. The *Herald and Weekly Times* (HWT) which had its beginnings in Australia in the 1840s, did publish stories and photographs of Australian soldiers on the Western Front—but they were selective. Nothing like those which appeared every day in the British newspapers and tabloids.



Fig. F-2. shows one such British Daily newspaper reporting on casualties at the Battle of Vimy Ridge—09-12 April 1917.

PREFACE

To put the enormity of Australia's contribution and subsequent casualties—deaths, wounded, and to a lesser extent, prisoners—into some perspective, it is necessary to look at the relevant statistics. (The statistics quoted here may have a plus or minus factor of 5-10%, but even that does not distract from the enormity of the situation.)

In Australia during the period of WWI—1914-1918 inclusive—the estimated population of Australia was approximately five million—5,000,000—perhaps a little less. Of that number, approximately one million—1,000,000—were men eligible for enlistment, and, in turn, overseas military duty. The numbers indicated that 420 thousand—420,000—did just that. This represented 38.7% of all eligible men in Australia enlisted—many more would have been rejected for various reasons. At the end of WWI on 11 November 1918, Australia's casualties were approximately 62 thousand—62,000—killed, and 156 thousand—156,000—wounded or were made prisoners of war (POWs). This equates to a figure of 56.7% of all Australian men who participated in this war. The graph below shows the salient differences between the relevant numbers.

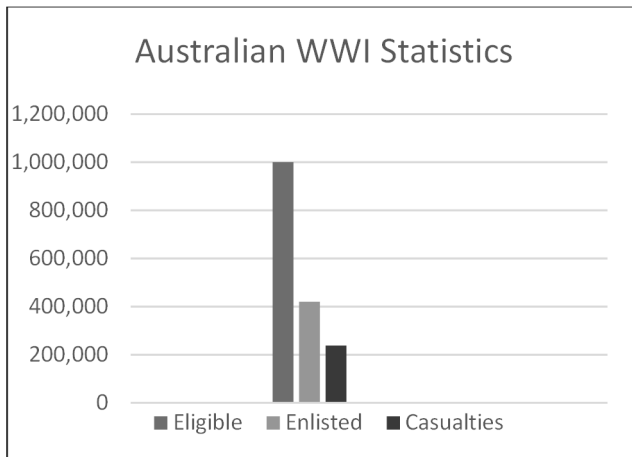


Fig. P-1. Statistics for WWI—Australia. Eligible, Enlisted, and Casualties—including POWs. The figures have a plus or minus factor of between 5% to 10%.

It is difficult to comprehend these percentages—and more importantly numbers. If we were to transpose them one hundred plus years later, we would come up with the following numbers. In 2019 Australia's population was close to 25 million—25,000,000. This would now translate into “Eligible, five million—5,000,000”, “Enlisted, two million one hundred thousand—2,100,000” and “Casualties, one million, one hundred and ninety thousand—1,190,000—rounded off”. (Of course, the sex of the eligible enlistees would now be different, given females in Australia are now able to enlist for active service.)

These huge percentages—and enormous numbers—would simply not be applicable—indeed not be tolerated in a First World Country, like Australia, in the 21st century. Especially when it is remembered that Australia was not invaded, but in effect “invaded” other countries halfway across the world and in the northern hemisphere.

However, to men like James Gordon Stevens, and George Charles Stevens, it was their duty to enlist and fight for their country overseas—right or wrong. And at the time of their enlistment—1915—they would have been only too aware of their chances of survival in that foreign war. Furthermore, what is important to remember is that unlike other countries involved in WWI, all of Australia's participating troops were volunteers. Inter alia, there were two referenda held in Australia during WWI on the question of conscription for overseas service—one in 1916, the other in 1917. Both were defeated both in total numbers and in the majority of the States. In Australia, a referendum not only has to be won by a majority numbers wise, but a majority of states. Today the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) are included in referenda but were not in 1916 and 1917.

