

## CATHERINE TIERNAN

### In search of Stroud Langford

Emblazoned across the proscenium arch of the Soldiers' Memorial Hall in the Melbourne suburb of Canterbury were the words, 'Their name endureth for ever'. This monument, completed in 1923, commemorated the soldiers from Camberwell and Canterbury who died in the Great War.<sup>1</sup> The hall was a venue for public rallies, political speeches and flower shows, and was used as a picture theatre and polling booth. Over time, however, a different purpose, and arguably more practical form of commemoration, was found for the site. In 1979, the hall was demolished to make way for home units to accommodate widows of ex-servicemen.<sup>2</sup> The hall's proud proscenium proclamation no longer exists, and the only remaining feature of the original hall is a memorial plaque located outside the Canterbury Memorial Home Units, that now accommodate pensioners from the broader community.

One of the 197 names listed on the plaque is that of Stroud Langford. My interest in Stroud Langford began in 2010 when, as a Monash University student, I walked the battlefields and explored the peaks, ridges and gullies of Gallipoli's haunting and memorable landscape, learning about the Anzac campaign. World War I official historian Charles Bean advocated the preservation of Gallipoli as a 'storied landscape', with the battlefields, ridges and gullies becoming a memorial to the dead. Respecting Bean's wish, student pairs were assigned the task of presenting the story of a site at Gallipoli. Having been allocated Anzac Cove, my partner and I began by revisiting Beach



The Langford family (c. 1910–1912): (back, l–r) Frederick, Frank, Constance, Robert, Stroud; (front, l–r) Charles (Linc), Frances, Septimus, Charles Snr, Walter. Image courtesy of Julie Roberts

Cemetery, at the southern tip of the cove, where 391 soldiers are buried. It was there that I came across Stroud Langford's grave.

I had never heard of SL Langford and, although his epitaph was one of many I'd found moving, I resolved to find out more about this particular young soldier. I began my search for him by viewing his service record, now digitised. Remarkably, this document revealed that Stroud Langford's family home was the house in suburban Melbourne that I had bought the year before I stood at his grave.

As a result of this extraordinary coincidence, I felt compelled to find out all I could about Stroud Lincoln Langford. I trawled the internet and studied electoral rolls attempting to locate a family member, eventually making contact with a distant relative of the Langford family through a genealogical website. She forwarded me a photograph of Stroud's parents, Charles and Frances Langford, and their eight children, and arranged for me to meet Marjorie, one of Stroud's nieces. Over the following year, as I spoke with members of each branch of Stroud's family, it became apparent that Stroud had left no narrative of his own.

There were no letters. There was no diary. Other than the undated family portrait, no relevant documents or photographs appeared to exist and, although a number of Stroud's nieces and nephews were able to share their memories of his parents and siblings, none was able to recount any story about him. Thus, within one generation, Stroud's story could no longer be told.

I considered the Anzac narratives that I'd read. They were invariably based on soldiers' writings or the testimonies of survivors, accounts preserved by a grieving generation and passed for safekeeping to the family that followed. But what if a family had no such papers, and any stories told were long forgotten? Was it possible to restore the narrative of a soldier who had died leaving no narrative of his own?

### Anglo-Saxons under the Southern Cross: the Langfords of Kingsley Street

My starting point was determining Stroud's background, and the context in which he enlisted. In the absence of personal documentary sources, and to augment the family's limited oral testimony, I turned to contemporary rate books, census records, cartographic material, church records and newspapers for insight into Stroud's home and family background. Local and church histories provided an overview of the environment and society in which the Langfords lived.<sup>3</sup> These secondary sources helped to support primary documentary material and place the Langfords in the context of conservative and protestant middle-class family life in Camberwell from the 1880s until the onset of World War I.

An important early discovery was an 1882 poster held by the State Library of Victoria advertising building allotments in the Prospect Hill Estate. The allotments boasted 'Magnificent Views and Pure Country Air'<sup>4</sup> and, in 1888, Charles Langford purchased a home on one of them in Kingsley Street for his English wife Frances, and their baby daughter.<sup>5</sup> By 1900, Charles had extended this home to eight rooms to accommodate his growing family as, by 1899, Frances had borne seven further surviving children, all sons.<sup>6</sup>

School records confirm that Stroud and his siblings were educated at Camberwell School 888 up to 'merit' level and the age of 14.<sup>7</sup> Throughout this period, Camberwell's population was rapidly increasing and, as a result of burgeoning enrolments, the school was seriously overcrowded. The Victorian Education Department records contain a litany of complaints regarding school conditions, and requests for improvements to the accommodation, ventilation, drainage, sanitation and other facilities, in the interests of student health.<sup>8</sup>

Fortunately Stroud and his siblings were not entirely dependent on school for their physical, intellectual and social progress as Charles and

