

BART ZIINO

War and private sentiment in Australia during 1915

Australian attitudes towards the Great War underwent some critical changes during 1915. It is tempting to justify such a claim simply by reference to the fact that the Gallipoli campaign – with all its cultural and military implications – falls so neatly within the year. Yet, as Judith Smart has pointed out, it is not just the military events of the war that can be mapped so neatly onto 1915. By the end of that year, the pressures of war and the demand for civilian sacrifice had forced a confrontation between differing aspirations for Australia's future as the political middle ground fell away. The key political and industrial divisions in Australian society crystallised. What followed after 1915 was, Smart argues, 'a logical extension of the irreconcilable polarities already uncovered'.¹ This was one outcome of Australians' confrontation with total war, and it reminds us that the impacts of this kind of war were measured not just in the mobilisation of military and industrial resources, but also in the mind. As John Horne has observed, the 'totalizing logic' of the war can be seen in the willingness of the belligerent societies to continue escalating their commitment to the war militarily, economically and spiritually.²

This article investigates that process in Australia, as it exposes the layers of private feeling underpinning the public politics of the war. Through a study of private letters and diaries, it observes two key shifts that previously have been difficult to discern or explicate. One is the much greater level of popular commitment to the war that emerged in the middle of 1915, a phenomenon

that Lloyd Robson speculated on in 1973 and that Joan Beaumont has recently begun to elucidate in terms of the emotional impact of battlefield casualties at home.³ The other is the increasing acceptance throughout 1915 that the expanding war had taken on a life of its own, and that it would not end suddenly or without tremendous sacrifice. By the end of 1915, Australians were showing ever greater levels of dedication to a war offering increasingly less sense of how long it might continue. This was the logic of total war – no less potent in Australia than elsewhere – and it carried with it the potential for fostering both deeper commitment to war and more acute divisions, public and private.

By the beginning of 1915, observant Australians had already begun to accept that the five-month-old war would not end abruptly. The military situation on the Western Front had settled into the static trench lines that would characterise the war for the next four years. People in Australia well understood the tremendous scale of operations, yet the prospect of a dramatic breakthrough and collapse was still tantalising. In Melbourne, Margaret Stanley, wife of Governor Arthur Stanley, wrote that ‘Things seem to be going on tolerably well, but one longs for some decisive event and above all the German Fleet to get a smashing.’⁴ While observing that Australians could ‘hardly realize that men are fighting for us in a great war’, Louis Roth in Perth also hoped ‘to hear the end of this before long’.⁵ Hopes of an early finish were being driven not just by a desire for victory, but by an awareness of the tremendous sacrifice that was taking place at the front. Australia had already sent a contingent of 20,000 men, and a further brigade before the end of 1914; many Australians also had relatives in British regiments already at the front. They were anxious. Australians were pleased to begin receiving letters from their soldiers in Egypt early in the new year, but these were accompanied also by rumours of disaster. Nellie Fisher, whose sweetheart had left with the first contingent, reported that: ‘No sooner did the news come that you had landed at Egypt than a rumour went round here that 130 had been shot by the enemy without having had a chance to defend themselves.’⁶ Margaret Stanley, with her entire family in the United Kingdom, watched the war with deep foreboding: ‘One feels sometimes there will not be a whole man left! and one dreads looking forward to the awful slaughter which is still to come. It cannot be prolonged one would think beyond this year.’⁷

Despite such anxieties, in the first half of 1915 the war was not the only matter on the minds of Australians. The major competing concern was a longstanding drought across almost the entire country. In Brisbane the politician Littleton Groom observed that the effects of the war were not being

felt to any great extent, though the people 'will feel depression here if we do not soon get rains in the country districts'.⁸ In Adelaide, Kitty Sandford thought that life was 'very humdrum' especially because 'the drought seems to be very keenly felt here', though 'of course the War as ever is an agonising subject'.⁹ The drought *was* keenly felt, with 'famine prices' in Victoria's Western District, according to one pastoralist, and bare paddocks obvious even to city dwellers who visited the country.¹⁰ The coupling of the war and the drought as oppressive and uncontrollable forces was common. Businessman FD Michaelis hoped for the end of the drought so that Australians would 'be able to fight the evils man is imposing on us all in the shape of war without having at the same time to fight nature herself'.¹¹