Australian military conscription for overseas duty

The Prime Minister of Australia at the time, William Morris Hughes, who was not in the office of prime-ministership when Australia declared war on Germany in 1914, had always believed in the principal of military conscription for overseas duty. (Hughes was in office from 27 October 1915 to 09 February 1923—he died in 1952 at the age of 90 years.) Hughes' predecessor, Andrew Fisher, resigned in October 1915. Fisher had always opposed military conscription for overseas duty, and this may have put him at odds with Hughes. Fisher resigned as Prime Minister of Australia on 27 October 1915—the Gallipoli campaign by this time was in its “death throes”, and enthusiasm for overseas duty was waning somewhat. Hughes

was well aware of the situation, and this only helped to strengthen his resolve to introduce military conscription for overseas duty.

Hughes may have felt that it was in the best interests of the British effort in WWI—especially on the Western Front—to introduce conscription in Australia, but it is fair to say his conception of what was involved differed to what Britain—and Australia’s close neighbour and ally New Zealand—had either introduced or were contemplating introducing. Britain had introduced military conscription, but it also had to pass extensive legislation on the treatment of genuine conscientious objectors—this it did. Hughes had not even considered the question of “conscientious objection”. It was not in the equation.

Leaving aside the question of conscientious objection, Hughes tried everything he could to convince the Australian voting public that it was in Australia’s better interests to introduce military conscription. He tried, patriotism, fear, even a veiled reference to “for or against” Australia and Britain. On 25 October 1916, Hughes did an article in the *Sydney Mail NSW*—(1912-1938)—in which he said the following:

This is our war. More men are needed. Australia must do her duty. Britain expects us to do it. Our Allies look to us with expectant eyes. Our comrades call us to stand by their side. Australian democracy is on its trial. It is being tested by fire. Voluntary recruiting has failed to secure the number of men necessary: but the men must be forthcoming, or we are dishonoured and our comrades abandoned and condemned to die. I admit there ought not to be any necessity for compulsion. I believed there would be none. I believed that the fires of patriotism burned so brightly in the breasts of Australians that the clarion call to arms would bring them rushing to the standard. For a time it did: But its affects have now spent themselves. With Britain triumphant we are safe: by her defeat we are overwhelmed. Brush from your minds those foolish phantasies that becloud your judgement. Australia is and remains, only as part of an unconquered British Empire. By ourselves we are helpless. Every citizen must decide in which camp he will stand – for or against Australia – for or against Great Britain – for or against the Empire.

Then he put his signature underneath. Furthermore, to make a salient reminder of those who had paid the ultimate price—or to prick the conscience of those constituents wavering—he included the photos of seven soldiers who had been killed or died of wounds on the Western Front. (The last photo is of James Gordon Stevens, with the caption saying “missing”. This was before a court of enquiry ruled that he had been killed.)

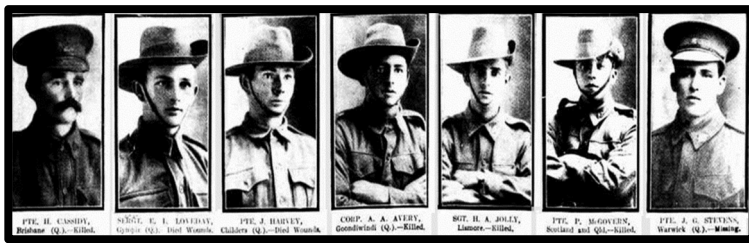


Fig. P-2. Pte. James Gordon Stevens is the last of the seven—right-hand side. The others had either been killed or died of wounds. James Gordon Stevens is obviously included because there were more casualties than just killed or died of wounds. By the time Hughes had written this article, James Gordon Stevens was still listed as missing. His inquest had yet to be conducted where he was officially declared killed in action.