Frances evidently encouraged their children's self-development. Like many Camberwell residents, Frances was a devout member of the Church of England. A short walk from home, the family's parish church – St John's in Burke Road, Camberwell – offered an impressive range of activities for youth: a literary and debating society, a cricket club, a girls' athletic club, the St John's Dramatic Players, and a field naturalists club, the latter involving excursions such as trips to the snow and a five-day camp to the Mornington Peninsula.<sup>9</sup> Stroud played lacrosse with the Canterbury Lacrosse Club, and brother Septimus earned his bronze medallion in surf lifesaving, aged 16.<sup>10</sup>

There was also music. The family owned a piano, and the children's early exposure to organ music at St John's may have influenced Constance who, by 22 years of age, had attained her licentiate of the Associated Board of The Royal Academy of Music and The Royal College of Music.<sup>11</sup> Constance was to make a career as a musician, but I wondered about her brothers.

As Stroud recorded his occupation as 'Electrician' on his enlistment papers, I was curious to learn of his training and experience in what was, at that time, a new trade. Through the archives of RMIT University (at the time the Working Men's College of Melbourne) I learned of other technical educational institutions operational in 1910, including the Eastern Suburbs Technical College (subsequently Swinburne University), established in 1908. Although the college was yet to offer electrical training, Swinburne's archives revealed that five of the Langford brothers were enrolled there. Four, including Stroud, studied carpentry at night school at a cost of 10 to 15 shillings each per term, a considerable sum on Stroud's then clerk's salary.<sup>12</sup>

The seven Langford brothers served as cadets in the compulsory Citizen Military Forces, where discipline was 'strongly inculcated'.<sup>13</sup> It was also the *modus operandi* at home. Stroud's mother Frances, 'a fine woman in many ways', reportedly 'ruled the family with a rod of iron'.<sup>14</sup> Frances was also, by all accounts, fiercely patriotic, and her grandchildren recall dutifully standing to attention at the base of the flagpole in her garden, as their grandfather hoisted the Union Jack.<sup>15</sup>

Frances was not alone. In 1914, as talk of war intensified, the patriotism of Camberwell's residents was palpable. Archival material underscores the depth of patriotic sentiment to which Stroud was exposed. A newspaper account indicated Stroud's membership of the Australian Natives' Association (ANA) and I liaised with the archivist at its successor, Australian Unity, to enhance my understanding of his involvement with this organisation.<sup>16</sup> The Langford boys, as native-born Australian males, were eligible and became members of the ANA at 16.<sup>17</sup> Primarily a provider of health insurance

and funeral cover, the ANA organised rifle competitions, debating nights and various social activities for its members. But the association had a further agenda. It was a patriotic, nationalistic, political organisation that promoted a 'white Australia' and had been committed to the federation of the Australian colonies. Featured at the ANA National Fete in 1910 was a song entitled 'White Australia: march of the great white policy' – the stated intention of which was 'to express the life, character, and aspirations of the Australian born ... [and] the patriotic spirit of the race'.<sup>18</sup>

As the new nation announced its commitment to send a contingent in support of the Empire, songs of this type fuelled the patriotic fervor with which Australians responded.<sup>19</sup> Gamberwell and neighbouring Canterbury hosted patriotic parades, church services, fundraising meetings and concerts.<sup>20</sup> Patriotism was preached from the local pulpit, roused by marching bands and promoted through visual displays.<sup>21</sup> The venue for one local Red Cross benefit was reportedly 'crammed to the door' with a crowd of 600. Decorations of red, white and blue, a Union Jack, and banners proclaiming 'England expects that every man this day will do his duty' and 'For God and Country' adorned the walls.<sup>22</sup> Two years later, this bastion of conservative protestant middle class voted a resounding 'yes' in the conscription referendum with a vote of 73.2 per cent in favour of conscription – over 21 per cent higher than the state average – a vote that was virtually unchanged in the 1917 referendum.<sup>23</sup>