The demands of war thus competed with the economic consequences of drought, both in the country and cities. Nevertheless, in the early months of 1915 the claims of the war on the private conscience and purse were insistent, especially in the form of Belgian charitable funds. In Yarraville in Melbourne's west, Thomas Purcell noted three functions for the Belgians within a fortnight, including a gathering organised by children in his street. Nellie Fisher's church was decorated with flags and a Belgian windmill for its Harvest Thanksgiving service while, on the following evening a concert in the church featured a 'refugee Belgian violinist'. There were only subtle differences between attracting and demanding support for the Belgians and the war more generally. City worker William Dodds, however, set out to avoid being accosted for funds: 'I did not get "stung" for a shilling for a Belgian Button today although we all went through town at lunch time for the purpose of dodging the sellers.'¹² Did Dodds resent the impost, or was he unable to subscribe? The latter was certainly an issue, especially in farming and mining communities, where funds were limited due to drought and the closing of mines. TW Robinson in North Dandalup, Western Australia, was not unusual in reporting that collections for the Belgians were down in April, as 'money is tight in this district now and I think much the same throughout the State'.¹³

Financial pressures genuinely caused some to consider enlistment in the army as an option. Yet why and whether to enlist remained a matter for considered deliberation. Patriotism was hardly absent, and enlistment certainly had some social cachet. When Alan Fry enlisted in January, his uncle declared himself 'proud that you have chosen to go – a soldier in a right cause is always somewhere near what a man ought to be doing'.¹⁴ Yet motives were diverse and tended to involve a certain amount of calculation, whether financial, social or professional.¹⁵ In January Nellie Fisher heard that Gilbert Waring was 'out of



Wounded soldiers recuperating at 'Hethersett', a private residence in Burwood that was converted to a convalescent home in 1915. State Library of Victoria Pictures Collection H2009.103/10

work, and if he couldn't get some soon, that he would go too'.¹⁶ At the same time, Charles Murrell had been thinking hard about the war, and decided to ask his mother's permission to enlist:

No doubt mummie is [*sic*] will give you a little start when I say, I'd like, with your permission to be able to go to the war. No[*w*] go steady mum, I havent only just thought of it today, or yesterday, but for the past two or three weeks. Of course I'm only thinking of going under special circumstances. Harold + Cambell Williamson a[re] going to volunteer, and if we can all be together + join the light horse brigade then I'll go, but if Cam, cant go, then well I wont go, and if we cant go in the light horse then I wont go at all. Now you understand mother, I'm no kid, and I believe now is the best time to go. ... I know it would come hard of [*sic*] you mother, but think of the thousands and thousands of others mothers who feel it the same.¹⁷

At this point in the war, principle could fairly be weighed against legitimate personal calculation; Charles Murrell and other men could remain at home without significant criticism.

Those with loved ones in Egypt were nervous about developments. In late March, as the British and French navies attempted and failed to force the Dardanelles, there was already speculation that the Australian forces would go to Turkey. These rumours gained currency when the first troops began to leave Egypt in early April. While Frank Tate noted that no one knew where their men were exactly, 'the popular idea is that they will go to the Dardanelles'.¹⁸ The idea was confirmed only with the bare details of a cable on 29 April that expressed the British Government's admiration of the Australian forces' 'splendid gallantry and magnificent achievements' at the Dardanelles.