Hughes may not have been successful in his two attempts at introducing conscription in Australia during WWI, but he still remained very popular with the Australian voting public. In December 1919—over 12 months after the finish of WWI—his government was comfortably re-elected—although the opposition was not very well organised. Known as the “little digger” he had a way with twisting the truth from reality. When he attended the Paris Peace Conference—also known as the Versailles Peace Conference, held from 18 January 1919 to 21 January 1920—he chided the United States President, Woodrow Wilson, for the disproportionate U.S. war dead, as opposed to Australia. In a famous encounter with President Wilson, Hughes said “I speak for 60,000 Australian dead, how many do you speak for?” This encounter would have looked good back in the Australian newspapers and would have helped in his re-election during the Versailles Peace Conference.

Of course, Hughes would not have let “truth get in the way of a good story”. The United States may have had more combat and war deaths than Australia—116,700 as opposed to close to 62,000—but the population difference between Australia and the United States (U.S.) was important to recognise. Australia’s population was around 5 million as opposed to the U.S. which had approximately 92 million. However, what Hughes failed to mention was by the time the U.S. entered WWI in April 1917 fighting had been going on for two years and nine months. And peace was less than 17 months away. It must also be remembered that many of the costly Western Front battles were now history.

On the other side of the Tasman Sea—which divides geographically, New Zealand and Australia—New Zealand adopted a different approach to Australia in terms of conscription for overseas military involvement. First up they had to ascertain how many men between certain ages—17 to 60—there were in New Zealand in 1915—October 1915 to be precise. Obviously at age 17, men were too young to enlist in the army, and, at 60 were way beyond the maximum age for enlistment. To gauge how many men would be available for overseas military war involvement, the New Zealand Government introduced the “National Registration Scheme”. (War Census). There was, at the time, concern that the number of volunteers had been diminishing—especially since the Dardanelles Campaign was stalemating and New Zealand, as well as Australia, was on the verge of retreat.

Australia and New Zealand have, for the last 100-150 years always had a ratio of population of about 5:1. And the life expectancy and ratio of males to females is very similar. The following figures produced in the 1915 (War Census) confirmed the ratios just stated: 208,513 men submitted their details. This would have been very close to the correct number given there were heavy penalties for not registering. 109,683 stated their willingness to serve with the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces (NZEF) if indeed they were required. 43,524 were willing to serve in a civil capacity only, and 34,386 declared themselves unwilling to serve in any capacity whatsoever. The figure below—**Fig. P-3.** illustrates in graphic detail what the consequences were for non-registration.

Ironically, the National Registration Act did not solve the question of dwindling enlisting numbers, and a complicated conscription system based on a “lottery” draw was introduced in 1916. It did have provisions for many grounds of appeal for any man who was “unlucky” enough to be drawn out of the lottery—personal hardship, religious beliefs, conscientious beliefs and other extenuating circumstances and reasons. However, it is fair to say that had a New Zealand man been of age—or in the accepted age bracket—and wanted to be included in the NZEF, he would have already enlisted. This was the norm for both Australia and New Zealand. Patriotism was alive and well at that time in the early 20th century in both countries. As mentioned, 38.7% of all eligible men in Australia enlisted—and New Zealand would have had a similar percentage.

On the other side of the world, the United Kingdom had introduced conscription because casualties on the Western Front were outstripping enlistments. Australia was unable to introduce conscription—as mentioned—and all its expeditionary forces were volunteers in WWI. This was to change

in the 1940s—and periodically through the 1950s and 1960s up to the early 1970s. Australia's involvement in the Viet Nam War in the 1960s to the early 1970s in which 202 conscripts were killed, signalled the end of military conscription in Australia. Although it did take the election of a Labor Government under Edward Gough Whitlam to abolish conscription which was for 20-year-old men.