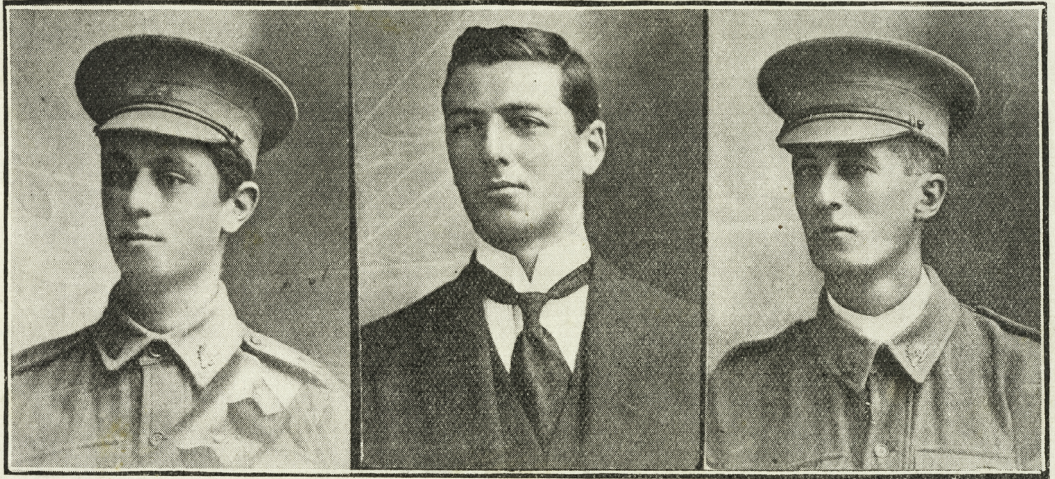
Although there are numerous well-documented reasons why men volunteered to serve,<sup>24</sup> we cannot know Stroud's primary motivation for joining the queue to enlist. Almost inevitably, however, patriotism and prevailing community sentiments to serve 'King, Empire and nation in war' were key contributing factors.

### Service, sentence and sacrifice: Stroud's experience of war

While uncovering details of Stroud's early life and considering the community's response to impending war, I also followed leads about Stroud's war service. As war inevitably generates a paper trail, Stroud's period of service is better documented than his earlier life. Nevertheless, my investigation of Stroud's war service highlights the importance of carefully scrutinising primary source material. While some wartime primary sources (such as unit diaries and troopship records) were pivotal in developing an understanding of Stroud's war service, others were sketchy, equivocal or misleading, perhaps demonstrating the difficulty of keeping accurate wartime records, particularly in the early stages of this campaign, and/or the chaos of the battlefield.

Personal diaries and letters from members of Stroud's unit that are held

my father's cousin's sons



MR. FREDERICK JOHN LANGFORD, Australian Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade. Photo by Alice Mills, A.E.F.  
MR. STROUD LINCOLN LANGFORD, 1st Brigade Staff Field Artillery, A.E.F. (Now in Egypt.)  
MR. ROBERT FILDAS LANGFORD, Australian Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade.

The above are the three brave sons of Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Langford, of "Stannage," Camberwell, who have been accepted for active service. Another son volunteered, but was disqualified for defective eyesight.

'My father's cousin's sons', *Punch* (Melbourne), 25 March 1915, p. 2.  
Frank Langford, rejected for poor eyesight, was later accepted for service, and was awarded the Military Medal for bravery. Image courtesy Eon F Cook

in the State Library of Victoria and the Australian War Memorial collections proved invaluable. A detailed examination of the complexity of interpreting wartime diaries is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that accounts by men who were members of his unit, and who sailed, trained, lived and fought beside him, are as close to a written account of Stroud's wartime experience as is likely to be found. Photographs add a further dimension to Stroud's story. Other than the undated family portrait, family members were not aware of any other photographs taken of or by Stroud. Discussion regarding my research at a family reunion, however, prompted a distant relative to recall a newspaper clipping in another relative's possession.

Using this image as a reference, I was able to identify Stroud in the Australian War Memorial photograph of Headquarters, 2nd Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) at the Broadmeadows camp, taken prior to the unit's departure for the Front. I sourced the War Memorial's vast online collection for photographs depicting conditions for the 2nd FAB in the early days at Anzac. Then, unexpectedly, one of Stroud's great-nieces unearthed three small inscribed photos taken by Stroud in Egypt. With each detail confirmed and image discovered, I came closer to understanding Stroud's experience of war.

Following the announcement of Australia's pledge to send 20,000 troops to support the British Empire, Stroud, like many others, demonstrated a keenness to volunteer.<sup>26</sup> The fifth-born son, Stroud was the first of five Langford

brothers to enlist. On 15 August 1914, the first Saturday of recruiting, Stroud joined the crowds enlisting in the Melbourne suburb of St Kilda and, in fine copperplate, he completed his attestation paper. Although aged 19, Stroud claimed his age was '20 years, 3 months'.<sup>27</sup> It was not uncommon for a recruit to raise his age, but why Stroud felt the need to do so is not clear. As a fit young man of six feet, or 182 centimetres, in height, Stroud met the early high standards set for enlistment, unlike approximately 33 per cent of volunteers who were rejected in the first year of the war.<sup>28</sup>

Stroud's occupation is also in question. He was on the staff of the Melbourne Electric Supply Company, but his mother referred to him as a clerk, not an electrician.<sup>29</sup> Stroud's well-formed handwriting would undoubtedly have been an asset in clerical work. Alternatively, Stroud's carpentry studies may have provided him with skills applicable to the electrical trade. As I was to learn, both skill sets were almost certainly useful to Stroud as a signaller and despatch rider in Headquarters, 2nd Field Artillery Brigade.<sup>30</sup> In this capacity, Stroud's work would typically involve laying communication cables to establish vital lines of communication between headquarters and the brigades, manning telephones and running messages.<sup>31</sup>