Australians may have been excited by that message, but it was their anxiety that marked the commencement of the Gallipoli campaign. In Melbourne, John and Margaret Melvin were disturbed about their son Jack, whom they expected to have landed with the 5th Australian Infantry Battalion. The British cable, John thought, 'was sent to prepare us for sad news, as splendid gallantry and magnificent achievement must necessarily be accompanied by great sacrifice'.¹⁹ The newspapers gave no further detail of the fighting, but rather a series of casualty lists mostly containing the names of officers. John Monash's cousin Mat Roth felt the shock of those lists: 'The Papers are now publishing lists of Casualties and it brings the War so much closer to us,' she wrote.²⁰ Those concerned for loved ones in the ranks were having a harrowing time. 'We are passing thro' a time of terrible anxiety just now,' wrote Margaret Melvin,

and it is you dear son who is ever in our minds, our hearts and prayers. We do not know where you are nor how you are. ... It is very hard writing to night, but of course we keep hoping and trusting all is well with you, our dear, dear son.²¹

Nellie Fisher suspected there must be more going on than the lists revealed: 'I have been thinking of you very much this week' she told John Balfour. 'Up till today the total is 59 killed and 37 wounded, and nearly all those are officers, so there must be a terrible lot of privates wounded that we have not heard of.'²²

Without fuller details, anxiety went unrelieved. Frank Tate sensed a more intense focus on the war, though all that was certain was that 'the first casualty lists have been published, and there is gloom everywhere. The wildest rumours are being circulated ... Most of us are keeping our minds in a state of suspended judgement, and hoping for the best'.²³ The first account of the landing at Gallipoli, published on 8 May, came from the English correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, and it eulogised the Australians as a 'race of athletes'. But it rated no mention in Thomas Purcell's diary, which reflected only the growing

realisation of the scale of losses at Gallipoli, and the bare detail that 'One of the Walters got his arm blown off at the Dardanelles. Several of the Footscray boys wounded over 1000 casualties up to the present date'.²⁴ The problem here was that no personal or individual news of those fighting would come for weeks, unless in the form of a report of death or wounding. Every evening Margaret Melvin opened the extraordinary editions of the newspapers with trepidation: 'It is an awful moment whilst reading the casualties. ... We just live from morning to night and night to morning in the hope and trust that no news is good news, and I think it is, under the circumstances.'²⁵

She was right about the circumstances. It was not unusual, even weeks after the landing, that they had received no letter from their son. Nellie Fisher had no word from John Balfour until 22 June: anxiety only increased. John Melvin found it 'very difficult to write just now', five weeks after the landing. He told his son that he assumed the lengthening lists to be the 'belated lists of the landing casualties which I always thought must have been much heavier than at first reported'.²⁶ Nellie Fisher was taken aback: 'It seems terrible to think that the first lot that marched through town are nearly all wounded or killed. We would all be very glad to see the war come to an end.'²⁷ The casualty lists revealed the terrible cost of Gallipoli more quickly and perhaps more accurately than the reports of Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and the Australian war correspondent CEW Bean. Soldiers' letters from the front were also finding their way into the local and metropolitan press. Mat Roth sifted the 'pathetic remarks' from the otherwise 'cheery style' of the letters.²⁸ Rumours filled the gaps, but while they often anticipated the forcing of the Dardanelles, deep anxiety also gave rise to some alarming reports. In mid June, Arthur Hunter of Gippsland heard from a neighbour that the entire Australian force had been taken prisoner – 'too awful to believe'. Another rumour claimed that 7000 Anzacs had been killed trying to escape. Two days later, Hunter had no further news of this disaster, 'so I hope it was only a yarn'.²⁹ At the same time John Melvin told his son that 'We are hungering for some little news of you, if only the formal printed post-card'.³⁰ John and Margaret Melvin never received that scrap of comfort; their son had been dead since the day of the landing. His body was never recovered.