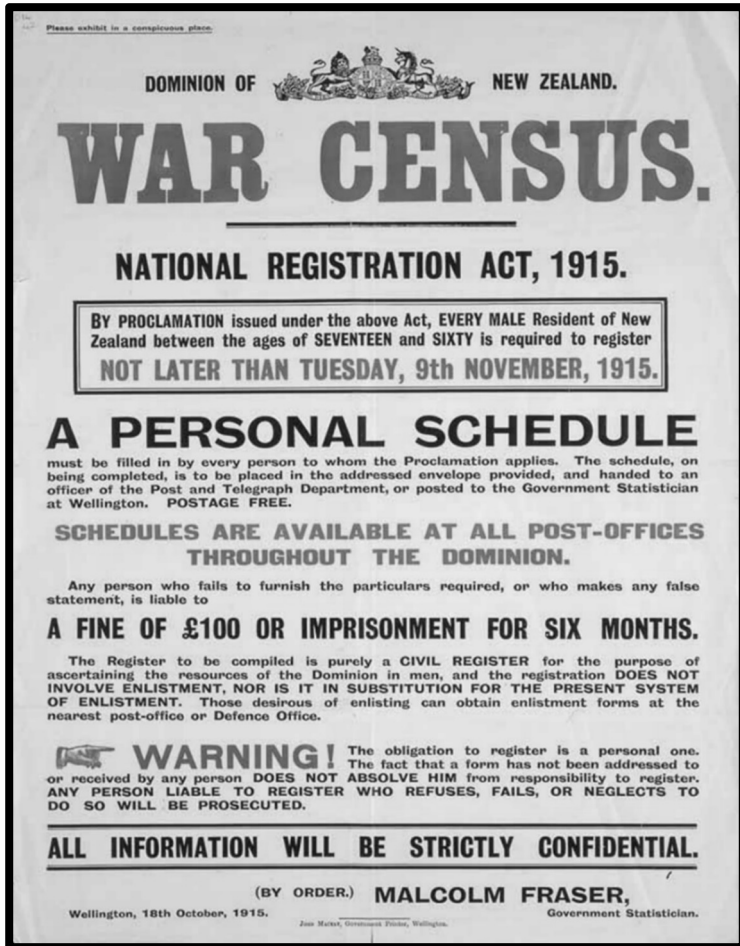


Fig. P-3. New Zealand's 1915 "War Census"—Registration requirement. Also shown were penalties for not registering.

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All photographs reproduced in this publication are, to the best of my knowledge, in the public domain.

INTRODUCTION

The lives and ultimate sacrifices of James Gordon Stevens, and George Charles Stevens, of Warwick, Queensland, Australia, were similar in many respects to the other approximately sixty-two thousand—62,000—young Australians who also paid the ultimate price in Australia's involvement in The Great War (WWI) 1914-1918.

As previously mentioned, Australia did not need military conscription to obtain the required number of troops willing to serve abroad and die for—as was termed at the time—"*God, King, and Country*". In fact, such was the enthusiasm to enlist, that many found it necessary to change their birth details to fit within the required 18-44 years. (As mentioned, there was one requirement that had to be adhered to, and this was any man under the age of 21 years had to have parental permission to enlist—and this could be either parent.) This caveat was not applicable to either James Gordon Stevens, or George Charles Stevens in 1915—both were over the age of 21 years at their time of enlistments. James filled out his attestation paper on 20 May 1915, whilst George did likewise on 01 September 1915. (Attestation in this context is used to mean something is certified as being true.) It must be remembered the attestation papers of both men were only the preliminaries before they were formally accepted as being on active service—or, as was stated on the form "Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad". Later in this account of their service, their attestation papers are shown, and various dates are obvious. There was also provision for the name of "next-of-kin." In the case of James, it was given as his mother—Janet Stephens—whereas with George it was his father Thomas Stephens. There was no particular reason for the difference and perhaps it was considered appropriate at the time to allow one or other of the parents to be seen as such—a sharing of the title. (Next-of-kin can only be a single identity.)