As a new recruit, Stroud headed to Mornington Park, Broadmeadows, in Melbourne's north, where a training camp had been quickly established. While there, soldiers slept under canvas and were introduced to arms,<sup>32</sup> however, combat training appears to have been minimal.<sup>33</sup> The diary account of another member of 2nd FAB, Corporal Robert McHenry, suggests military exercises were not a high priority for recruits at Broadmeadows:

during this time we had to settle down, sum up our comrades, choose friends, make enemies, receive parting gifts, and realize that at last we were doing what was expected of us as citizens.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, Stroud and other early recruits received more training pre-departure than many later enlistees, whose experience with arms was minimal or non-existent.<sup>35</sup> Opportunities for further training onboard transports would be limited, but the men were keen to leave, and were disappointed when rumoured departure dates came and went.<sup>36</sup> Finally, on 20 October 1914, Stroud departed Port Melbourne on HMAT *Shropshire*.<sup>37</sup>

The troops settled into a daily shipboard routine but, despite attempts to divert the men, six weeks aboard proved testing. Robert McHenry and Gunner Brian Lyall describe the gunners' training on the *Shropshire*, which involved physical and rifle drill, lectures, practising signalling and rope tying, and stable duty for the 500 horses onboard.<sup>38</sup> Half an hour was allowed for



Headquarters 2nd Field Artillery Brigade, Broadmeadows Training Camp, 1914. Stroud Langford, back row, fourth from the left. Australian War Memorial, AWM H15139

meals and, as McHenry wrote, ‘we were fed with good stuff from the day we started and finished the voyage fat as pigs’.<sup>39</sup> Troops sent postcards home when mail allowed, and for entertainment, concerts, lectures and lantern view showings were organised.<sup>40</sup> Boxing, various games and gambling were popular and, on Sundays, the Chaplain Rev Green, reportedly ‘a decent sort of parson’, conducted Church Parade.<sup>41</sup> Despite efforts to keep the recruits occupied and well during the voyage, the men found it monotonous, and were frustrated to find there was to be no landing at Colombo or Aden.<sup>42</sup>

Once in Egypt, the troops made the most of opportunities to explore Cairo, recording their impressions of the pyramids, museums and brothels, and describing the challenges of living and working in the desert environment.<sup>43</sup> Stroud’s visit to the Sphinx is captured in one of the three existing inscribed photographs he sent from Egypt. The other two of Stroud’s photographs depict the desert conditions in which the telephonists conducted communications exercises.

In his diary account, Sergeant Ernest Holmes of the 2nd FAB sheds further light on Stroud’s work, describing their night training, which included the establishment of essential telephone connections:

We get a good deal of night practice now. We leave camp any time after 8 pm and go to a spot selected in the desert and there dig in our guns & wagons into the earth, and all the necessary communication trenches. This usually takes till 4 am, after which we sleep for two hours on the sand and then take our posts at the guns just before daybreak. Everything is done at night in the pitch dark, and everyone is connected by telephone ... The wires are always connected too.<sup>44</sup>

On 1 April, Captain Adjutant Charles Miles of the 2nd FAB received his preliminary orders regarding embarkation.<sup>45</sup> From then on the mood amongst the men was one of mounting tension and readiness for action.<sup>46</sup> They became increasingly aware of the risks they faced, as officers 'told their men plainly the heavy chances of death in the fighting ahead of them'.<sup>47</sup> After helping dismantle Mena Camp, on 8 April, Stroud retraced over 160 kilometres by train to Alexandria and embarked on HMAT *Karoo*, bound for Lemnos.<sup>48</sup> Shipboard routine was immediately re-established, but a rumour that troops may be aboard a month unsettled the men.<sup>49</sup> The *Karoo* arrived at Port Mudros, Lemnos, during the night of 11 April, dropping anchor around 7 am, 12 April.<sup>50</sup> Gunner James Stevens of the 2nd FAB described the impressive sight of Lemnos harbour that day:

Our tension on ship board ended when we arrived off Lemnos ... The anchorage is splendid and theres quite a fleet of war ships and transports ... War activities abound and great preparations are in hand for our attack on the Dardanelles.<sup>51</sup>

Sometime during this eventful day, Stroud was awarded 28 days Field Punishment Number 2 without pay.<sup>52</sup> The 1914 *Manual of Military Law* describes this punishment as follows:

An offender ... may be kept in irons ... and may be secured so as to prevent his escape ... Straps or ropes may be used for the purpose of these rules in lieu of irons ... He may be subjected to the like labour, employment, and restraint, and dealt with in like manner as if he were under a sentence of imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>53</sup>

There is no reference in Stroud's service record to the nature of his offence, and neither the *Karoo* Troopship Routine Orders nor the Headquarters, 2nd Field Artillery Brigade Unit Diary sheds any light on the matter.<sup>54</sup> Stroud's nieces and nephews were unaware of their uncle's punishment, and the diaries of others in Stroud's unit offer no explanation.