If the dominant response to the Gallipoli campaign in Australia was a terrible and unrelieved anxiety, there was still room for pride. Some Australians revelled in the glory of Ashmead-Bartlett's reporting. Bernard Hall, director of the National Gallery of Victoria, told Lionel Lindsay that 'It is well to live, at last, in heroic times. What a renaissance for France, Russia, Belgium and ourselves; and what a time for Australia and all of us, as you say!'³¹ Arthur Fry in

Sydney noted that the losses ‘were dreadfully heavy in forcing a landing ... but the world is ringing with the bravery of Australians’.³² The heavy losses that accompanied the elevation of Anzac were real and immediate for thousands of Australians. After his son died at the landing, Queenslander MG Haymen found consolation in the fact that ‘our Son heard the Empire’s call and died a glorious death fighting for his King and Country, helping to rid the world of a monstrous German military despotism’.³³ By contrast, Eleanor Moore, of the newly formed Sisterhood for International Peace, felt that the casualty lists ‘bring home to us more painfully than ever a sense of the horror and cruelty of war, and of the necessity of working for its abolition’.³⁴

Despite its immediate implications for their men, Australians were not consumed entirely by Gallipoli, but had a wider perspective on the expanding war. On the Western Front the action around Ypres had been brutal and costly, with the introduction of poison gas. In the east, doubts about the Russian army’s capacities were growing, while the sinking of the *Lusitania* on 10 May ranked with the atrocities in Belgium in provoking hatred for the Germans. Arthur Fry described ‘the rage that shook us when the news of the Lusitania came through’.³⁵ Frank Tate noted how the news had ‘aroused a very bitter feeling here’, in which ‘One hears the mildest of men uttering the most bloodthirsty threats’.³⁶ By August, John Gibson of Melbourne could reflect that ‘Before the war I had a sincere regard and admiration for the German people which has turned to a loathing – almost personal’.³⁷ Margaret Stanley found that the *Lusitania* ‘makes one long for vengeance, and to see the whole German nation ground down and humiliated to the dust’.³⁸ The war against Germany in the main theatres preoccupied Australians, even as their men fought in Turkey. Press editorials might be optimistic, but the news pages allowed readers to understand the movements of the war, including allied reverses. Thus Arthur Hunter took up the Melbourne *Argus* on 3 July 1915: ‘War news not good, Russians driven back a long way, and in France no headway made and the Dardanelles much the same. Italy joining in seems to have made no difference yet.’³⁹ Thomas Purcell of Yarraville similarly appraised the wider war situation: ‘Russians are being beaten back by the Germans, they have not sufficient arms or ammunition.’⁴⁰

Purcell’s appreciation of the faltering Allied war effort accompanied the lengthening casualty lists and the arrival of more intimate accounts of the war. Letters from the front could be graphic, despite the constraints of censorship. One of Chaplain William McKenzie’s first letters from Gallipoli, for instance, described the brutality of war, telling his wife that ‘Australia will be shocked when they get the full particulars ... They have well nigh accomplished the

impossible but at a fearful cost. Still don't make this public or show the letter'.⁴¹ Despite McKenzie's caution, this sort of private knowledge circulated extensively, emerging in public sometimes as rumour, sometimes in the local press, and feeding anxieties about the progress of the war and the safety of loved ones at the front. In late July the first of the Gallipoli wounded came home, bearing signs of the war on their bodies and telling stories that were unmediated by the censor. Albert Behrend talked with two men who had been at the landing. 'According to these men,' he wrote, it is "Hell on earth" there.⁴² Even those who glimpsed the wounded at a distance found them confronting. Muriel Mills thought that, while some did not look too bad, 'some look real wrecks'; Sarah Simonson simply wrote that 'the returned wounded give one the creeps – they all look so thin and worn out'.⁴³

The emotional context of the war in mid 1915 was acute and changeable. Official historian Ernest Scott later reflected that, between exultation at their soldiers' gallantry and the grief induced by the casualty lists, Australians had experienced the 'keenest alterations of emotion'.⁴⁴ Deepening commitment to the war partly reflected the exploitation of public sentiment in the interests of recruitment and patriotic fundraising, but personal anxieties about loved ones and the course of the war also helped to produce an extraordinary mobilisation of people and resources. Referring to his own 'very mixed feelings' in response to the war, Melbourne doctor Felix Meyer told John Monash that the losses at the front 'have stirred up people here as nothing else could have done'.⁴⁵ Frank Tate was finally satisfied that Australians had devoted themselves entirely to the war:

A very great change has come over our attitude with regard to the war. The enormous casualty lists, and the German success in Galicia, want of progress in France, and the apparent standstill in the Dardanelles are affecting us very much. Our folk are getting very restive ... I think there is a determination to get busy and do things.⁴⁶

That determination was reflected in rising enlistments for the Australian Imperial Force and the proliferation of patriotic fundraising bodies. July 1915 saw the greatest number of men enlisting during any month of the entire war, and by a long way. Up until the end of June 1915, just over 100,000 men had enlisted; in July alone a further 36,000 joined the forces, including an extraordinary 21,000 in Victoria. Two related trends are evident. One is a shift in the personal dynamic between duty to home and duty to nation; the other is increasing recrimination against those who did not enlist. Both were a product of the urge to respond to the war situation, and both had consequences for

social relations throughout the remainder of the war. As the first news of the landing filtered through, Malcolm Stirling wrote to his mother that ‘The war, instead of getting better, is getting blacker every day; and I think it is the duty of every responsible person to do his share’.⁴⁷ Stirling’s reference to duty was important: before the situation worsened one might have justified prioritising family responsibilities or employment over enlistment. After the landings, many young men began to feel, as one put it, ‘very unsettled’ and indeed ‘ashamed of myself for not taking my part in the struggle in which so many Australians are engaged’.⁴⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed in working-class communities, though economic concerns complicated the sense of obligation. As a parent, Thomas Purcell was upset to find that his sons ‘George and Leo unfortunately, both passed’ when they fronted the recruiting station in mid July. Rejected men could take the thwarting of duty hard: Dene Fry’s friend claimed that ‘One can’t work with this war on’, and regarded his rejection as ‘a knock out blow and I can’t swallow it’.⁴⁹ Another rejected man simply insisted that military authorities were ‘making fools of men that is [*sic*] willing to fight and die for freedom’.⁵⁰

On the other hand, families and friends were watching their men leaving at an alarming rate. Glenn Taylor’s cousin Rita wrote to ask ‘Have you lost your boy yet, I think the way things are going on we will lose all our boys before long (then what will we do)’.⁵¹ For some this induced a kind of lassitude. In Adelaide, Kitty Sandford found it difficult to concentrate on anything except the war: ‘somehow since one has been on edge for so many months with the War and all that it means, it just gets more and more impossible to be capable of any concentrated effort, at least so it effects [*sic*] me’.⁵² Sarah Simonson thought that ‘Melbourne is very depressed and people seem to take no enjoyment out of life, races theatres and picture shows though patronised seem somehow different and most people only go to try and forget their worries’.⁵³ Elsewhere, the mobilisation of labour and finance in the service of patriotic organisations accelerated, as ordinary citizens sought outlets for their feelings, and others attempted to direct those energies. With two sons at the war, Arthur Fry sought his own ways of contributing directly to the war:

I feel almost guilty that I can’t do more myself, but it’s not my fault I am 65, I certainly could not carry a kit one day’s march, nor sight a gun at anything smaller than a haystack. All I can do is to make my little contribution to the fund.⁵⁴

Patriotic funds could be opportunistic in tapping such emotion: Margaret Stanley, president of the Victorian Red Cross, was advised by some ‘leading



Patriotic World War I procession in Melbourne.
State Library of Victoria Pictures Collection H36420/41

business people' that 'if I made a special Appeal for the Australian Sick and Wounded now that such heavy Casualty lists are coming in from the Dardanelles that I should get a very big response'.⁵⁵ Her advisers were right, though people were equally grateful for the opportunity to donate. During the Australia Day appeal at the end of July, Victorians gave or pledged around a quarter of a million pounds. Muriel Mills thought the day would live long in people's memories: 'I think there was the biggest crowd that ever was in Melbourne before, and the wounded soldiers well the people fairly threw the money at them. It was great.'⁵⁶