In the year that both James and George enlisted—1915—the number of men who joined up in Australia to give "Service Abroad" was recorded at 165, 912. The previous year—1914—it was about 1/3 of this number at 52,561. (The reason for the much lower number was because war was declared in the latter part of the eighth month of 1914.) From 1916 it fell like this: 1916—124,352; 1917—45,101; and 1918—28,883. There were

various reasons for the decrease in enlistments from the 1915 peak, not the least that the “pool” of eligible men was decreasing due to casualties. Additional factors included many men were simply not available because they were needed on their rural properties. It has to be remembered over 100 years ago, mechanisation was both expensive and, in its infancy, tending towards more labour-intensive activity.

The following account of both Private James Gordon Stevens, 1755, and Private George Charles Stevens, 4580, begins with James because he was the first to enlist. Chapters 1 & 2 are recollections of James’ military service from his enlistment to his death in 1916. They cover his time in Egypt as accurately as what can be reconstructed by his correspondence to his family at the time. Historical battle episodes—which Australia was involved in—are carefully researched and woven into a fabric of actuality. Chapters 3 & 4 are recollections of George’s military time from his enlistment to his death from wounds in 1917. (As his body was never recovered, and there were no witnesses to his death it is assumed he was killed when a German artillery shell exploded very close to him.) There is more primary evidence in the way of correspondence from George to his family and this makes for easier interpretation of his time both in Egypt and France. Chapter 5 attempts to see how the Stevens family accepted the deaths of two of three brothers and how the women of the family finally came to grips with the reality of the situation. Included are the various correspondences by Janet Stevens to Australian military officials and their official replies. As well, Chapter 5 gives a detailed description of the awards and medals that were bestowed on him posthumously. Chapter 6 traces the various memorials—and presumed grave sites—for each brother, including memorials in their hometown of Warwick, Queensland, Australia. Finally, the Conclusion attempts to make some sense of the magnanimity of the huge losses Australia suffered on the battlefields in a country on the other side of the world. Included also is the significance to Australia every year in observing “Remembrance Day”—11 day of the 11th month. It is actually observed with two minutes silence on the 11th hour, that is 11am. The actual time of remembrance and silence is not uniform, because Australia has three time zones.

CHAPTER ONE

UP TO MARCH 1916

**James Gordon Stevens. 1755. (Private). 25th Battalion,
First Australian Imperial Force (1st AIF)**

Official AWM Roll of Honour: P05301.027

Service Number: 1755

Rank: Private

Unit: 25 Battalion

Service: Australian Army

Conflict: First World War, 1914-1918

Date of death: 29 July 1916

Place of death: France

Place of association: Warwick, Queensland, Australia

Cemetery or memorial details: France: Villers-Bretonneux Memorial

Source: AWM145 Roll of Honour cards, 1914-1918 War, Army



1-1. (a) from the AWM.

1-1. (b) from private collection.

Figs. 1. 1 (a & b) Private James Gordon Stevens prior to leaving Australia for Egypt. (Circa 1915)

These photographs are one and the same of James Gordon Stevens. (a) is taken from the Australian War Memorial (AWM) official Roll of Honour—it is somewhat blurred and shows the word “missing” on the bottom right corner. (b) is from the author’s private collection and was forwarded to the AWM. The official AWM Roll of Honour gives the name of the cemetery where the deceased may be buried in an unknown or unmarked grave—this is shown as “France”: Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

James Gordon Stevens was reported as “missing” no doubt at a roll call—sometimes held twice a day. Morning and evening. The recording of “missing” was not unusual for the time. In later conflicts he may have been reported as “missing, presumed dead”. Such was the ferocity of the heavy artillery bombardment during the war on the Western Front—1914 - 1918 inclusive—that many men just simply disappeared. They were either completely “blown to unrecognisable fragments” or buried alive in the quagmire that resulted from the continual bombardment from the German heavy artillery. The dismal photo—to the right—was taken of Australian troops on the Western Front in late 1917 and shows the complete devastation that James Gordon Stevens would have experienced. As can be seen on either side of the wooden decking, the morass may well have proven