A search through the National Archives of Australia and Australian War Memorial records in Canberra and the Public Records Office of Victoria failed to reveal evidence documenting punishments awarded.

Discipline of Australian troops was a major issue for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).<sup>55</sup> A 1917 report indicates field punishment was generally dispensed for relatively minor, common violations, such as alcohol-related offences; insubordination; and, the most common offence in the AIF, absence without leave.<sup>56</sup> Charles Bean described men who were 'bent upon seeing the world' often taking such leave and reported that a few, frustrated by being cooped up in transports and denied leave at various ports, jumped ship and swam ashore.<sup>57</sup>

As the nature of Stroud's misdemeanour does not appear to have been recorded it is open to conjecture. It may be relevant, however, that the day after Stroud's punishment was awarded, the *Karoo's* Troops Orders state, 'While in port a sentry is to be posted on the gangway ... so strength of guard is to be increased by three men'.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps Stroud jumped ship, tempted by a last taste of freedom on the island of Lemnos. Regardless of his crime, Stroud was never to be a free man again.

Although field punishment was widely adopted, Stroud's award of 28 days was the maximum length of field punishment imposed.<sup>59</sup> Officially, those who incurred field punishment were given the hardest, dirtiest and most dangerous tasks, their diet was 'restrictive' and privileges such as leave, rest, mail and cigarettes were denied.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the challenges the troops faced, particularly during the latter part of Stroud's punishment, which was served at Gallipoli, may have rendered his denial of such privileges somewhat academic. For example, what difference would a restricted diet have made to Stroud in the circumstances? Ration packs for offenders were meagre in any case and, on the day disembarkation orders were received, one week into Stroud's punishment, the troops were placed on iron rations, and restricted provisions were standard fare for weeks to come.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, it is likely that being disallowed mail during his punishment made no practical difference to Stroud as, after leaving Mena Camp, the troops were unable to send or receive mail for over a month.<sup>62</sup>

The conditions of Stroud's field punishment were in accordance with the *Defence Act's* ruling that soldiers' pay and allowances cease during their sentences.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, two sources indicate that, at the time of his death, Stroud's cessation of pay was yet to come into force, and his mother, Frances, continued to receive the 2/3rds allotment Stroud had allocated to her. The day before Stroud was punished, Robert McHenry wrote on the *Karoo*,

'We were paid tonight, a wage of 30 days which clears up from 7th April to 12th and pays in advance for 25 days to come'.<sup>64</sup> Correspondingly, an examination of Stroud's pay card reveals that he was paid for 201 days of service, up to 9 May, his documented date of death.<sup>65</sup> As there are no noted deductions, fines or stoppages recorded on Stroud's card, it would appear that the loss of salary Stroud incurred on 12 April was to be instituted on the next payday. Stroud would hardly have welcomed the opportunity to inform his parents of his penalty, as field punishment was considered 'a slight on the dignity of a man', but as mail was forbidden him, and his salary was not affected, it is unlikely that they knew of Stroud's infringement.<sup>66</sup>

During the last days onboard, the troops practiced unloading horses and supplies into the small craft that were to take them to shore.<sup>67</sup> Still wearing the clothes in which they had left Egypt, the men were given two days' rations and received their final orders and the King's message.<sup>68</sup> Finally, at 1 am on 25 April, the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade departed Lemnos, arriving near their disembarkation point north of Gaba Tepe at around 8 am.<sup>69</sup> The unit landing took over two days, however, as signalling and telephone equipment were carried in 'First Line Transports', and headquarters staff routinely went ahead of other troops to establish bases, it is likely that Stroud landed on 25 April.<sup>70</sup>

In accordance with military histories, the diaries of those in Stroud's unit clearly detail the harsh realities of life as an Anzac at Gallipoli.<sup>71</sup> The hard labour of field punishment notwithstanding, the demands on all men who landed at Gallipoli were grueling. Within days, many were 'stupefied with fatigue'.<sup>72</sup> Leave had been cancelled, as all hands were required.<sup>73</sup> For most, rest was virtually out of the question.