Volunteering time and labour helped to ameliorate feelings of powerlessness. In addition to the local and state Red Cross branches, an extraordinary array of funds devoted to particular causes and to the welfare of particular military units proliferated. Knitting has become emblematic of Australian women's wartime patriotism, and knitting was indeed ubiquitous and public. Mat Roth told her cousin at the end of June that 'we are all knitting

as hard as we can, in the trams and trains it is not unusual sight to see a ball of wool roll under the seat and two or three people rescuing it'.⁵⁷ These were acceptable contributions from women; other forms of contributing to the nation at war were simply proscribed. Ann Riddell thought that, as she held a first aid certificate, she would volunteer for service anywhere. It would be 'the highest honour to be made a stretcher bearer'. But defence authorities informed her that unless she was a 'member of Trained Nurses Association I would not be accepted for service with the AIE Forces. Pigs!! They might be glad of me yet'.⁵⁸

The mixed emotions confronting Australians in mid 1915 – anxiety, grief, pride, fear and anger – not only fed a determination to contribute to the war, but fuelled recrimination against fellow citizens. Indeed, recrimination was a fundamental part of the emotional mobilisation that was occurring. As early as 5 May, as he waited for news of his son at Gallipoli, Melbourne industrialist FD Michaelis claimed that 'The greatest shirkers are undoubtedly the working classes as while they are the greatest howlers for preference to unionists, when it comes to showing their mettle – well – they are wanting'.⁵⁹ Public praise of the Anzacs encouraged claims that those at the Gallipoli landing had been the cream of Australian manhood. George Brund told John Melvin that 'only our best' could have given such an example of self-sacrifice: 'Wasters might have branded our name with infamy'.⁶⁰ That elevation of the early volunteers over those still at home might have offered some comfort to those who were mourning their losses, but ultimately it could only produce division. Gladys Nelson put it in these terms when comforting Janey Adam, who had lost her son:

Think of the number of boys, who are too self centred, and cowardly, to think of going, on their own account, but who, eventually must really go, as it is going to be compulsory.
How dreadful some Mothers will feel then.⁶¹

Despite the extraordinary response to Victoria's recruiting effort in July, and an acknowledgement that 'Most people are busy doing something' for the war effort, Richard Taylor could still charge that 'all the same we have still too many "shirkers" or "cold feet"'.⁶² These attitudes had their effects. By September, JA Laing told John Monash that the war was 'the all absorbing topic and it is not easy to justify one's non-participation'.⁶³ The labourer Ernest Randall told his father from camp in October that 'I realy [*sic*] had to enlist I could not be what people consider one of these shirkers any longer'.⁶⁴

The pressures that Ernest Randall was feeling were already manifesting

themselves in calls for conscription. In one sense the demand for greater organisation of resources was the logical development of a growing total war effort; it was also attractive as a way of punishing those seemingly less than completely dedicated to the cause. At the end of September, Richard Taylor saw 'thousands of young fellows knocking round Melbourne ... quite prepared to let others do the rough and dirty work for them provided they have not to soil their hands'. He observed a growing movement in favour of conscription, but noted bitterly Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher's rejection of the prospect.⁶⁵ The conscription issue nevertheless emerged quickly on the back of a well-established debate over compulsory service in peacetime, and both sides mobilised seriously in 1915. The opposition to conscription, and strikes for better wages to meet increasing living costs, brought bitter denunciation. New South Wales Railway Commissioner Edmund Milne declared that strikers in the Randwick tram shops were a 'Lot of scoundrels – pity we couldn't hand them over to the Kaiser'.⁶⁶ In Melbourne, the 65-year-old educationist JP Wilson claimed that 'Our working classes are totally against conscription. They clearly do not understand the critical position, and there is even a soupçon of disloyalty or at least indifference in certain quarters'.⁶⁷ Trade union bitterness deepened when new Prime Minister William Morris (Billy) Hughes dropped Labor's referendum to extend federal powers over monopolies. Soldier violence – a feature of the home front since 1914 – now targeted anti-conscription meetings and individuals considered to be undermining the 'war effort'.

These emerging differences between fellow citizens were accentuated by a trend much less obvious in public. This was the growing acceptance that there was to be no sudden and dramatic end to the war and, indeed, that this was to be a long and costly struggle. The war had threatened to expand from the beginning of the year, with the Allied plan to force the Dardanelles, and speculation that the Bulgarians, Greeks and Italians would join either the Allies or Central Powers. While this had the allure of a quick route to victory, by the end of year the entry into the war of new belligerents only brought a more bewildering sense of the war's all-encompassing grasp. In early April, John MacArthur had summarised the dimensions of the war in his diary: major battles had been fought on the Western Front, the Russians appeared to be advancing well, the Bulgarians and Greeks were seemingly ready to commit, and the British and French navies were supposedly making gradual progress in the Dardanelles.⁶⁸ By the time that the Allies had established themselves on the Gallipoli peninsula, doubts about imminent victory were growing. 'Somehow', Margaret Stanley wrote in June, 'in the last few weeks one has felt

less sanguine as to the end of the War coming this year'.⁶⁹ Yet she still hoped that a sudden enemy collapse might occur, or that Italy's recent entry into the war might hurry the end. Several weeks later, Littleton Groom described the outlook as 'very serious for everybody. No one can say yet how the war will end. We are confident of victory, but the end is a far way off yet'.⁷⁰ By mid August, Frank Tate was rather less than confident. He found the outlook 'as depressing as ever'. It was difficult, he wrote, 'to keep ones [*sic*] equanimity, and believe that time is going to work out all things for us on the right side'.⁷¹

Australians began to see the complexion of the war differently, even as they were mobilising to fight it more rigorously. Zella Milne now told her brother that 'I do wish the horrible war would end and you could come back, it's worse than I thought it would be'.⁷² Felix Meyer might have been just as hopeful, but he now had 'no illusions as to a "dramatic" termination of the struggle as some would have us believe'.⁷³ The first anniversary of the war in August offered an opportunity for reflection and rededication. John Roberts' assessment was blunt: 'A year ago to day since Great Britain declared war against Germany. No sign of it ending yet'.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, such acceptance only grew in tandem with a determination to carry on with the war. In Sydney, HA Twiby observed that 'Without doubt this dreadful War is turning everything upside down but of course it has to be fought to a finish and everything else has to take a second place'.⁷⁵ Margaret Stanley found that 'Apparently we have all settled down to the fact that it is not to be over yet, and this has only seemed to make the determination to fight to a finish all the stronger'.⁷⁶

News from Gallipoli hardly offered grounds for optimism. Attentive readers of the press understood that the major offensives in August had failed; the casualty lists and soldiers' letters that followed expressed some brutal truths. Edmund Milne could see from the lists that 'Tad's 4th [battalion] seems to have been cut up badly. The Turks must be fighting hard. Everybody seems to have lost a relative dead, wounded or sick. Its [*sic*] very trying and god knows when it will end'.⁷⁷ Errol Devlin wrote from the front to tell his mother that:

we are having an awful time here. This last fortnight has been a perfect hell on earth. ... It would be impossible for me to describe the scene of Sunday 22-8-15, when we lost 600 men in a few hours. All my mates went down to it that day. ... Two of our officers went dotty on our fatal Sunday and small wonder too. It is quite common for men to go mad here. The strain on the nerves is so severe.⁷⁸

The realities were confronting at home too. In September, at a farewell to local recruits at Lindfield in Sydney, a Major Wynne announced that, having failed to break the Turkish defences, the Australians would remain at Gallipoli for the winter. Attempting to attract further recruits, he asserted that 'half of these boys are going to be dead in a few months (cries of No!) they are going to be wounded, and their places have got to be filled'.⁷⁹ Wynne was wrong about the Anzacs remaining for the winter. By September it was becoming clear that the Gallipoli campaign was failing, and at a great cost. Before the end of the month, Arthur Hunter understood that there were 'A terrible lot of killed and wounded Australian soldiers at the Dardanelles about 4000 killed and about 20,000 wounded and I am afraid there will be a lot more before it is over'.⁸⁰