Headquarters, 2nd Field Artillery Brigade, made up of six commanding officers and 32 rank and file, was based on the beach.<sup>74</sup> This noisy area was crowded with 'everything needed for the support of an army'.<sup>75</sup> Mules that carted supplies and munitions up the gullies at night were picketed along the middle of the beach, which was a busy thoroughfare around the clock.<sup>76</sup>

As a despatch rider, Stroud is likely to have run messages between the beach and trenches so, even though his role was primarily non-combatant, he was still at great risk.<sup>77</sup> There was no safe place at Anzac and, although soldiers' accounts suggest men often played down their fear, they regularly witnessed the wounding and killing of others by shrapnel, and were all too aware of its damaging impact.<sup>78</sup> Members of 2nd FAB dug themselves small shelters in the cliff face, partly in an attempt to protect themselves from its effects, as Bombardier Elliot Wilkie described on 28 April:

we have dug ourselves in ... Shrapnel is falling continuously ... Dozens of men get hit on the beach here by pieces of flying shrapnel. Spent bullets are falling like rain. The landing place here is at the foot of an awfully stiff hill ... It is on the side of this and facing the sea that all troops are camped with their little 'dugouts'.<sup>79</sup>

By 30 April the main beach had become so crowded a second supply depot was established further south at Brighton Beach, despite this area being closer and open to Turkish positions at Gaba Tepe, making it particularly vulnerable to enemy fire. Stroud was to be caught up in a blistering artillery attack there six days later.

Herbert Reynolds, of the 1st Field Ambulance, and Major HM Alexander, in charge of the India Mule Corps, were both on Brighton Beach at around 11 am on 6 May, when a Turkish officer riding from Gaba Tepe, 'waving a white handkerchief', was apparently 'seized, blindfolded, and taken to headquarters'.<sup>80</sup> There he informed his captors that the Turkish army intended to bombard their positions.<sup>81</sup> According to Reynolds,

Immediately afterwards a battery of field guns behind Kaba Tepe opened fire on our bivouacs and gave us an extremely hot time for a couple of hours ... Dug into the shelter of the cliffs ... are our horse and mule lines and upon these the enemy seemed to direct his attention ... shell after shell exploded over and around our bivouacs, keeping us under cover like rabbits. As many of their horses and mules that could be let loose were cut loose from the lines but we lost 20 mules and 12 artillery horses and suffered a number of casualties.<sup>82</sup>

Alexander's report is similar, however, it suggests that the incident involved two episodes of significant shrapnel fire, the second taking place in the afternoon:

The Turks opened with shrapnel ... right into the middle of the mule camp. Everybody went to ground as far as possible, but cover was inadequate, and men and animals began to fall. As soon as there was a lull ... an attempt was made to shift the camp, and the mules were rushed round Hell Spit Corner ... out of the enemy's sight ... All was quiet for two or three hours.<sup>83</sup>

Headquarters issued an order that all animals were to be moved from the beach to the relative safety of the gullies. The soldiers carried out this order under fire. As Alexander recounts:

The guard ... [was] ... assisted by Australians and New Zealanders who were standing about and at once volunteered for the work – hurriedly unshackled

the mules and led them away. They were followed along the beach by the persistent and obnoxious attentions of Beachy Bill, whose fire was more like a violent hailstorm than anything else.<sup>84</sup>

Alexander records the losses resulting from this incident, and reports 'several Australians were casualties'.<sup>85</sup>

Stroud's service record nominates his date of death as 9 May and reports that he died of wounds, although this was later altered to read 'Killed in Action'. In fact, Captain Miles recorded in the unit diary on 6 May: 'Anzac Cove. Gr. Langford, Hd. Qrs. Killed. 14 horses out of 24 on shore were killed.'<sup>86</sup> Miles records no further details, however Elliot Wilkie's diary sheds light on the incident:

This afternoon at 2.30 pm we had about half an hour's terrific bombardment all shrapnel. As well as 8 horses we lost 14 mules. Our dugout was badly peppered ... everything had marks of the shrapnel. 4 of our men were hit ... Langford of the Brigade Staff was killed outright and I hear that in all 14 Aust. were killed from shrapnel.<sup>87</sup>

While the number of animal and human deaths noted in these four accounts do not tally, it seems evident these reports describe the one event, and that shrapnel fired in this incident caused Stroud's death. Chaplain Green buried Stroud on the side of a hill, near where he had landed 11 days earlier, marking his grave with a wooden cross.<sup>88</sup>

### Choosing to remember, choosing to forget: the postwar burden of loss

American author, Joan Didion, argues that when faced with unfathomable or inexplicable loss, 'We tell ourselves stories in order to live. ... We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, [and] select the most workable of the multiple choices'.<sup>89</sup> An examination of the Langford family's response to Stroud's death suggests further that, when confronted by grief, we select the most workable stories to share, personae to project, and memories to maintain. Stroud's nieces and nephews knew of their uncle only as 'Uncle Stroud, who died at Gallipoli'. They believe his family 'grieved him dreadfully', however, they were unable to recount how this grief was manifest.<sup>90</sup> As I was to discover, the Langford family's collective response to Stroud's death virtually assured his absence from their ongoing family story.