In this context, the continued expansion of the war was not to be welcomed as a means to its ultimate conclusion, but was regarded as a sign that the war had assumed a life of its own. In October 1915, Bulgaria joined the Central Powers and British troops occupied Salonika. Greece and Romania continued to vacillate. Arthur Fry now found it difficult to comprehend the dynamics of the war, as 'altogether the problem seems getting too stupendous for the mind to grapple'.⁸¹ Margaret Stanley now likened the war to 'the spreading of some horrible and hideous disease', and asserted that it had 'assumed such gigantic proportions now that one simply cannot grasp it as a whole, or know what effect any particular phase of it may have'.⁸² Edmund Milne was resigned, and found:

People depressed with the news re Bulgaria and Greece. We recognise every prospect of a longer term of purgatory which this war means. The whole civilised world appears to be affected with the blood lust. Ah well! we are in the ring and it's a fight to the finish.⁸³

Australians who were coming to accept the long war could also begin to accept Gallipoli for the failure it was. From September, rumours circulated about poor planning and provisioning for the August offensives, whether the Allies would remain for the winter, and the prospects of disaster should an evacuation be attempted. Sarah Simonson had heard all sorts of things. 'We are all wondering what the next move will be in Gallipoli,' she wrote.⁸⁴ Ernest Wears professed surprise at this new pattern of conversation, and blamed the press for inflating people's hopes:

Now we are hearing that it's a mistake our being on Gallipoli and talks of retiring and all this after expecting any day to hear that the top of Achi Baba was blown off and that Johnny Turk was skiddadling back home.⁸⁵

Whether the press had deceived people or not, by November 1915 it was common to discuss Gallipoli in terms of a 'blunder', especially following the removal of General Sir Ian Hamilton. Arthur Hunter now recorded that 'it seems the Dardanelles campaign was a foolish undertaking according to what we read'.⁸⁶ No longer burdened with expectations of foreshortening the war, Gallipoli assumed more alarming proportions as a potential massacre for the remaining Allied forces. When Tom Dewarre noted that 'We are all interested in the future of the Gallipoli campaign', that interest was laden with fear and anxiety.⁸⁷ Edmund Milne had visions of a last stand on the beach for his son, and confessed 'I don't like it'.⁸⁸ Such anxieties might explain the muted public response to the news at the end of the year that the peninsula had been evacuated. Jack Strong thought it 'hard lines to have to give up there after all the fight our chaps have shown, but it's no use squealing'; Milne was deeply relieved: 'Anzac is a memory not a nightmare. I and thousands of others need not now grit our teeth and hold in when that awful beach is mentioned'.⁸⁹

The war had expanded and deepened for Australians in 1915. They were themselves part of that deepening, and the persistence of the war, as the nature of hope and expectation changed over the course of the year. Australians had not, as the increasingly common accusation ran, been unaware that a war was going on, but had been conscious of its costs and potential costs before they were exposed to its worst realities. Yet, even when confronted with those realities, Australians persisted in their determination to continue the war to the destruction of their enemies. This was a reflection of what was happening across the belligerent societies in 1915, as each configured the war as a righteous struggle to preserve fundamental principles, if not the nations themselves. Thus the war developed a logic and a power of its own, as it accelerated and expanded across 1915. The muted response to failure at Gallipoli reflected an environment in which Australians increasingly felt that the war was moving beyond control, even as it demanded their complete commitment. Anxiety and loss of life at the front reinforced that dedication as they sanctified the Allies' cause; they also provided the conditions for recrimination and division. The mental and emotional patterns of the war had been set. In a strict sense the path to total war in Australia would be thwarted by the failure to introduce conscription in 1916. In another sense, by the end of 1915, total war had already achieved its fatal grasp on the minds of those who saw themselves intimately invested in its outcome.