In order to explain the lack of any narrative for Stroud, I considered the role each family member played in the retention of family memory. Like many young enlistees, Stroud was unmarried. As such, he had no wife or direct



The Langford veterans, Kingsley St, 1919. Charles and Frances Langford with their surviving sons: (l-r) Frank, Linc, Fred, Robert. Photograph courtesy of Julie Roberts

descendants committed to maintaining his memory. I reviewed the stories his brothers told, and the memories they appeared to have silenced. I reflected upon Stroud's parents and the words they chose to commemorate their son; the means by which Stroud's only sister memorialised her brother, and the role of memorabilia in the family's remembrance.

According to family members, the Langford brothers shared certain attributes. They were 'quietly spoken and charming', had excellent handwriting and, with the exception of Linc, were very tall.<sup>91</sup> When read alongside recent historical research, family testimony also suggests that Stroud's veteran brothers shared responses typical of returned Anzacs in several notable ways. They elected either not to talk about the war or, when they did, they were selective in their choice of war narratives, sharing only the humorous stories, or tales of bravery and mateship. Characteristically, they also largely kept postwar emotional burdens to themselves.<sup>92</sup> Their children were witness to the physical and emotional after-effects of war, which, though not overt, impacted on their fathers' postwar lives. As members of a generation encouraged 'to be seen and not heard', the Langford children were rarely party

to adult conversations and believed it inappropriate to ask questions. Matters related to war were simply not discussed.<sup>93</sup>

I turned my attention to the words written to commemorate Stroud, beginning with his epitaph. As I stood at his grave, I read:

GREATER LOVE

HATH NO MAN THAN THIS.

MY BOY, ONE OF THE BEST.

I assumed this inscription was written by a widow or widower, acknowledging not only a son, but countless soldiers who had fought to defend their country. As I continued my research, it became evident that neither of my assumptions was correct, and the reasons for these carefully selected words became clear.

Stroud's father, Charles, is remembered by his grandchildren as 'a fine man', 'a gorgeous man', who was 'much milder' than his somewhat formidable wife, Frances.<sup>94</sup> Various descriptions as refined, well-spoken, dominant, majestic and autocratic, Frances reputedly considered her sons 'the be-all and end-all'.<sup>95</sup> I was therefore not surprised when the Commonwealth War Graves Commission verified it was Frances who had written the epitaph for the Langfords' fallen son.<sup>96</sup> Frances chose words that spoke of Christian faith, pride and personal loss and, by referring to Stroud as 'My boy', effectively proclaimed ownership of the family's sacrifice.<sup>97</sup> Considering family testimony, her final words, 'one of the best', may simply epitomise the esteem in which Frances held all her sons.

Also inscribed on Stroud's plaque is the date '9 May 1915'. Having clarified<sup>98</sup> that Stroud died on 6 May 1915, this suggests the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) referred to AIF records for dates of death, or that families were asked to provide this information along with their epitaphs. Like many others, the Langfords were dependent upon official, but sometimes inaccurate, notification for information about their son.<sup>99</sup> Official newspaper reports and family tributes mirror confusion over the date and circumstances of Stroud's death, and indicate that it was to be two years before the Langfords learned that Stroud had not died of wounds, but had been killed in action.<sup>100</sup>

For 16 years, Frances commemorated her son on the anniversary of his death by submitting 'In memoriam' notices to the *Argus*. Although initially worded as family tributes, by 1919 the notices were signed simply 'from Mother'.<sup>101</sup> In her study of postwar bereavement, Joy Damousi considers the sacrificial identity assigned to mothers during and after the Great War. Describing the pressure on women to be stoic, and give up their sons for the

sake of the nation, she contends that women offering their sons for service became emblematic of feminine sacrifice, a theme used extensively both in the media and wartime propaganda.<sup>102</sup> The publicly recognised role of ‘sacrificial mother’, perhaps in part, explains Frances’s apparent ownership of the family’s loss in both her newspaper tributes and Stroud’s memorial plaque.

As memorabilia plays a role in the preservation of oral tradition, I considered the absence of such material related to Stroud. Any personal effects distributed amongst family members seem to have been long forgotten. Regardless, I was more interested in items that could shed light on Stroud as an individual, such as photographs, letters and documents of a personal nature. Since women are the traditional custodians of family papers, I considered Constance, Stroud’s only sister, to have been the likely inheritor of such material.

Constance, known as Connie, was seven when Stroud was born, and married by the time he left for the Front. Connie’s only daughter, Dorothy, turned 100 in September 2012. Dorothy never married and was, she attested, never a hoarder.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, as the only daughter of the Langfords’ only daughter, Dorothy was a potential custodian of any surviving family papers.

In 2012, having lived independently until her 100th year, Dorothy moved into assisted care with the help of her niece, Bronwyn, and nephew, John. Along with Stroud’s British War Medal, two collections related to Stroud surfaced during this house move. Firstly, Bronwyn discovered the three photographs that Stroud had sent from Egypt. Concerned the photographs were ‘tiny’ and the figures photographed were ‘just little smudges’, Bronwyn suspected the photographs would be of little interest to me. I assured her to the contrary. Meanwhile John came across a pile of Connie’s papers that he boxed for recycling. Having been an accomplished musician and composer, Connie’s papers included a large collection of ‘old music’. Following our conversation, John sorted through Connie’s miscellaneous papers and found a newspaper article entitled, ‘Composer’s success’, which revealed that Connie won the Anzac Festival Committee’s prize for the musical setting of the poem ‘An ode to Anzac Day’.<sup>104</sup> This competition was clearly of some national interest, as a quick search disclosed similar articles in interstate newspapers.<sup>105</sup> John duly revisited the box of music and retrieved Connie’s stirring, nationalistic ode entitled ‘The Anzac way’.

Although composed 23 years after Stroud’s death, Connie’s music was undoubtedly written mindful of her brother. This significant document reminds us of the individualised and ongoing nature of Anzac commemoration for some relatives of men who died during World War I.

The Langfords were among the thousands of families who faced the death of an enlisted relative during the Great War. Interpreting a family's reaction to wartime loss is complex, yet an examination of how Langford family members responded is essential in order to understand Stroud's virtual disappearance from the family's narrative. Constrained communication is central to this disappearance. The Langfords' written and verbal postwar communication, like that of many postwar families, was restrained and measured. Words were carefully chosen and memories and emotions effectively silenced or suppressed. Intergenerational communication was limited, and neither the war, nor Stroud, was a topic for discussion. So, as Stroud's nieces and nephews grew up knowing little about the war, and virtually nothing of their uncle, his story failed to become part of the following generation's family narrative. Without any knowledge of their great-uncle, Stroud's great-nieces and nephews had little interest in the few surviving items of memorabilia related to him.



Following the Great War, communities throughout Australia vowed that the names of those who had sacrificed their lives would 'endure forever', yet Stroud's story indicates that, although countless men are remembered on bronze panels and war memorials across the continent, some no longer have a place in their family's narrative.

This investigation provides an explanation for the fragility of stories such as Stroud's, those of unmarried enlistees who died leaving no direct descendants. Highlighting the ongoing impact of constrained communication during the early to mid twentieth century on family narratives, the Langford case study teases out the role of oral tradition and memorabilia in the retention of family memory, and draws attention to the impact of relevance on family remembrance.

The degree to which it is possible to recreate a soldier's war experience will clearly vary from case to case. My search for Stroud demonstrates that it is possible to restore worthwhile elements of the history of a soldier who was previously remembered in name only. In this case, the careful examination, analysis, cross-referencing and interpretation of a range of archival and other materials has enabled significant parts of Stroud's story to emerge. Some key questions regarding his experience of war remain unanswered, and Stroud's absence from the family narrative naturally leaves us with further questions. What kind of person was Stroud? How did he relate to others? What interested, motivated and moved him? In fundamental ways, we cannot know him.



Left: Stroud Langford visiting the Sphinx. ‘This is taken just in front of the sphinx. All the fellows roaming about are Guides who show you all round the different place [sic] for a piaster. You will see me squatted down on the white piece of stone work. Stroud’.  
 Right: Headquarters 2nd Field Artillery Brigade telephonists’ cable cart. ‘This is our cable cart which lays the wire for the telephonists work. It was taken on the way to the manouvring [sic] ground. You will notice the sandy ground. I am not in this. Stroud’.  
 Photographs taken and posted home by Stroud. Courtesy of Bronwyn Clucas

When questioning the extent to which we can recover a life story, however, it is vital to consider the essential point that no historical account is ever complete: even an individual’s personal testimony or biography is selective, and in research, ‘we can never gather all the evidence’.<sup>106</sup> While inevitably incomplete, my search for Stroud establishes that it is possible for historians and family members to make rich sense of fragmentary evidence, resulting in historical research that may enhance and complicate our understanding of Australian World War I history, illuminate our understanding of family remembrance and forgetting, and contribute to a family’s enduring story.

In 2012 I enjoyed two memorable conversations with Peter Langford, son of Stroud’s brother Walter. After Peter’s son, David, returned from overseas recently, he wrote:

On the way home we visited Gallipoli, our interest having been heightened by your discoveries. It was very moving; both hearing the stories on both sides and visiting Stroud’s grave at Beach Cemetery. Our family is extremely grateful that you kept us and our late father, Peter Stroud Langford, informed of all your findings ... We are so blessed that you have connected us with our history.<sup>107</sup>